

Empowering the Office of Public Witness to Speak To Injustices Related to Fossil Fuel Extraction, Transport and Storage

Recommendation

The Presbytery of _____ overtures the 222nd General Assembly (2016) to:

1. Affirm the wisdom, foresight, and voice of “Restoring Creation for Ecology and Justice” adopted by the 202nd General Assembly (1990), “Power to Change: U.S. Energy Policy and Global Warming” adopted by the 218th General Assembly (2008), and the Precautionary Principle adopted by the 221th General Assembly (2014).
2. Empower The Office of Public Witness (OPW) in Washington, D.C., and the Presbyterian Ministry to the United Nations to witness against environmental degradation and to affirm public policy that supports good stewardship of natural resources. With firm biblical foundation and the policies of twenty General Assemblies to build upon, they may give voice to threats to air and water quality; threats from fracking; threats from crude oil transport and storage; and indeed all modes of fossil fuel extraction; threats from methane that results from industrial processes. This empowers both offices to speak for the church to uphold the integrity of creation and speak against injustices.

Rationale

Our charge is clear:

Hosea declared in times of no faithfulness, “...the land mourns, and all who live in it languish; together with the wild animals and the birds of the air, even the fish of the sea are perishing.” (Hosea 4:1,3)

Jesus heard the lawyer reply, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself” and told him “...do this, and you will live.” (Luke 10: 27-28)

Calvin lifted up the “lively image of his (God’s) wisdom, power, and goodness in the creation of the world, and in order of nature, encourages us to praise him for the manifestation he has made of himself as a father to us in this frail and perishable life.” (Calvin on Psalm 104)

The 202nd General Assembly advanced social policies to preserve the environment including global warming, water quality, protecting wildlife and wildlands, solid waste and hazardous waste management, and sustainable agriculture. Why? “So that all my know justice.”(Restoring Creation for Ecology and Justice, 1990)

The 218th General Assembly advanced social policies to preserve God’s creation in the face of global warming and the need to improve our nation’s energy policy. “We stand with “the least of these”...and advocate for the poor and oppressed...who are often the victims of environmental injustice...” (Power to Change: U.S. Energy Policy and Global Warming, 2008)

The 221st General Assembly affirmed the Precautionary Principle as a method of “preventing irreversible ecological impacts” to the planet. The principle represents “a part of the basis for responsible moral, and scientifically-informed human flourishing, affirming the sacred in societal and creation care, and protecting the earth for future generations.” (Overture 15-02, 2014)

The obstacle is real:

In the last decade, the decision to shift from historic annual Assemblies to biennial Assemblies was grounded in the logic of cost savings; greater time for governing bodies, agencies, and committees to act upon Assembly decisions; and, expanded space for discerning God’s will within the life of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) A consequence of the shift, however, has been a reduced opportunity to respond swiftly through General Assembly actions to the accelerating pace of world and national events. The shift has placed even greater weight on the reasoned and well deliberated policy positions of prior Assemblies. Yet, if an event or development presents itself unexpectedly, it may not have been addressed within previous policy guidance. This is true for environmental issues that are emerging as climate changes unfold. For Example, the COP 21 talks in Paris offers faith leaders an opportunity to join their voices on issues that affect those most impacted by those environmental changes. The PCUSA voice needs to be an immediate part of that. To wait for policy to come to the 223 General Assembly is to be left out of the very call Jesus gives to love our neighbors. To wait until 2018 to address critical fossil fuel extraction that drives climate change may mean irreversible damage for our planet and God’s people.

The foundation is firm:

We are called by God to uphold the integrity of creation. Across the years, General Assemblies of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) have repeatedly called for the protection of the environment. “Restoring Creation for Ecology and Justice (1990),” “Power to Change: U.S. Energy Policy and Global Warming (2008), and the 2014 General Assembly affirmation of the Precautionary Principle are contemporary, landmark positions of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

With the firm foundation of biblical charge and the established environmental policies of General Assemblies, leaders of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) are called to faithfully address rising threats to air and water quality that may emerge from industrial processes including but not limited to fracking; crude oil shipment, storage, and export.

We are called as witnesses. With this empowerment, The Office of Public Witness and the Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations can communicate with the President of the United States and Executive Departments; members of Congress and their staffs; state and local officials; and, corporate leaders when a new and arising threat to creation is presented.