

## Relational Creator and Relational World

John G. Gibbs, PRC Member

Creation looms much larger in scripture than it has in the western Church, and in most of its hymns, liturgies, theologies, and sermons. Scripture preceded the present ecological crisis in requiring us to rediscover the bonding of God, world, and humanity, and the eco-justice which that bonding envisions and requires.

The Bible's first scene opens on the cosmic totality: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Here we are, an amalgam of earth and Spirit, humanity (Adam) brought into and formed out of earth (Adamah). Disembodied spirit we never were, and never will be. We are rooted in the earth, and salvation does not uproot us, for the fullness of God's redemption brings earth along with it.

Our mandate from the start has been to image God by serving God's purpose within and for the creation (Gen. 1:26). Biblical ethics posits no human "dominion" over other creatures that defaces or denies that imaging of the garden-tending Creator. Restoring creation is not an afterthought, not a peripheral concern, not a dispensable option at the edge of "saving souls"—not for those who believe that "the earth is the Lord's, and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it" (Ps. 24:1). There is one Owner with ultimate dominion over the earth, and that One is not us.

So then, who is God, what is creation, and how do we relate to both? The most significant summary of biblical responses that has appeared in at least a generation is the biblical theology of creation in Terence E. Fretheim's *God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation* (Abingdon, 2005).

There we find the interpretive lens of "a relational Creator and a relational world:" "Israel's God is a relational God who has created a world in

*We are rooted in the earth, and salvation does not uproot us, for the fullness of God's redemption brings earth along with it.*



which interrelatedness is basic to the nature of reality." Humanity experiences ethical order and cosmic order in "a symbiotic relationship." "God has a future in store for the entire created order, not just human beings." Fretheim reaches such conclusions on the basis of Genesis 1-2, 3-11, 12-50, Exodus, Torah (Law), Prophets (II Is. 40-55 especially), Wisdom, and the Psalms.

(For more of John Gibbs' work see his "Creation Texts in Scripture" @ <http://www.env-steward.com/reflect/creationtxt.htm>)

### In This Issue

Nominating Committee Report	2
We're Almost There!	2
Good Books and a Movie	3
A Presbyterian Creation Conservation Corps?	4
Equipping a New Generation to Heal a Hurting Planet, Developing a World-sized Faith	4
Immaculate Heart of Mary Motherhouse Wins Green Award	5
Eco Justice for All	5
General Assembly Report	6
Continuing Important Work After I'm Gone	7
Upcoming Events	7

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## Nominating Committee Report

*William F. Smith, Chair*

I'm grateful to have had the opportunity to serve as Chair of the Nominating Committee this past year. I enjoyed the cooperative spirit within our committee and among those whom we reached during the four months of deliberation. After initial contact late last year and in early 2006, concerning needs to be met and tasks to be accomplished, Rebecca Barnes-Davies, PRC Coordinator, outlined various steps for us. Initially, the need was to expand the Nominating Committee itself and Gladys Gifford, being one of the four names suggested, accepted and joined Bill Bowman and myself. Using the contact list from last year's PRC conference at Silver Bay in the Adirondacks and various personal contacts that each of us had, we began the process of considering possible candidates to fill the vacancy for the NE Regional Representative on the Steering Committee. This region covers a broad area encompassing ten states.

After considering a number of people, we narrowed the list to three individuals, one for each of us to contact. In a couple of cases the first person contacted, while unable to accept, suggested another person. The process evolved during March and April and we were able to select a candidate by May 1. That candidate, John Preston, (see *Wrestling Until Dawn*, book review, page 3) appeared on the ballot for election along with the re-election of Bill Bowman, Vice Moderator, Barbara Hipple, Mid -American Regional Rep, and Jim Mulligan, NW Regional Rep. The membership was asked to cast votes by paper or electronic means no later than June 5. Our committee's endeavors encompassed four conference calls and numerous emails and telephone calls within the committee, with Rebecca and others, as well as with potential candidates. Overall the process went smoothly. Thanks to the committee members, officers and staff, who offered their time and expertise helping us to achieve this goal.

## We're Almost There!

*Bob Remsburg, PRC Treasurer*

The Fundraising Committee of PRC set a goal of \$6,500 for the 2006 Spring Campaign. With your generous donations we have almost met that goal. At press time, we had raised \$5,700, just \$800 short of the goal. We continue to need your helpful support to keep fulfilling PRC goals and mission. Your membership dollars make up a significant portion of our revenue, but the funds from the fall and spring campaigns are necessary to meet our budget needs. Until we establish a regular revenue source from endowment funds and grow our membership, these fall and spring campaigns will be vital to keeping our efforts underway. Those that have given \$60 or more can help grow the membership of PRC by designating a friend, church professional, family member, or anyone special to receive a free membership. Each person's efforts are important. Thank you for making the spring campaign such a success.

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GOOD BOOKS AND A MOVIE

***Wrestling Until Dawn: The Fight for Biblical Justice in a Postmodern World***, John R. Preston, Spiritbrook Press, Holland Patent, NY, 2006 293

John Preston is a retired Presbyterian minister and the part-time Executive Director of Foothills Rural Community Ministry, an outreach ministry for rural low income people in the Mohawk valley of upstate New York. John attended the PRC conference in Silver Bay and was an active member of the planning team for the water advocacy conference (May 2006) at Stony Point. He has recently published *“Wrestling with the Dawn: The Fight for Biblical Justice in a Postmodern World.”*

PRC member Jane Hanna tells of meeting John Preston last summer when he came to the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship (PPF), Witherspoon, PRC sponsored seminar at Ghost Ranch. Their new friendship honored her with an opportunity to read his pre-published draft and now to respond to the book in print. John told her that what began as a personal quest for understanding how his faith could speak to the moral issues of our time led, over six years, to this timely volume. Preston’s breadth of research is impressive. He excellently summarizes the findings of modern scientific and biblical scholars to cast new light on traditional scriptural narratives. Preston uses the biblical story of Jacob’s night long wrestling match as a metaphor for the struggle he has experienced in using traditional theology for meeting the challenges of our time. He offers his struggle and discoveries to others who seek a prophetic and honest faith that is relevant in light of today’s moral issues.

Preston contends that we must discover a new theological lens for developing an effective response to the call for justice and peace. Too often theology has supported and justified slavery, racism, colonialism, wars, imperialism, homophobia, sexism, and a host of other unjust systems. Our traditional biblical and civic narratives are not sufficient for opposing militarism, nationalism, commercialism, genocide, poverty and environmental devastation.

The biblical and scientific studies Preston cites offer a deeper understanding

of God’s intent for the well being of all. His is a call to reinterpret our religious traditions to free us from the American myth and better prepare us for meeting the spiritual and social challenges of our modern world. Available for purchase @ [www.lulu.com/spritbrookpress](http://www.lulu.com/spritbrookpress)

***“Prayer for Creation”*** is now published as the last hymn in a beautifully illustrated book called ***“Hallelujah: The Poetry of Classic Hymns.”***

The bio about author, Cathy Yost, printed below the hymn refers prominently to PRC and her philosophy about people of faith caring for the earth. It’s really a lovely collection that includes such pieces as *“His Eye Is on the Sparrow”* and *“Simple Gifts.”* The editor is Anna Burgard if you want to Google her and read some reviews. The book is available on [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com) and in bookstores.

***An Inconvenient Truth***

Renee Rico, PRC Steering Committee

I had the privilege of hearing Al Gore last month as he made a presentation to the very interested sustainability coalition called CERES in Oakland. There I was, listening to ex-governor Gerry Brown and Al Gore in the same morning. Gore did the presentation that he’s been doing all over the country on global warming. I would put this up with my Top 5 most inspirational moments in environmental work. Gore was articulate, passionate and convincing—yep, the same Al Gore who ran for President in 2000.

In early June, the movie based on this amazing presentation will be hitting the theaters—you can see a preview and more information here: [www.climatecrisis.net](http://www.climatecrisis.net). This is not a movie that will get the public flocking to the theaters. We need to create some momentum, because it is quite vital to have this movie out there and being seen by soccer moms, NASCAR dads, everyone, in fact.

I urge you to go to the movie. Take some friends, sponsor a discussion, have your youth group go. Word of mouth will mean a lot to this move, but more importantly, to our planet.



## A Presbyterian Creation Conservation Corps?

*Rick Ufford-Chase, Moderator PC(USA)*

I would like to challenge you to consider an idea that has been rolling around in my head for some time. After being with the PRC gathering at Silver Bay last summer, and visiting many of our Camp and Conference Centers over the last two years, I am convinced that there is an opportunity to fill a significant void in leadership development in our churches, and possibly to provide renewed energy in both the PRC and the PCCCA.

I'd like to see us develop a "Presbyterian Creation Conservation Corps" for juniors and seniors in high school. The idea would be to recruit the PCC members from among students who have distinguished themselves in our camping programs and/or as strong advocates for restoring creation. They would gather for two weeks at the beginning of the summer for intensive training (Biblical study, analysis of environmental protection concerns, skill-building for alternative technologies, land reclamation, organizing skills, etc.). The PRC would need to help design a curriculum of study (theological, academic, spiritual, and practical) that the students would begin during their orientation week together.

Following the training, the participants would fan out to our participating Camp and Conference Centers across the country for an eight-week, intensive, volunteer experience. Each Camp would have a focus for a particular project of land conservation that particular year (e.g. land erosion projects, wetlands protection, home-made solar hot water heaters, water purification, composting toilets, etc.), and they would go to work. In addition to the projects they're given, their tasks might include educating campers and coordinating events that would be open to other adults who want to come and work.

Following the summer, the students would be expected to commit to some agreed upon number of educational events or even a demonstration project at churches or in their presbytery.

There is a huge need for a camping renaissance that will engage the next generation, and there is currently little that distinguishes Presbyterian camping from the myriad other camping opportunities available to kids today. Perhaps a Presbyterian Conservation Corps could provide a unifying theme for that renaissance in Presbyterian camping.

(To learn more about Rick's vision and ideas for funding it, go to <http://what-i-see.blogspot.com/> and scroll down to March 23, 2006.)

## IT'S A GREAT IDEA! Equipping a New Generation to Heal a Hurting Planet, Developing a World-sized Faith

*Jenny Holmes, PRC Moderator*

I was delighted to read Moderator Rick Ufford Chase's March 23 blog challenging Presbyterians for Restoring Creation and Presbyterian Church Camp and Conference Centers to work together to form a Presbyterian Conservation Corps (PCC) focused on youth at a critical stage of their faith journey.

Underestimating the desire of senior high students to make a difference in the world and do mission, often feeds a disenchantment and disengagement with the church. Rick's challenge is well-grounded, realistic about the limited financial resources of camps and presbyteries but big enough to stretch us. It has generated new energy among PRC and PCCCA leadership on our vital role of church camps in modeling and teaching eco-justice values.

Presbyterian camps have never been more important. It is well-known that camps play a pivotal role in the faith formation of many. There is an openness to God's spirit that camps evoke through nature and the experience of Christian community. As we grow more and more detached from the natural world, the more we need places to reconnect with it. Living faithfully in the age of globalization requires new skills and knowledge. The PCC will give practical skills needed to heal a hurting planet such as water purification, renewable energy and land restoration. Hands-on projects combined with a



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biblical and theological grounding is a powerful combination for energetic and idealistic youth.

For several years, the PRC and PCCCA have been collaborating. Building on this, both groups have been responding to Rick's challenge. The PCCCA has invited Rick to attend the PCCCA national conference at Menucha Retreat and Conference Center in Oregon and has begun a discussion that they plan to move to implementation as quickly as possible. PRC has convened a group of PRC members and others involved in camp and conference ministries to flesh out a plan for developing the PCC and to explore a green camp certification program. The possibilities are tremendous. God is indeed doing a new thing among us.



### **“Immaculate Heart of Mary” Sisters win HUGE award**

The American Institute of Architects (AIA) gave the IHM Sisters of Monroe, MI, the 2006 COTE Top Ten Green Projects award at the National Building Museum in Washington, D.C. The AIA's Committee on the Environment (COTE) selected the IHM Motherhouse based on its integration of architecture, technology and natural systems. The IHM Motherhouse sustainable renovation also won the Clean Air Excellence Award from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; the Build Michigan Award; a Building Award from the Michigan Historic Preservation Network; a Pyramid Award for Best Project team; and the Design Honor Award from Faith & Form magazine and the Interfaith Forum on Religion, Art and Architecture (IFRAA). The IHM Congregation was awarded an honorary affiliate membership in AIA-Michigan as a result of the renovation.

*For more information contact Sister Janet Ryan, IHM, at 734-240-9745, or Molly Hunt in the IHM Communications Office at 734-240-9716.*

### **Eco-Justice for All: God's People, God's Planet**

*Barbara Hipple, PRC Steering Committee*

Roughly 100 people gathered June 1-4, 2006 for the National Council of Churches conference in the middle of Katrina-ravaged New Orleans. They came expecting to experience environmental injustice first-hand; but were surprised by the intensity of emotion lurking everywhere just below the surface of friendly greetings, gracious hospitality, determination, and scenes of everyday life.

At this writing we are two days into the conference with a day of pre-conference touring of the city, meeting with community leaders, and (for some) also a day sweating in a Tyvec suit with goggles and mask gutting a moldy house. Those that met with community leaders heard stories of Gert Town's poor homeowners who struggle to rebuild homes they could never afford to cover with insurance, and continue their ongoing struggle of advocating for clean-up of toxic waste produced by an old chemical plant in their neighborhood. They also heard the stories of a very large and well-organized Vietnamese-American community surrounding the Mary Queen of Vietnam Catholic Church—a transplanted community now so firmly rooted in the New Orleans soil that 1700 of 4000 residents have already returned. The first neighborhood in New Orleans to submit and receive approval for a neighborhood rebuilding plan, their efforts have been rewarded by the placement of a new unprotected landfill a bare mile away, bordered by a canal, and a wetlands wildlife refuge.

At the opening plenary, we heard Dr. Beverly Wright of the Deep South Center for Environmental Justice speak of the plight of African Americans along the 85-mile stretch of the Mississippi River Chemical Corridor (aka Cancer Alley). Environmental justice author Bill McKibben then drew us into a global perspective on the world we are creating through human-induced climate change. The bad news: Katrina is a preview.

Just one day into the conference, and I had no more words. I could only begin to process through a lens—and that lens is Christ.

*Time and space did not allow for a full review of this conference. Please, please go to: [www.prcweb.org](http://www.prcweb.org) and read all of Barbara's compelling report.*



### ***Do you have a story to share?***

We are always looking for stories and typically take articles of 400 words or less.

The next submission date is September 1. *Send your ideas to [hhhallman@yahoo.com](mailto:hhallman@yahoo.com).*

## GENERAL ASSEMBLY REPORT

**PRC Makes a Splash at GA!***Bill Bowman, PRC Vice Moderator*

At the recent General Assembly meeting in Birmingham, PRC introduced its Bottled Water campaign, to try to convince GA commissioners, churches, and presbyteries to avoid using bottled water. We inserted brochures in commissioners' mailboxes, worked with GA planners to reduce the impact of bottled water use, and talked to over 100 folks at the PRC booth about the choice of using water this way. We also found ways of working with other environmentally-conscious organizations like Peacemaking, the Presbyterian Hunger Program, and Living Waters for the World.

Bottled water packaging (PET bottles) tends to be tossed in the trash rather than recycled, and transportation of tons of water uses valuable fuel. Bottled water is often no safer than tap water, and about 40% of bottled water in this country comes from tap water anyway.

PRC developed a brochure to discuss the issues mentioned above, and its quiz about bottled water was a good discussion-starter. It includes a "pledge" that PRC members are invited to "sign" on the website. Go to the PRC website, [www.prcweb.org](http://www.prcweb.org), to download a copy of the brochure, "sign" the pledge, and spread the word to your local churches and presbytery.

The idea for creating the brochure came out of the 2005 PRC Conference at Silver Bay, New York. All of us in attendance heard how bottled water impacts water resources in the developing world as well as costs consumers billions of dollars. Rebecca Barnes-Davies, Celia Kewitt and I gathered materials from websites and other resources to create the quiz, the pledge, and the list of "What You Can Do" ideas for the brochure.

### **Dan and Elizabeth Turk Receive Bill Gibson Award**

The Steering Committee of PRC has selected PC (USA) Missionaries Dan and Elizabeth Turk to receive the 2006 Bill Gibson Award. The Turks have made a significant difference in the restoration of the forests of Madagascar and have worked to educate in the issues of HIV infection. Both are with the FJKM (Church of Jesus Christ of Madagascar).

Dan has a background in soil science and agronomy and a doctoral degree in forestry from NC State University. As a missionary, Dan has used his experience and ability to promote the planting of native trees and fruit trees. Nurseries have been set up to propagate citrus trees and over 100 species of native trees have been planted in public parks. Dan has led environmental education efforts in over 120 schools encouraging the planting of native species. Native trees are planted at each school as part of the training. Madagascar has been significantly deforested over the past 100 years causing great damage to the soils and species diversity.

Elizabeth has a background in nursing and a master's degree in public health from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Elizabeth has been able to assist the FJKM Aids program which focuses on prevention and caring for those living with Aids and their families. Efforts are underway to have one trained HIV resource person in each of the 4,000 FJKM churches in Madagascar. She has also contributed to FJKM efforts to start community health programs.

The Turks have two children, Robert and Frances. They will return to Madagascar in July following a one-year sabbatical.

*To see the Turks and their work go to <http://www.pcusa.org/missionconnections/photos/turk.htm>*

### **Presbytery of Sheppards and Lapsley win PRC Award with Marvel Slab Removal**

*Robert Hays, Sheppards and Lapsley Presbytery*

In 2001, the Presbytery of Sheppards and Lapsley purchased 440 acres with 4 miles of river frontage on the Cahaba River. We immediately began working in partnership with conservation groups in an effort to remove a dam from the Cahaba River commonly called the "Marvel Slab." For years, these conservation groups had been working towards this goal. The Presbytery of Sheppards and Lapsley was the first landowner who was willing to enter into this work. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) describes this effort as one of the most ambitious river restoration projects in the Southeast. The Marvel Slab was an abandoned concrete bridge, in northern Bibb County near the town of Marvel, which stretched across the Cahaba from bank to bank for more than 40 years. The slab was an obstruction to fish that needed to move upstream to

feed, breed and elude predators. For almost a half-mile upstream, the dammed-up water drowned riffles and shoals that should have been teeming with life. In 2004, the Marvel Slab was successfully removed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) in an extensive partnership with the Presbytery of Sheppards and Lapsley, TNC, The Cahaba River Society and others.

**Proudly presenting ENERGY OFFSETS**

**P**RC and the Presbyterian Environmental Justice, Peacemaking, and Hunger programs are pleased to announce that together we offset the estimated global warming impact—168 tons of CO2—from hotel accommodations and use of the Birmingham Jefferson Convention Complex at the 217th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church USA. With NativeEnergy, we kept over 168 tons of CO2 out of the air!

You too, can do something about global warming - offset CO2 pollution from your summer travels with NativeEnergy's Travel CO2 calculator ([www.nativeenergy.com/traveler](http://www.nativeenergy.com/traveler)). How does CO2 offsetting work? With our purchase of renewable energy certificates (RECs), we are helping build renewable energy through the Rosebud St. Francis wind farm and the Dovan Family Farm methane renewable energy project. When "our" renewable energy projects are completed, they will displace dirty energy sources and keep CO2 out of the air on our behalf.

**Continuing Important Work Long After I'm Gone**

*Anonymous PRC member*

I was recently standing at the seashore in Key West, Florida, having arrived late in the evening after a long flight. Despite the beauty of the moon over the quiet water, my first thought was, "I'm sorry." That apology was directed to God, the creator of the wonderful panorama in front of me. It was a global apology for all that I have done, all that we have done, and continue to do to God's precious Earth. By the grace of God, perhaps we can do as much to restore it. That is what Presbyterians for Restoring Creation is all about. As I work in my own church to try and bring environmental justice issues to greater attention, I rely on organizations like PRC to help me find ideas and best practices. There is much to be done, and PRC helps point the way. My decision to include PRC in my bequest is my commitment to help Christians, particularly Presbyterians, to continue this important work, long after I'm gone.

.....  
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**Upcoming Events**

**Legalizing The Rights Of Earth And Community Challenging the Corporate State:**

**Claiming Our Rights and the Rights of Nature**

*July 7 - 9 2006, Gettysburg College, PA*

Fulfilling the dream of a just society that extends to the rights of the environment requires a new kind of local civic responsibility beyond protests over single issues. Our objective is to awaken conference participants to the neglected chapters of American political and legal history and introduce them to municipal tools for self-governance provided under most state constitutions.

**Register at [www.nacce.org](http://www.nacce.org).**

**Ghost Ranch Seminar sponsored by Witherspoon Society, Presbyterian Peace Fellowship and Presbyterians for Restoring Creation.**

**"ECONOMY, ECOLOGY AND EMPIRE"**

*July 17-24, Ghost Ranch Conference Center, NM.*

**Register at: [www.ghost ranch.org](http://www.ghost ranch.org).**



# PRC Update

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*\* If the date on your mailing label is Sept-06 or earlier, or there is no date, it is time to renew!*

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