

**Greetings From PRC Update Editor,  
David Brookman**

As I write this the forsythia outside my window is bursting with bright yellow blooms, the grass is greening nicely and the crabapples and dogwoods are preparing to send forth fluffy pink and white blossoms. Such are the heralds of spring in southwestern Indiana where this year we have received more than ample rainfall with still more in the forecast. I'm also aware that average temperatures in this part of the world have crept higher during both the summer and winter seasons. Are these harbingers of the effects of global warming? If so, how will they impact the climate in ways that are unpredictable and, depending upon where one lives, potentially unwelcome? How expansive will the growing seasons become? How much drier or wetter will they be? How much time do polar bears have before their icy abodes near the North Pole turn to water? How much has human consumption of nature's bounty contributed to what is now recognized as a rapidly emerging, twenty-first century crisis?

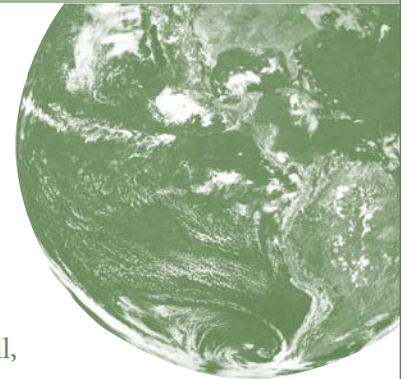
Even as scientists ponder these "how" questions, faith questions are never far removed. Though faith questions are still often muted during "town square" discussions, they are nevertheless given voice in places of worship and around home's hearth where they stir the conscience and kindle action. Why did our Creator endow us with the power to alter rhythms of the natural order? Does this imbalance that science documents reflect an implicit imbalance within human nature? In what ways might people of faith respond? What lessons can we learn about ourselves by truly becoming stewards of the natural order and not merely consumers of it?

Perhaps, by participating in such questioning, we shall eventually make a difference for the better. In learning to walk upon the planet that we call home—not merely as tourists passing through but as pilgrims who are wise enough to set foot lightly yet deliberately and

purposefully—we will discover that we are charged with a sacred trust. With these thoughts in mind I volunteered to act as the editor of PRC Update. It is, after all, your newsletter and we can be heartened and strengthened as we consider together the many ways in which each of us shares the fruits of discernment as we seek to deepen our capacity for engaging and practicing the stewardship of creation. Of course, I value your suggestions, welcome your constructive criticisms and, by all means, I encourage your contributions to the Update. Meanwhile, wife Becky and I will look forward to again meeting many of you and to continuing the acquaintances we made at the St. Simons Island gathering in February of 2007.

May God's peace be with you. And may you enjoy the loveliness and promise of summer wherever you may be.

*Shalom,*  
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## PRC is moving!

As those of you who have been long-time members know, the PRC office came to San Francisco Theological Seminary when Rebecca Barnes-Davies followed her husband to seminary in the Fall of 2003. Rebecca was also employed part-time during her stay at the seminary. Now, with staff expanding, Renee Rico, our current coordinator, is moving. She will be working part-time for PRC out of Sausalito Presbyterian Church, where she will be serving as part-time interim pastor.

If you call the old phone number, you will hear a message with the new phone number, and for the time being, email from the old address will be forwarded.

**NEW PHONE:** 415-289-0684

**NEW EMAIL:** [coordinator@prcweb.org](mailto:coordinator@prcweb.org)

**MAILING ADDRESS:** PO Box 2855, San Anselmo, CA 94979

**PHYSICAL ADDRESS (PACKAGES):** 112 Bulkeley Ave, Sausalito, CA 94965

## UPCOMING CONVENTIONS

- ✳ **Mindful Living: Healthy Churches, Healthy People, Healthy Planet**  
*Oct 9-11 2008, Alexandria Minnesota; Lake Geneva Christian Center*

**Speakers:** Pete Myers, CEO and Chief Scientist of Environmental Health Sciences, co-author of *Our Stolen Future*; The Rev. Dr. Jim Antal, spokesperson for Alliance for a Healthy Tomorrow's Body Burden project. For more information, contact [info@nccecojustice.org](mailto:info@nccecojustice.org) or visit [www.nccecojustice.org/mnconf.htm](http://www.nccecojustice.org/mnconf.htm)

- ✳ **2009 National PRC Conference: Embracing God's Call to Be Green**  
*July 7-11, Montreat Presbyterian Conference Center, Montreat, NC.*

We are very excited to be going back to Montreat, and we have great partners in the conference center, Warren Wilson College, and many others. Save the date: more information is on the website!



### ***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 20.**

***Send your ideas to David Brookman,  
[brookman@gibsoncounty.net](mailto:brookman@gibsoncounty.net)***

## Grassroots Efforts in the Presbytery of Greater Atlanta

Alan Jenkins, SCE for Presbytery of Greater Atlanta

Atlanta, Georgia: the city of trees, the Chattahoochee River, and Dr. Martin Luther King's birthplace. Atlanta, Georgia: longest average commute, largest city dependent upon the smallest watershed, and home to the greatest CO<sub>2</sub>-emitting company. Placed between inspiration and the cry of creation, Atlanta is also home to one of the Presbyterian Church (USA)'s largest presbyteries, the Presbytery of Greater Atlanta. What an opportunity and need for eco-justice ministry!

I am the Stewardship of Creation Enabler (SCE) here, but the challenges of such outreach ministry in this context are too great to take on without a strong network of support—at least for my organizationally challenged self! But God provides! The well-developed and thriving Sustainability Committee of Trinity Presbyterian Church jumped at the opportunity to partner with me in transforming the SCE position into a full-time Ministry of Word and Sacrament. With guidance from the Presbytery staff, we invited other congregations to join in further developing support and infrastructure. Several professors of Columbia Theological Seminary joined in the effort, as well.

We created a mission statement, a new name (*Earth Covenant Ministry*), and invited congregations to officially become *Partner Congregations* through an act of session and designation of a member to serve on the new Steering Committee. We successfully approached the Presbytery's Committee on Ministry for validation of the position as a specialized Ministry of Word and Sacrament.

The 202nd General Assembly-approved document *RESTORING CREATION FOR ECOLOGY AND JUSTICE* provides the direction for our work. That is, to support congregations of the Presbytery in their efforts to incorporate restoring creation into their "life and mission at every level." As an extension, we organize presbytery-wide events for creation care service, education and advocacy.

### STEERING COMMITTEE RESULTS

At PRC's luncheon at General Assembly in June, the following slate for the PRC steering committee was approved.....get details from Renee. We are pleased to have such a talented and committed group of people. Thanks to all of you who voted.



**Placed between inspiration and the cry of creation, Atlanta is also home to one of the Presbyterian Church (USA)'s largest presbyteries. What an opportunity and need for eco-justice ministry!**

Most recently, we partnered with The National Council of Churches of Christ's Eco-Justice Programs office and Georgia Interfaith Power & Light for nationally coordinated Climate Candle Light Vigil. In concert with 12 other actions across the country, we organized this March 27th interfaith event to give witness to the growing voice of faith communities calling for strong legislation addressing the climate crisis. We then followed up with our U.S. Representative David Scott to share with him the vital need for a strong climate bill by the U.S. Congress. We even got a bit of press coverage in the *Atlanta Journal & Constitution!*

The Holy Spirit continues to sustain us in this process, a process that has not always been easy. We pray for funding to flow more freely than it is. We get frustrated when pastors don't readily get on board or when a congregation is slow to do a new thing. We wish strong leaders in congregations were not already serving on five other committees! Yet we have no doubt that such struggles can be overcome with creative openness to the Holy Spirit.

If you'd like to learn more, please visit [www.earthcovenantministry.org](http://www.earthcovenantministry.org), email me at [ajenkins@earthcovenantministry.org](mailto:ajenkins@earthcovenantministry.org).

## Earthkeepers of Heartland Presbytery Overture on Non-Disposables

By Dianne Waddell, PRC Member

Last summer, I attended an alternative medicine conference in Portland. During one of the sessions, a physician told a story about a recent family vacation in Alaska. The family wanted to experience areas of wilderness in western Alaska, between mountains and sea. They had gone to considerable effort to locate a place where they could truly connect with Earth. They had hired a guide, flew toward the western side of Alaska, then back-packed further westward over a mountainous area toward their chosen site. After hiking, when they approached the sea, they were devastated at what they saw. Floating on the water in huge numbers, were plastic bottles, which had floated north from populated areas along the western coast.

That, unfortunately, was a sight much too easy to picture. We all have had experiences where we have been somewhere between disappointed and devastated in how our species has been uncaring consumers of Earth's resources.

The Ocean Conservancy just released a report regarding a massive trash pick-up by volunteers one day in September, 2007, in 76 countries. The most extensive cleanup was in the U.S. where 190,000 volunteers covered over 10,000 miles and picked up 390 pounds of trash per mile, among the highest of any country. And of course, this is just a small part of the problem.

In Heartland Presbytery, our local PRC group is entitled Earthkeepers.

We had written two previous overtures (one to add an additional line to the Book of Order on eco-justice, and the other regarding re-instating the Department of Environmental Justice) and were anxious to keep working to help make an environmental impact through the PC(U.S.A.). We felt it was vital to get a momentum going by promoting an effort where individuals, churches, and the communities could begin/continue to promote healing and keeping Earth through a visible effort.

We wrote an overture to discourage the use of disposables particularly in food service and to encourage use of non-disposables. This was passed by our Presbytery's

Mission Outreach and Social Justice Division as then unanimously by at a gathered meeting of Heartland Presbytery.

This overture passed at the June, 2008 General Assembly under Committee 09 working on Social Justice Issues. It was item number 09-02 listed as an overture "on the use of non-disposable food service items". To read the entire proposal, check the official site, which is [www.pc-biz.org](http://www.pc-biz.org) and open the item listed as "committees", then look under Social Justice. It was the second item for consideration.

*The main directive of the overture is as follows:*

Direct the General Assembly to request Presbyterian congregations and individual members to encourage use of non-disposable food service items, and to refrain from the use of disposable food service products, particularly Styrofoam and other non-biodegradables; to use non-disposable bags for packing items purchased in the commercial market, and to refrain from using plastic bags; and to choose tap or home or church-filtered water instead of bottled water or soda, and to refrain from purchasing those liquids in plastic bottles. Even though this represents only a part of what we can do to live in a more environmentally just manner, it is extremely important in beginning to live sustainable, healthy lives.

*Part of our rationale is as follows:*

In the 217th General Assembly the Assembly strongly urged all Presbyterians to live carbon neutral lives and to act boldly to lead the way in reducing our energy usage. This included reduction of emissions in transportation, food production, packaging and shipment.

It has been found that the styrene in Styrofoam and that the metabolites and byproducts of many plastics can have toxic effects on humans (particularly children and childbearing women) and therefore on all of the web of creation. Styrofoam products, plastic bottles, and plastic bags are the cause of major environmental concerns. Plastic bags are a nonrenewable resource, are a major part of our landfill waste, and litter the environment, sometimes being deadly to animals.

Traditional plastic bottles can take 1,000 years to degrade, and over 40 million bottles a day become trash or litter in the United States.

**Floating on the water in huge numbers, were plastic bottles, which had floated north from populated areas along the western coast.**



**We cannot make God's Creation a wasteland of things created, used, and then discarded and still expect people or the rest of Creation to prosper.**

We may eliminate our opportunity for abundant living through our reliance on synthetic chemicals by acting as a disposable society. We cannot make God's Creation a wasteland of things created, used, and then discarded and still expect people or the rest of Creation to prosper. By seeking safer and more sustainable alternatives, all of us and particularly future generations can live a more full and abundant life

Justice, peace and the environment are interrelated. Whenever we humans abuse the environment, whenever we engage in non-sustainable consumption of our earth's finite resources, we are not only endangering the future of life on our planet, but we are committing acts of violence and injustice against other life—both present and future. Protecting and restoring creation is central to our own survival.

We in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) have a rich tradition of justice and reverence for life. Included in our mission is responsible and faithful stewardship of God's earth. It is vital that we begin anew daily to find ways to care for others, ourselves, and earth as our expressions of our love for God. We must find alternative, sustainable methods of living, so that not only future generations, but all of creation may have the opportunity to live healthy, full lives.

This overture was adopted by General Assembly in June. We encourage you to bring it to the attention of your Presbytery and continue to work on this issue in your own home, community and local congregation. Let your presbytery know that this type of effort is a part of the denomination. We MUST change our ways as a consumer society toward more sustainable lifestyles. Don't give up. Encourage your church and workplace to be a model!! Make every attempt to discourage bottled water and disposable food service items.. Purchase or make your own reusable bags and give them as gifts to others...perhaps a gift-giving to your congregation. Check out new websites including: [www.grassrootinfo.org](http://www.grassrootinfo.org) and [www.noharm.org](http://www.noharm.org). (The latter is related to Health Care Without Harm, an excellent health-related website.)

Reach out and touch and do all you can to heal Earth, as Earth keeps and holds and heals us, through God's grace. We thank God for this beautiful sanctuary, a sanctuary called Earth. For it is STILL VERY good. Amen.

## BOOK REVIEW

### **Earth and Word: Classic Sermons on Saving the Planet**

*Edited by David Rhoads  
(Continuum Publishing,  
2007)*



David Rhoads, who supervises the interfaith eco-spirituality website [www.webofcreation.org](http://www.webofcreation.org) has published a new preaching resource for those of us in the Christian tradition. If you are thinking of a gift for someone in your life, thinking about giving this book. This volume should be on every preacher's shelf!

Rhoads, who is New Testament professor at Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago, notes in his introduction that "At its most profound level, the ecological crisis is a spiritual crisis," and "[w]e are entering an age in which environmental events and concerns will be dominant issues of the day." This state of affairs makes it an important resource for preacher, teachers, and activists. He hopes that the book can reach lay people as a devotional resource, to mold our minds, or deepen our convictions, and assist pastors in preparation of sermons

The collection of sermons and "sermonlike" addresses include those from well-known homiletics, theologians, environmentalists and activists, including Barbara Brown Taylor, Larry Rasmussen, John Cobb, Thomas Berry, Dieter Hessel, James Cone, and PRC member Neddy Astudillo. They cover both familiar and less-familiar biblical texts, an issues such as global warming, consumption, our human relationship with the earth, and even a children's sermon.

An added bonus: the book is printed on 50 percent post-consumer waste recycled paper, and the current printing has saved over 983 pounds of greenhouse gases by doing so.

—Renée Rico, PRC Coordinator

## Northern Ireland Trip Provides Opportunities to Share Challenges and Opportunities Around Climate Change

By Renée Rico, PRC Coordinator

In February, I was delighted to be invited to be a part of an interfaith delegation to Northern Ireland to share the United States experiences of faith communities engagement around the issue of Climate Change. The trip, funded by the British Consulate in New York, included coming together around the need to respond to the issue of climate change. Our group, beyond me, included Cassandra Carmichael, eco-justice program director for the National Council of Churches USA., Dan Misleh of the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change, and Liore Milgrom-Elcott with Committee on Jewish Life and the Environment (COEJL).

As I prepared for my trip, I had a number of questions in my mind, brought to a head in a conversation with my friend Judy. I was explaining to her the purpose of my trip, "I'm going as part of an interfaith delegation to talk with various constituencies and stakeholders about climate change." Judy paused, and then said, 'Oh, you mean global warming. I was thinking about the need for another kind of climate change, you know.'

I did know. As Northern Ireland recovers from the violence of terror that engulfed the country for more than twenty years, there are many issues facing this part of the world. Economic development has been stagnant, with investors reluctant to invest in a place where violence might overtake progress. A nascent Northern Ireland Assembly, elected for less than a year, is just now learning the ropes of running a government, with Sinn Fein and DUP political parties weary and wary of each other from the long period of hostilities.

The faith communities are also grappling with a new period in which they see a host of issues that were unaddressed because of the more pressing issues around the

violence. Another piece of the puzzle is that some clergy are exhausted from their long-term efforts to cap the violence from the front lines in the neighborhoods. They are in need a "Sabbath" time before moving ahead.

In the wider culture, Northern Ireland is delicately nudging towards dealing with the past violence in ways that will provide a way forward for Northern Ireland to rebuild its communities. Some fear that such discussions might elicit violence, but to not address it at all might also provide a return to violence.

All along my trip, I met a number of Presbyterians who are making a difference there. One is the Rev. Bill Shaw, who serves as the Executive Director of the 174 Trust, a community-based center that seeks to work on reconciliation in some of the most affected neighborhoods in North Belfast. Shaw grew up in a totally Protestant neighborhood of Belfast, and only met a Catholic for the first time when he was 17. Shaw's own transformation occurred because of his experience in living among Catholics in one of his parishes. Now, he says, the challenge is to work with the generations coming of age who feel the need to "protect their neighborhood" even though the violence has abated.

So too with the Green Party member of the Northern Ireland Assembly (the only one), who advocates for Climate Change targets to be set, but with the majority parties focusing on their own issues, is finding little headway.

At the Corrymeela Community, an ecumenical peace and reconciliation center that receives support from the PCUSA, we heard about the efforts of the community to reduce their carbon footprint. They invited in consultants to review their energy use, and discovered that they were one of the worst energy-wasters that the consultants had ever seen, in part because of the type of use of their facilities, and a lack of procedures to minimize energy use. They are now working on these issues to be a model, and are hoping to install a windmill farm on their site, which overlooks the sea. We had a great conversation with Ronnie Millar, the director, and

*Continues on back page*

*The rope bridge at Carrick-a-Rede, Northern Ireland*



### **Links to Northern Ireland Groups**

**The Corrymeela Community:** [www.corrymeela.org](http://www.corrymeela.org)

**Northern Ireland Environment Planning:**  
[www.nienvironmentlink.org](http://www.nienvironmentlink.org)

**Christian Aid on Climate Change:**  
[www.christianaid.org.uk/stoppoverty/climatechange](http://www.christianaid.org.uk/stoppoverty/climatechange)

**Trocaire's Lenten Campaign:**  
[www.trocaire.org/lent/climatechange](http://www.trocaire.org/lent/climatechange)

**The 174 Trust:** [www.174trust.org](http://www.174trust.org)

## Wake Up Call

By Robin Blakeman, PRC Member

The Gospel of Mark chapter 13 repeatedly calls, “Be awake!” Eight generations of family roots have been calling me back to awareness of my home state for a long time. The most urgent wake up call of my life, however, was delivered during a Southwings and OVEC sponsored flyover in June. Since my family and spiritual roots originate in Southern WV, this was akin to a religious experience. For the first time, I got to see those majestic mountains from a bird’s eye—perhaps, God’s Eye—view. Just outside Charleston, however, reality struck: the number and size of Mountain Top Removal (MTR) sites were astounding! I thought: “An evil giant has been stomping through my homeland!” Giant MTR sites extended in every direction to the horizon—some worse than others. The sludge pond behind Marsh Fork elementary ominously dwarfs the school. The Kayford site is nightmarish, complete with a monstrous Dragline. It was enough to make this preacher want to cuss! This was an urgent wake-up call for me.

*Be Awake!* I believe in the urgent importance of a swift spiritual awakening to end the environmental and social destruction caused by MTR. No ecological or human community can survive this level of destruction much longer! Sadly, it is often our faith communities that further the problem—if only by the silence we maintain in order to “keep the peace,” and to get program funding. For instance, Massey Coal sponsored a Gospel concert at the Stern Wheel Regatta. The word “Gospel” means—literally—“good news.” Can we find any good news in destruction of vast tracts of God’s Creation?

A mining company in our region has defended their MTR practices by posting a scriptural quote—Isaiah 40, verse 4—on their website. This scripture says:

*[NRSV] Isaiah 40:4 Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.*

How arrogant this is! Will we allow mining company executives and the politicians who are beholden to them, to “play god” with these ancient mountain habitats, and with the ancient texts of the Holy Bible? When read in context, Isaiah chapter 40 shows God’s focus on a people who have recently undergone an extended period of persecution at the hands of the rich and powerful; some have been forced to leave their ancestral land. Through Isaiah, God assures them of restoration and that *the forces of persecution will be leveled*, not the actual landscape.

As a result of the flyover, I believe more strongly than ever that people of faith need to pay attention to conditions of poverty and injustice within Appalachian communities caused by mountain-top removal. Many long-term residents

are suffering and loosing their ancestral land to powerful Coal Industry forces. Some long-term residents have claims to their land that pre-date West Virginia state history; Native American roots are mingled into some families. How can any multinational industrial corporation dare to destroy those deep roots? Yet, it is happening, all around—closer to population centers than most are aware. Friends, it is truly time to wake up!

As the Creator designed it, the land has value to all of us through the filtration systems of our natural rivers and streams, and irreplaceable hardwood forests. We are loosing an abundant heritage through continued radical extraction of coal. We are squandering the abundant gifts of God. What will we tell God about all those missing mountains and ruined streams? Who are we to think we can destroy these ancient mountains, and take away land that has existed in balanced and stable ecosystems since before human history?

The prophet Isaiah tells us: [11:9] *They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain...* Yet, we are allowing destruction every day upon these mountains. To members of faith communities, and people of Appalachian heritage, I say “Wake Up!” Examine your personal and communal lives; see how we are feeding the monster of consumption - which has been loosed upon our beloved mountains. As in Isaiah, God is calling us to take a prophetic stance to save God’s mountains, creatures, and people! West Virginia used to be “Almost Heaven,” but we are now “Open for Business.” In the future we could be “almost hell,” if we remain asleep to the importance of environmental preservation and social justice.

Let us heed the words from another prophet: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who asked all people of faith to be the “headlights” rather than the “taillights” of society. Do we want future generations to call us taillights on a Dragline? Divine voices are calling us now: “Be Awake!” Stop the monster of Mt. Top Removal that is destroying God’s Creation!

<sup>1</sup>“So here we are moving toward the exit of the twentieth century with a religious community largely adjusted to the status quo, standing as a taillight behind other community agencies rather than a headlight... to higher levels of justice.” (MLK, Jr: Letter from the Birmingham City Jail.)



**The prophet Isaiah tells us: *They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain...* Yet, we are allowing destruction every day upon these mountains.**

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## PRC Update

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## Northern Ireland

*Continued from page 6*

PRC is hoping to send a young adult intern to work with them on this project.

Seeds of hope are being planted. We met with environmental groups and faith leaders and remarked that, unlike the US, there is no strong cultural gap between environmentalists and those who are part of faith communities. We don't see that in the US very often, where often churches defend the poor, while the environmentalists defend nature. This is a plus that we don't have in the United States at the moment.

One of discoveries by our delegation was that the European Christian benevolence organizations (Christian Aid for the Protestants, Trocaire for the Catholics) are explicitly tying poverty to the issue of climate change as a result of their partners in developing countries telling them that climate change had already arrived for them. The strategy is now more than seven years old, and we saw numerous billboards from these organizations in Belfast, Dublin and Manchester linking poverty and climate change. Christian Aid is taking it a step further by advocating further carbon reductions on behalf of the poor in the European Union.

And while there is no larger strategy by the various denominations, there is theological and grassroots work being done. A conference on eco-theology was happening shortly after we left, and several people we met with noted that members of their congregations were waking up to the issue.

So, can the issue of climate change bring together a people divided by walls of hostility and move toward a common goal? We hope so, and hope that by sharing our individual experiences with each other, the body of Christ was built up so that we all might, through faith, move ahead into a common future.

**[www.prcweb.org](http://www.prcweb.org)**

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