

## Ecological Conversion Overture to the 222nd General Assembly

The Presbytery of Heartland overtures the 222nd General Assembly to join in partnership with other religions and denominations by modeling leadership and encouraging lifestyles and world views which are based on visions of environmental, economic, social and spiritual justice.

This would accompany a call for a transformation of politics, economics and individual lifestyles to confront environmental degradation and climate change. It also calls for coordination of a study between church agencies and individual members of the church to live and minister in a more simple, integral, and mutually faithful way seeking social and eco-justice.

Rationale:

### **Matthew 7:12** ESV

“So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

### **1 John 3:17-18** ESV

But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

“How we live shows our faith to the world and reflects our sense of call and commitment to God. It is easy to embrace the temptations that surround us, thoughtlessly consume and prioritize our own individual comfort. However, in most of our daily decisions, more responsible, sustainable choices are available that honor God's people and earth. We have been told to present ourselves as living sacrifices to God, and living into this instruction each day requires effort. We are also instructed to live in community, as together we are the Body of Christ in the world”. (Presbyterian Hunger Program, “Just Living” Program)

Pope Francis caught the world's imagination by issuing his encyclical on climate change, *Laudato Si'*, “On Care for our Common home.” This is such an urgent issue that the pope did not address his encyclical just to Roman Catholics. He addressed it to the peoples of the world. The pope calls on the people of the world to recognize that the human-caused damage to our planet—and especially climate change—has reached such critical proportions it now requires decisive, cooperative action from the peoples of the world. The pope believes that the time has come to go beyond treating the symptoms to treating the cause: we need to become more proactive in the redevelopment of our world cultures such that caring for creation becomes intrinsic to all. Indeed, he is calling the whole world to something new: an ecological conversion.

The time for meaningful ecological reformation—the reforming of humanity—has come. Recognizing the ecological urgency of this time is a moral issue.

*God is everywhere. That means that God is in the oceans when climate change makes the*

*oceans more acidic. It also means God suffers with the King Crab as that acidic ocean turns it into a permanently soft-shelled crab. And God is in the suffering of the people of Savoonga and Gambell when they go out to get food and find that climate change has made it so they can't protein. Indeed, St. Lawrence Island Yupik people have not been able to find walrus now for three years—forcing them to declare an economic emergency. (And by the way, what does that do for teaching the practices Native respect and values in hunting when there is no food to hunt.) And God is in also in the walrus, that no longer can live-and-feed-and-thrive in their best feeding places, because the ice platforms from which they feed are gone...People of all faiths, and of no particular religious faith, must know this: putting the whole web of life at risk desecrates our sacred home, planet earth.<sup>1</sup>*

The challenge for the United State and for the world, is three-fold. First, we must become aware of the suffering that climate change is causing for the whole of creation, including many people today. Second, we must allow our awareness of that suffering to sink deeply enough into the very center of our awareness such that we want to do some thing about it. And third, we must develop strategies for action—strategies for moving into a future where our very way of life provides human dignity, including economic dignity, certainly, but does so in harmony with ecological processes and life. If this is to happen there must be real passion...it must come from the heart, the very center of our being. But besides passion there must also be committed decisions for processes that invite new strategies—strategies for a truly sustainable way of life.

This requires leadership Recycling alone won't get us there There is no room for excuses.

Pope Francis pulls together a web of environmental, social, economic, political, and spiritual revelations and reflections and calls us to witness and work in an imperative of new vision.

Included in this work are the following statements:

*If present trends continue, this century may well witness extraordinary climate change and an unprecedented destruction of ecosystems, with serious consequences for all of us. (24)*

*Climate change is a global problem with serious implications, environmental, social, economic, political, and for the distribution of goods; it represents one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day. (25)*

*The warming caused by huge consumption on the part of some rich countries has repercussions on the poorest areas of the world, especially Africa, where a rise in temperature, together with drought, has proved devastating for farming. (51\_*

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<sup>1</sup> Curtis Karns, Climate Rally Statement; Fairbanks, Alaska; August 31, 2015

*All of us are linked by unseen bonds and together form a kind of universal family, a sublime communion which fills us with a sacred, affectionate and humble respect. (89)*

*We have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach;*

*it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor. (49)*

*Every ecological approach needs to incorporate a social perspective which takes into*

*account the fundamental rights of the poor and the underprivileged. (93)*

*We are not faced with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social,*

*but rather one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the underprivileged, and at the same time protecting nature. (139)*

*Obsession with a consumerist lifestyle, above all when few people are capable of maintaining it, can only lead to violence and mutual destruction. (205)*

**As Christians, we are called to seek justice and uplift those in poverty.**

*Book of Confessions 9.4.c: The church cannot condone poverty, whether it is the product of unjust social structures, exploitation of the defenseless, lack of national resources, absence of technological understanding, or rapid expansion of populations. The church calls every man to use his abilities, his possessions, and the fruits of technology as gifts entrusted to him by God for the maintenance of his family and the advancement of the common welfare. It encourages those forces in human society that raise men's hopes for better conditions and provide them with the opportunity for a decent living. A church that is indifferent to poverty, or evades responsibility in economic affairs, or is open to one social class only, or expects gratitude for its beneficence makes a mockery of reconciliation and offers no acceptable worship to God. (9.4.c)*

Particularly pertinent in the encyclical is the term “integral ecology,” which, if incorporated in our lifestyle, could lead us to harmony with Creation. Humans are part of the web of Creation, yet many persons adopt an anthropocentric way of living and being. Many see themselves as above other parts of Creation exemplified by actions which have led to environmental degradation, in many cases, irreversible. Integral ecology brings us to seeing other parts of Creation as part of the intricate web, co-nurturers in the bio-system of life.

Currently, people on the Earth use up 150% of the available resources of our planet, which is unsustainable. The United Nations states that by 2030, at our current rate of

consumption, we will need the equivalent of two Earths to support us. A result is collapsing fisheries, diminishing forests, depletion of fresh water systems and buildup of carbon dioxide and methane emissions which are contributing to climate change. This has a much more devastating effect on those who are impoverished, who are already disproportionately negatively affected. The United States population is only 5% of the world population, but we are consuming 25% of the fossil fuel resources. Our use of available resources (gifts of God) and unsustainable as most resources are finite.

Gradye Parsons, Stated Clerk, Office of the General Assembly, in a letter dated June 18, 2015, welcomed the release of Pope Francis' papal encyclical *Laudato Sii*. He stated, in part:

*We celebrate the faithful witness and words of Pope Francis today as he encourages responsible, loving care for God's creation in the release of his papal encyclical *Laudato Sii*. We affirm its echo of the great St. Francis' reverence for nature. At the same time, we join the Pope in the urgency of truth-telling: we humans are largely responsible for global warming and we have to find ways to reverse track. The Pope is calling us all to environmental conversion: may we together find the immense moral and spiritual energy that the world powers have been lacking so far...*

*In the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), we are greatly concerned about environmental degradation. Climate disruption in particular is a threat to this and future generations and to God's creation. In 2008, our General Assembly said,*

*With our Lord, we will stand with the "least of these" (Matt. 25:40) and advocate for the poor and oppressed in present and future generations who are often the victims of environmental injustice and who are least able to mitigate the impact of global warming that [is falling] disproportionately on them. ... [W]e implore our nation to accept its moral responsibility to address global warming. (The Power to Change: U.S. Energy Policy and Global Warming, approved by the 218th General Assembly (2008) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.); Minutes, 2008, Part I p. 935)...*

*Pope Francis' leadership, wisdom, and pastoral care are evident in the encyclical, and we deeply appreciate this powerful, faith-filled encouragement for all people to join together to care for God's creation. We affirm the moral conviction that we must turn from individual and corporate practices that harm the creation and participate in healing, protecting, and caring for the world. We will continue to work in partnerships with other faith communities and in the public sector as we all seek to better care for all people and all creation. Finally, we applaud the inspiring leadership of Pope Francis and look forward to seeing what transformative commitments will result from this ethical mandate to care for creation."*

This overture calls us to

-- Prayerfully discern and carefully reassess our work and calling as individuals, as community, as a denomination, and as a body of Christ in communion with all beings.

-- Call upon agencies of this denomination, congregations, and individual members to reconsider our presence and mission on this planet, as emissaries of Christ, to nurture and care for each other, with the understanding that we are indeed interrelated and vitally depending on each other for survival.

-- Re-covenant in community to look toward making our material lives more simple, more equitable.

-- Re-affirm our previous environmental and social justice overtures.

-- Proactively seek ways in our congregations/communities to seek "ecological reformation" in such ways as

- partnering with presbyteries or churches who face different ecological, cultural and economic challenges to pray, learn, and seek ways to together work toward an "integral ecology"
- seek to proactively model prophetic witness in environmental, economic and social justice.
- actively work toward justice-seeking, working proactively with other faith based partners as well as leaders in community, government and other offices to enact positive change in "ecological reformation."
- work closely with agencies in the PCUSA who have faithfully led and shepherded the denomination in witness, including agencies in the Presbyterian Mission Agency, including those with in Peace, Compassion, and Justice. This include the Hunger Program, Self-Development of People, Disaster Assistance, Peacemaking Program, Office of Public Witness, and Presbyterian Women, among others.

-- Move forward with compassion and wisdom toward a way of living in an understanding of "integral ecology" toward the end of a new vision, living in faithful partnership in an "ecological reformation" as we "seek justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God." (Micah 6:8).

Amen.