

## Overture: A Call for a Ban on Fracking

### The Recommendation

The \_\_\_\_\_ recommends to the 222<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly that the Presbyterian Church (USA) endorse a ban on the process of hydraulic fracturing (also called "fracking"), call on the federal, state and local governments to declare a ban on hydraulic fracturing, and ask the churches and all members of the Presbyterian Church (USA) publicly to support such a ban.

### The Rationale

A ban on fracking is supported by the following points:

1. **"The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it."** (Psalm 24:1) As Christians we are called to honor the sanctity of life, to safeguard the life and well-being of all living things, and to protect God's creation from damage and destruction. When we support or ignore the hydraulic fracturing (fracking) process, we threaten the life and well-being of living things on earth, including ourselves.
2. **This endorsement to ban hydraulic fracturing is supported by The Precautionary Principle—** adopted by the 221<sup>st</sup> General Assembly in 2014, which states "an action should not be taken if the consequences are uncertain and potentially dangerous." The consequences of hydraulic fracturing have not been thoroughly tested, and the many negative and serious results of its widespread use show the fracking process threatens the health and life of human beings as well as living creatures due to the contamination of water and soil.
3. **Fracking threatens our clean water.**—Water is essential to life and it should be protected against contamination. Water should be available to all who need it as it has become a resource that is becoming more scarce and precious world-wide. In areas where fracking is done, studies have shown contamination of local aquifers. Fracking uses incredible amounts of water—5 to 13 million gallons per gas or oil well—and almost all of this water is not reusable. Also, water supplies are taken from local farmers and ranchers who need it. Water that is reusable is radioactive or, in the cleaning process, creates contaminants that are concentrated and difficult to dispose of. The construction of new well sites and supporting infrastructure takes up an average of 9 acres of land per well, increasing sediment deposits in streams and rivers due to erosion and disrupting the natural filtration of water into the aquifers by grasses and trees. Contaminants from spills, leaks and blowouts of toxic chemicals and oil and gas often enter local water sources.
4. **The fracking process increases the rate of global warming.** 97 percent or more of actively-publishing climate scientists agree that climate-warming trends over the past century are due to human activities. Global warming already causes hardship for human beings, especially the poor. Scientists predict that warming of the planet beyond 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit (2 degrees Celsius) may threaten human survival and life as we know it. Fracking releases methane and other hydrocarbons into the atmosphere—and methane causes atmospheric warming 25 times more than carbon dioxide according to the EPA. There is 17 times more

methane in the air near shale gas development sites due to leaks. Leaking well casings, inadequately plugged abandoned oil and gas wells (often used for the deposit of fracking fluids), deteriorating casings and pipes of used or abandoned wells over time, and improperly centered well casings and their gradual settling—all lead to the release of methane and other climate-changing hydrocarbons.

5. Fracking causes an increase in earthquakes. Earthquakes, directly or indirectly, contribute to the loss of life and property. For decades the central and eastern U.S registered about 20 earthquakes of 3.0 magnitude or greater per year. In 2010-12, 300 earthquakes of 3.0 or greater occurred in that area, and about 200 of 3.0 or greater hit in the first-half of 2014 in Oklahoma alone. A magnitude 4.7 earthquake among a swarm of 1,000 smaller ones struck Greenbrier, Arkansas in 2010-11, and a magnitude 5.7 earthquake hit Prague, OK in 2011. Seismic waves created by earthquakes will increase the likelihood of leaking oil and gas wells.
6. The transport of oil produced by fracking creates the near certainty of disastrous explosions. Trains carrying oil have exploded in Quebec, West Virginia, Virginia, Alabama and North Dakota—risking life and destroying property. The Department of Transportation predicts an average of ten crude oil or ethanol derailments per year for the next two decades, causing billions in damages. The fear is that such derailments and explosions will occur in highly populated areas, such as Seattle or Minneapolis or Albany, NY.
7. The process of fracking creates many more pollutants in the air for which there is no containment—impacting the health of all in the vicinity, especially the children and the elderly, and causing environmental degradation. Clouds of silica dust arise at fracking sites from sand that is processed and mixed with fracking fluids, and silica is linked to lung cancer, obstructive pulmonary disease, kidney disease and autoimmune disease. Exhaust from diesel generators and large trucks, smoke from flaring well sites, and explosions create a stream of toxic air emissions. The fracking process brings up air pollutants from the depths of the earth including methane, benzene, toluene and other cancer-causing hydrocarbons, radon (a by-product of radioactive radium), hydrogen sulfide and chemical vapor from the fracking fluids—the identity of which is protected by the Toxic Substances Control Act.
8. Fracking puts a strain on and causes damage to local communities. Where fracking is occurring, communities have their health and emergency response systems pushed to their limits. Schools are over-crowded, housing becomes scarce and expensive (especially difficult for the elderly and poor), crime and the transmission of sexually transmitted disease increase, and roads are damaged. Very little wealth is captured at the local level and outside investment in the community drops. The local land is altered and water supplies are put at risk.
9. Fracking supports our greater dependence on fossil fuels rather than moving us toward cleaner energy solutions such as wind, solar and higher efficiency. Resources and funds are being used to support our fossil fuel dependency, rather than investing in companies that will move the nation toward clean and sustainable energy use. The current hope based on the use of natural gas is misinformed because studies have shown that because of the fracking

process, all the pollutants created (including methane) and other factors the use of natural gas will increase global warming at a higher rate than at present.

- 10. The PC(USA) has a moral and prophetic obligation to speak out against actions that damage, endanger or destroy the life and health of people, their future generations and all living things. To support a ban on hydraulic fracturing addresses one of—if not the greatest issue—the human race will face in the 21st century, namely, that human activity causes climate change. By endorsing a ban on fracking the church will take a stand against the unrestrained financial interests of those individuals and companies that knowingly neglect or misrepresent the negative impact of fracking on human life and on the environment. As a result the Presbyterian Church (USA) will show compassion for "the least of these," who will be most affected by the rising water, drought and fires, flooding and crop disruption brought on by climate change. This is a basic and great calling of the Church—to hold sacred and protect all life. This is not just a courageous stance; it is our responsibility.**

## References

### Rationale 1 (God's Earth)

**Genesis 1:1** In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth,....

**Genesis 1:31** God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.

**Genesis 1:27** So God created humankind in God's image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

**Genesis 2:15** The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.

**Genesis 9:8-11** Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, "As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth."

**Deuteronomy 10:14** Heaven and the heaven of heavens belong to the Lord your God, the earth with all that is in it.

**1 Chronicles 29:11** Yours, O Lord, are the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and on the earth is yours; yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all.

**Job 38:1-7** Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind: "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up your loins like a man, I will question you, and you shall declare to me. Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements-- surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone when the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?"

**Psalms 65:4-5, 9-11** By awesome deeds you answer us with deliverance, O God of our salvation; you are the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas. By your strength you established the mountains; you are girded with might. ...<sup>9</sup>You visit the earth and water it, you greatly enrich it; the river of God is full of water; you provide the people with grain, for so you have prepared it. You water its furrows abundantly, settling its ridges, softening it with showers, and blessing its growth. You crown the year with your bounty; your wagon tracks overflow with richness.

**Psalms 104:1-6** Bless the Lord, O my soul. O Lord my God, you are very great. You are clothed with honor and majesty, wrapped in light as with a garment. You stretch out the heavens like a tent, you set the beams of your chambers on the waters, you make the clouds your chariot, you ride on the wings of the wind, you make the winds your messengers, fire and flame your ministers. You set the earth on its foundations, so that it shall never be shaken. You cover it with the deep as with a garment; the waters stood above the mountains.

**Psalms 104:14-21** You cause the grass to grow for the cattle, and plants for people to use, to bring forth food from the earth, and wine to gladden the human heart, oil to make the

face shine, and bread to strengthen the human heart. The trees of the LORD are watered abundantly, the cedars of Lebanon that he planted. In them the birds build their nests; the stork has its home in the fir trees. The high mountains are for the wild goats; the rocks are a refuge for the coney. You have made the moon to mark the seasons; the sun knows its time for setting. You make darkness, and it is night, when all the animals of the forest come creeping out. The young lions roar for their prey, seeking their food from God.

**Psalms 104:24-30** O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. Yonder is the sea, great and wide, creeping things innumerable are there, living things both small and great. There go the ships, and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it. These all look to you to give them their food in due season; when you give to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things. When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground.

**Isaiah 24:3-6** The earth shall be utterly laid waste and utterly despoiled; for the Lord has spoken this word. The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers; the heavens languish together with the earth. The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt; therefore the inhabitants of the earth dwindled, and few people are left.

**Isaiah 35:1-2** The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the LORD, the majesty of our God.

**Isaiah 42:5** Thus says God, the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it.

**Isaiah 65:17-18** For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating.

**Matthew 6:26-29** "Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single cubit to your life's span? And why are you anxious about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory did not clothe himself like one of these."

**Mark 4:37-41** A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But Jesus was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" And they were

filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

**John 1:1-5** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

**Colossians 1:15-16** Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers-- all things have been created through him and for him.

**1 Corinthians 8:6** ... yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

**Revelation 4:11** "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created."

**Revelation 21:1, 5** Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ... And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new."

**Revelation 22:1-2** Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

## **Rationale 2 (The Precautionary Principle)**

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