

Ovt 014

On Engagement with the Issue of Climate Change—From the Presbytery of New Covenant.

The Presbytery of New Covenant overtures the 223rd General Assembly (2018) of the PC(USA) to:

1. Express its profound concern about the detrimental effects of climate change on all God's creation, including those living in poverty, the elderly and children, and those least responsible for the emissions of greenhouse gases.
2. Proclaim that we recognize the Gospel's call to shift to a just, compassionate and sustainable energy plan.
3. Acknowledge that this compels us to implement strategies and actions that engage climate change and offer the realistic prospect of changing our destructive behaviors that contribute to the issue.
4. Call upon congregations and councils of the church to develop ways for those who disagree on climate change to be in dialogue with one another, seeking together to find and represent the will of Christ; affirm the need for dialogue and discernment, not only within and among our congregations, but also all parties outside our denomination, seeking faithful individual and collective responses to address climate change, trusting that we share a common belief in the need to respond.
5. Affirm that we have a duty to assure that our response to climate change does not endanger the economic progress and improvements in living conditions that have been made among all of God's people, most notably the impoverished, but instead enables that progress to continue.
6. Affirm that is both possible and practical to effect meaningful change; urge individuals, congregations, councils of the church, and institutions (including the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Foundation, Board of Pensions, Presbyterian Mission Agency, Office of General Assembly, camps, conference centers, colleges, and theological seminaries) to initiate, continue, and build upon steps to reduce our carbon footprint and to continue adoption of lower-carbon and zero-carbon technologies and lifestyles.
7. Commend the Committee on Mission Responsibility through Investment ("MRTI") for its long history of corporate engagement on climate change issues.
8. Instruct MRTI to continue that engagement, applying the long-standing PC(USA) principles related to corporate engagement and consideration of divestment.
9. Acknowledge that our response must not be limited to corporate engagement, and that engagement also requires us to develop, advocate, and implement faithful responses that alter harmful individual, institutional, and corporate behaviors that contribute to climate change.
10. Affirm the steps already taken by the Presbyterian Foundation, Board of Pensions, and Presbyterian Investment and Loan Corporation to leverage investments to help care for God's creation and mitigate the adverse effects of climate change by urging these groups to establish and enhance programs to target climate change solutions, such as the "Restoring Creation Loan" program, which allows congregations to renovate their buildings using energy-efficient products to conserve energy, lower costs, and reduce carbon emissions.
11. Commend congregations that have committed to the "earth care pledge" and encourage all congregations to consider joining the Earthcare Congregation Network of the PC(USA).
12. Advocate for the reduction of greenhouse gases through the use of alternative, cleaner energy sources, such as natural gas, nuclear, wind, solar, and industrial-scale power storage, even if only as a bridge to the long-term future.
13. Direct the Advisory Committee for Social Witness Policy, in collaboration with Congregational Ministries Publishing, The Thoughtful Christian, and other organizations with parallel goals, to develop a policy paper and educational materials to assist congregations and councils of the church to understand the impact of climate change and in taking individual and collective action to slow climate change,

including: shareholder activism; investments in renewable energy; advocacy at local, state, federal, and international levels for policies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (including policies to price greenhouse gas emissions); and local efforts to reduce carbon footprint, consistent with the 2006 call for denominational carbon neutrality, and the 2008 “Power to Change” recommendations.

14. Direct the Stated Clerk of the PC (USA) to inform the denomination and the larger public of the passage and implementation of this overture.

Rationale

Our denomination has long recognized our obligation to be faithful stewards of God’s creation (including General Assembly actions in 1981, 1998, 1999, 2003, 2006, and 2008). We have acknowledged the realities of climate change and its effect on the “least of these,” and the need to take action by reducing energy consumption and reliance on fossil fuels. Now is the time to move from symbolism to education and behavioral changes.

We must also adopt in our individual, congregational, and denominational lives meaningful approaches that address climate change. As Christians, we have the privilege, responsibility and obligation to speak with moral authority on issues of great importance. Climate change is such an issue.

This overture exhorts us to unite all Presbyterians to engage climate change with responsible, meaningful, and lasting actions that will make a difference in the future of God’s creation. Through the actions called for in this overture, the PC (USA) will demonstrate the depth of our theological understanding of the stewardship of God’s creation and community by promoting faithful actions that unite us in addressing the issues of climate change.

Biblical and Theological Rationale

Ecology and justice are implicit in the story of creation itself: “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it” (Gen. 2:15). This Scripture affirms four values that characterize “a new faithfulness” reflecting God’s love for the world: sustainability, participation, sufficiency, and solidarity. These values also highlight the inherent tensions. We cannot address only the good of the creation without also considering the good of the community. We cannot address only the good of the community without considering the good of creation. Global climate change, regardless of its cause, threatens both the community and the earth over which we are stewards. Our call is to address these threats responsibly, with meaningful effect, while promoting economic justice.

A Proposed Response

From our perspective, the consistent, rational, and equitable global pricing of emissions would enlist market forces to drive changes in consumption necessary to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and also provide the economic incentive necessary to promote investment in low-carbon or zero-carbon infrastructure and technologies. Affordable energy would continue to be available to drive responsible economic development, while global emissions driven by consumption would decline. We thus address our dual responsibility to promote the well-being of the disadvantaged and the protection of the earth.

We also recognize that this pricing system must originate with the secular authorities, not PC(USA). This Overture therefore also highlights many actions that we as individuals, congregations, and institutions can take on our own authority, and that some among us are already taking. We urge broader adoption of these actions.

Summary

We Presbyterians approach creation with the twin perspectives of responsible use and sustainable care. An ethic of stewardship therefore must consider creation both as a good in itself and as a resource for economic justice. The responsibility of holding wealth is directed toward an ethic of engagement that seeks to use wealth to transform injustice and immorality rather than shunning such engagement. Action to bring about that outcome is a faithful response to the urgent climate change issues that are before us.