

Caring for God's Earth

a Policy Statement on Local Economies and the Environment

Adopted by the delegates of the 59th Annual Assembly of the Kentucky Council of Churches in Bardstown, KY on October 20, 2006

Scriptural Foundations

Who really owns the earth, the air, the oceans, the streams? Who owns the soil as it moves from the Kentucky hills down the Ohio River and into the Mississippi Delta? The Psalmist announces in Psalm 24 that the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof. That theme is repeated throughout scripture from the creation accounts in Genesis through the book of Revelation. God is the creator/owner of the earth. This concept is key to God's covenant relationship with the people of Israel and is key today to our understanding of our identity as a people of God. We are called through our covenant relationship to participate as stewards in God's creative work. We must work to care for the earth for our own and future generations. It is important to use wisely the resources of the environment, so that all may live in peace and abundance.

Judeo-Christian scriptures give special sanctity to the land. They convey an understanding of land as a gift of God, a blessing bringing forth food for all creatures. There is no ethical way to use land and creation except as stewards seeking a responsible relationship with the ultimate owner and giver of life.

God's Covenant in Genesis 9:8-17 reminds us of the interconnectedness of all things in the earth. "Then God said to Noah and to his children 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.'"

Romans 1:20 teaches about the value of all of God's creation. "Ever since the creation of the world God's eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things God has made."

Romans 8:19-23 describes the fragile state of God's creation and the need for tomorrow to be better than today. "For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies."

Leviticus 25:23-24 gives us a summary of God's intentions for people to be responsible for the change that needs to occur, "The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants. Throughout the land that you hold, you shall provide for the redemption of the land."

Sustainability and Local Economies

We are witnessing profound and disturbing changes in rural America. Land ownership is being restructured, agricultural production is becoming more heavily industrialized and concentrated in fewer hands, and the earth is being subjected to harmful farming, mining, and development practices. Such changes are adversely affecting our rural people, their way of life,

and their land. The toll attributable to the crisis includes increased suicide, family violence, alcohol and drug abuse, and other indications of family and individual breakdown. This level of human suffering is simply incompatible with our commitment to social and economic justice.

We recognize that the Bible and faith are about the future, and that growing in faith requires change. However, we are called to direct change, and to do this with hope. Passive acceptance of change in the past has brought the churches in Kentucky to the position where we must now engage in determining policies affecting rural America.

People of faith should view present land ownership concentration with grave alarm. This radical change in land tenure runs contrary both to scriptural ideals and to our American heritage as expressed by Jefferson, who believed the small landowner to be "our most precious asset" and whose inspiration and idealism was carried into the foundation and structures of our government.

The ancient prophets, Amos (9:13-15), Micah (2:2-5) and Isaiah (32:1-8) condemned land ownership concentration in their day. The same process is occurring in our midst, producing only a few crops for a volatile market place with a system of taxes and borrowing that favors the large producer and those who control capital.

We remind our fellow citizens that the consequences of past rural social and economic upheavals included massive outmigration of rural refugees into urban areas. The disbursement of rural society and the disappearance of the family farm adversely serve the best interest of our Commonwealth and nation, for our country has been built on a strong belief in a Creator-God and on the moral and ethical values inherent in a system of family farms, such as, honesty, self sufficiency yet interdependence, mutual trust, hard work, and neighborliness. The destruction of this system also jeopardizes the base on which our urban centers are built.

Needs for Environmental Justice

Every person, church, business, and institution has a role to play in local, farm, and environmental justice. In addition to raising our voices about the problems we perceive, we are also responsible to work toward solutions. Every person, church, business, and organization purchases food and other items. Every choice we make can help or hurt the problem.

Psalm 24:1-2 reminds us "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein; for the Lord has founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the rivers." God is the owner of all, but humankind covets that ownership. The earth, the air, the water, our biosphere, are too often regarded as commodities by the human community and as possessions to be bought, sold, and exploited rather than as resources belonging to our Creator God. It is given, in trust, to us to manage wisely for the benefit of all humankind.

The earth, the air, water, family farms, and local economies exist in an increasing state of crisis. Consumption of products that require the use of limited natural resources is increasing. More products are being produced that lock natural resources into non-biodegradable forms. Toxic and nuclear waste disposal becomes an increasingly critical issue for health and safety with each passing year. Urban areas are turning more and more to less populated rural areas and states such as Kentucky as the solution to their ever-expanding problem of waste disposal, thereby endangering the food and water supply as soil and water quality in rural and agricultural communities continues to deteriorate.

Sound environmental practices compete in the marketplace with quick profits. We, however, are not unaware of and indeed have compassion for those people who suffer great financial hardship resulting from the increased and necessary protection of the biosphere. They

must not be forgotten as they face the burden of unemployment and the resulting family struggles. Yet our current environmental and industrial farming practices threaten the viability of the earth and of generations yet to come.

Because of the deep interconnectedness of issues like the sanctity of the land, the reality of change, the farm crisis, our responsibility to seek to guide change for the better, biblical mandates about concentration of land ownership, the industrialization of food production, the outmigration from rural areas, and environmental justice issues--representatives to the Annual Assembly of the Kentucky Council of Churches wish to reaffirm our commitment to work together on these important matters.

WE, THEREFORE, call for urban-rural unity in environmental justice, support for local economies, and the promotion of family farms and sustainable production.

We call upon member churches and other faith groups, at every level of their organizations, to enable and to encourage their constituents to engage in serious and sustainable study, reflection and appropriate action based upon the theological issues relating to our human responsibility for the earth as stewards of God's creation, and further;

We call upon local, state, and federal governments, in their function of providing for the general welfare-- to make and enforce laws that protect the earth and all living things therein as vital resources for life both today and in the future. The short-term advantages of legislation must be measured against the long-term costs to the earth, to local economies, and to future citizens. Of primary concern in enacting environmental legislation are the immediate and future impact on the farm crisis, health, quality of life, and the renewability of natural resources.

Churches and government should encourage and promote, and require sound and sustainable environmental practices such as:

- the conservation of natural resources;
- the development of processes and methods of reduction of the quantity of waste materials produced;
- the development of products, by-products and packaging which are biodegradable;
- the development and implementation (mandatory where feasible) of safe and effective methods of the recycling, transporting, storage, and disposal of existing waste products;
- the clean-up of existing nuclear and chemical toxic wastes; and
- the development of more realistic regulations to implement the full intent of air pollution laws throughout the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

To these ends, we resolve as a community of faith, to work together with others at local, state, and national levels in organizations, governments, and businesses to find short and long term political, economic, and public policy solutions to the crisis in rural America, the environment, and our local economies with solutions that:

- 1) Support a rural economy which helps and does not harm people or the land and which provides for an appropriate return for those who work the land;
- 2) Encourage a viable agricultural system of sustainable, local farming -- both supporting those still on the land and allowing for the establishment of more diversified and family farms for locally supplied products;
- 3) Prevent the loss of and enhance biodiversity by preserving woodlands, wetlands, and karst (spaces within the earth); conserving of assets (whether they are currently endangered or not); and ensuring proper stewardship of our precious soil, air, and water resources for ourselves and for future generations through education, strengthening future regulation, and enforcing current regulation;
- 4) Provide access to adequate, affordable, sustainably grown food for all;
- 5) Enhance the quality of life for rural families and migrant workers and their families and support the ministry of rural churches as they reach out to the larger community that sustains them,
- 6) Oppose the raising of domestic animals where the animals are not provided humane living conditions, including sufficient space to move, and to nurture their young, and with access to clean air and water, and without use of antibiotics except in response to a specific health need;
- 7) Require that with all agricultural animal operations in the Commonwealth of Kentucky, the owner of the animal shall be responsible for ensuring the humane and environmentally responsible treatment of animals commensurate with the owner's control and supervision of the raising of animals;
- 8) Require that all contracts between farmers and integrators (owners of the animals) or other entities (that will purchase the agricultural or silviculture (tree) product) be fair to the farmer;
- 9) Replace valley fill and mountaintop removal as a coal mining practice within the Commonwealth of Kentucky with more sustainable methods that protect water, soil, and people;
- 10) Support local and state government action to accomplish the Kyoto Climate Change Treaty goal of 7% reduction in Global Warming gas emissions below 1990 level by the year 2012. (See the US Conference of Mayors' Resolution on Climate Protection for more Information);
- 11) Reduce mercury emissions from existing coal fired power plants and require that all new coal-fired power plants reduce mercury emissions to the maximum extent achievable with the best available technology;
- 12) Eliminate the discharge of untreated human or animal waste into the waters of the Commonwealth, including discharges from combined sewers, from sanitary sewers, from septic systems, from straight pipes, and from industrial animal operations; Oppose regulatory actions that would weaken water quality standards in wet weather, or remove designated uses to allow

untreated human waste into our waters;

13) Direct public funds toward an economic development strategy that improves the education level and opportunity of all Kentuckians, that improves the infrastructure and the quality of life within Kentucky, that develops a more robust local economy, including improved connections between farmers and consumers;

14) Reconsider the existing energy and transportation policies within the Commonwealth of Kentucky, to recognize that we are overly dependent on cheap gasoline and cheap coal generated electricity, and that we must plan and prepare for sharp increases in the cost of energy, including planning for a less automobile dependent community, and more efficient use of electricity, and greater reliance upon renewable energy sources;

15) Adopt a Kentucky endangered species protection act, and a Kentucky environmental policy act (a State NEPA);

16) Encourage the fair treatment of laborers with a livable wage, access to healthcare, and protections from predatory lending and other exploitations;

17) Work with Kentucky land grant colleges, extension agents, farmers and others to encourage responsible and sustainable agriculture that minimizes the use of agricultural chemicals and antibiotics;

18) Oppose the introduction of additional industrial or research operations that would be detrimental to the health of the residents of Kentucky's rural, urban, and suburban areas.

19) Encourage markets for Kentucky-made and locally-produced products;

20) Advocate for the purchase of local products.

For Additional Information & Study on Farm Issues:

THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST)

"Resolution Concerning the Preservation of the Family Farm for the Sake of the World" (General Assembly of the Christian Church), July 1985.

THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

"Agricultural and Rural Life Issues", 1988.

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

"Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, Justice" (Proposed social statement), 1993.

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (USA)

"Rural Community in Crisis" (Report from Rural America to the PC, USA), June 1985.
"The Church: Responding to Rural America" (Report Approved by the 203rd General Assembly), 9111. <http://www.pcusa.org/environment/>

THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH, USA

http://www.episcopalchurch.org/1829_ENG_HTM.htm

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

"Renewing the Earth" (Pastoral Statement of the US Catholic Conference), 14 Nov., 1991

"Food Policy in a Hungry World" (US Catholic Conference), 8 Nov., 1989

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION & STUDY ON ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ISSUES:

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Concerning Investment Policies, 1971

- Concerning World Population Growth, 1971
- Concerning the Negative Impact of Strip-Mining, 1973
- Concerning Ecology, 1973
- Concerning a Response to the World Food Crisis on the Part of Congregations and Members, 1975
- Concerning Christian Stewardship of Food and Farm Land, 1975

- Resolution Concerning a Task Force on Ecology, 1977
- Resolution Concerning Energy, 1977
- Report of the Task Force on Christian Lifestyle and Ecology, 1981
- Resolution Concerning an Ecologically Responsible Christian Lifestyle, 1983
- Concerning Hazardous and Toxic Materials, 1987
- Resolution Concerning Seal Hunting, 1987
- Report of the Task Force on Christian Lifestyle and Ecology, 1987
- Resolution Concerning Energy Conservation, 1989
- Resolution Concerning Recycling, 1989
- Report of the Task Force on Christian Lifestyle and Ecology (Alverna Covenant), 1991
- Guidelines for the Ecumenical Sharing of Resources, 1991
- Concerning a Period of Worship and Study on Environmental Stewardship, 1991
- Resolution for Sustainable Community, 1993
- Concerning Future Generations, 1993
- Concerning "Green" Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) Events, 2001

Episcopal Church

Executive Council

- Urge Prohibition of Strip Mining, 1973
- Clean Air and Environmental Protection, 1989
- Global Warming, 2001
- Conservation-Based Energy Legislation, 2002

General Convention

- Call Upon Members to Exercise a Responsible Life Style, 1979
- Urge Local Churches to Influence Land Development in Their Communities, 1979
- Give Priority to Educating Congregations on Energy and the Environment, 1979
- Judicious Use of Land Resources, 1982
- Request a Statement of Policy and a Plan for Environmental Stewardship, 1988
- Oppose Oil Development in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, 1991
- Support Reauthorization of the Endangered Species Act in 1991
- Implement 1988 Lambeth Resolution No. 040 on the Environment, 1991
- Oppose Use of Foreign Countries as Dumping Places for Waste, 1991
- Affirm Environmental Responsibility and Establish an Environmental Stewardship Team, 1991
- Promote the Valdez Principles, 1991
- Encourage Governments to Seek Remedies to Reverse Rapid Population Growth, 1994
- Prepare for Jubilee 1994, 2000

- Adopt Environmentally Sound Practices at Church Meetings, 1994
- Encourage Church Investment Strategy on Hazardous Chemicals, 1994
- Authorize Continuation of the Environmental Stewardship Team, 1994
- Reaffirm Resolution on Environmentally Sound Behavior, 1997
- Considering Environmental Safety and Sustainable Energy Sources when Choosing Electrical Suppliers, 2000
- Environmental Racism, 2000
- Reduce the Use of Toxic Chemicals, 2003
- Spirituality of Food Production, 2003
- Stewardship of Water, 2003
- Declaration on Sustainable Development, 2003
- Water Policy, 2003

<http://www.ncccojustice.org/downloads/anth/epis.pdf>

Presbyterian Church (USA)

Past denominational statements (Presbyterian Church USA, United Presbyterian Church USA, Presbyterian Church US)

- Resource Use, 1951 (PCUSA)
- Natural Resources, 1954 (PCUSA)
- Christian Responsibility for Environmental Renewal, 1971 (UPCUSA)
- Wilderness Protection, 1975 (UPCUSA)
- Energy, 1979
- Toxic Chemicals, 1980, (PCUS)
- Drinking Water and Sanitation, 1981 (UPCUSA)
- Speaking Truth to Power (Energy), 1981 (UPCUSA, PCUSA)

PC(USA) Policy Statements

- Acid Rain, 1984
- Stewardship, 1984
- Population, 1984
- Nuclear Waste, 1987
- Pesticides and the Health of Farmers and Rural Residents, 1987
- Exxon Spill, 1989
- Restoring Creation for Ecology and Justice, 1990
- Recycled Paper, 1992
- Colored Paper, 1992
- Reaffirm Call to Restore the Creation, 1993
- Hazardous Waste, Race, and the Environment, 1995

- Hope for a Global Future, 1996
- Kyoto Protocol, 1998
- Kyoto Protocol, 1999
- Churchwide Stewardship of Resources, 2000
- Mass Extinction and Biodiversity, 2001
- On Cleaning Up Power Plant Pollution, 2002
- Takings, 2002
- Energy, 2002
- On Ratifying the Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol, 2003
- On Concurring with the "Action for Wellness and Healing for Our Present and Future Generations of Saint Lawrence Island Yupik People," 2003
- On Opposing the Free Trade Area of the Americas in its Current Form, 2003
- On Assisting the Inhabitants of the Island of Vieques on the Task of Cleaning Up After the End of the Navy Bombing Practices, 2003

<http://www.nccecojustice.org/downloads/anth/pres.pdf>

United Church of Christ

- A Perspective on Christian Life Style and Ecology, 1975
- Pronouncement on National Toxic Injustice, 1985
- Environment, Solid Waste and Ecologically Sound Lifestyle, 1989
- Resolution on Global Warming, 1999
- Support for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, 1991

United Methodist Church

- Use of Reclaimed Paper, 1972
- Law of the Sea, 1980, 1996
- Energy Policy Statement, 1980, 2000
- Environmental Stewardship, 1984
- Common Heritage, 1984
- Indoor Air Pollution, 1988
- Environmental Health and Safety in Workplace and Community, 1988, 2000
- Black-Owned Farmland, 1988
- Environmental Justice for a Sustainable Future, 1992
- Environmental Racism, 1992
- New Developments in Genetic Science, 1992, 2000
- God's Creation and the Church, 1996
- US Agriculture and Rural Communities in Crisis, 1996
- Affirming the Household EcoTeam Program, 1996

- A Dioxin-Free Future, 1996
- Steps Toward a Dioxin-Free Future, 1996, 2000
- Nuclear Issues, 1988, 1992
- Caring for Creation—A Study from a Native American Perspective, 2000
- Cease Mountaintop Removal Coal Mining, 2000
- Environmental Law — The Precautionary Principle, 2000
- Recycling and the Use of Recycled Products, 2000
- Family Farm Justice, 2000
- Our Social Principles: The Natural World