

# Water

## Background:

A gift and blessing from God, water is necessary for all life. Too much or too little can be life-threatening. Access to safe, clean water is both a basic need and a human right. Yet all around us is evidence of water pollution, water scarcity, water privatization, and wasteful usage of water. 1 out of 6 people in the world lacks access to safe drinking water. Two million people die each year from waterborne diseases. As Christians, we are called to protect and restore waterways, to improve water quality and access, and to celebrate the gift of water in its scriptural and theological meaning for us.

## What Scripture Says:

“Come you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink...” Matthew 25: 34-35

“Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture, but you must tread down with your feet the rest of your pasture? When you drink of clear water, must you foul the rest with your feet?” Ezekiel 34:18

“To the thirsty, I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.” Revelation 21:6

# Air

## Background:

Air is one of God’s gifts that we often fail to notice except in its absence. We breathe, spend time outdoors, and live because of the presence of plentiful, clean air. However, as we consume fossil fuels for energy, we are threatening this good gift. Air pollution and global warming (climate change) arise from fossil fuel emissions. Illness, destruction, and death result from air pollution and from the affects of global warming—changes in weather patterns (such as the amount and pattern of precipitation), the rise of sea levels, depletion of snow cover and glacial ice, and the spread of infectious diseases.

## What Scripture Says:

“Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever.” 1 Thess 4:17

“The land mourns, and all who live in it languish; together with the wild animals and the birds of the air, even the fish of the sea are perishing.” Hosea 4:3

“Bless the Lord, O my soul. O Lord my God, you are very great.... you ride on the wings of the wind, you make the winds your messengers....” Psalm 104:1, 3a-4a

## What Presbyterian Church USA Says:

“The church has powerful reason for engagement in restoring God’s creation. God’s works in creation are too wonderful, too ancient, too beautiful, too good to be desecrated.” (1990 General Assembly)

“...Reaffirms the call of the 202<sup>nd</sup>, 210<sup>th</sup>, and 211<sup>th</sup> General Assemblies (1990, 1998, and 1999) for the United States to ratify the Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol.... Calls on the United States government to join in the world effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and to develop and enact a national emergency response, underwritten by law, with adequate financial support, and economic enforcement mechanisms, to be fully functioning by 2005, with targeted reductions by that time.” (2003 General Assembly)

“...Petitions the president of the United States to draft rules that would further reduce tailpipe emission by increasing fuel efficiency.... The communication should include the impact that smoke stack and tail pipe emission is having on the health of our most vulnerable populations and on our environment, due to acid rain, smog, increased ozone levels, and emissions of mercury and heavy metals.” (2004 General Assembly)

### What You Can Do:

1. Write your members of Congress and urge them to take effective steps to curb global warming, to raise vehicle fuel efficiency standards, and to protect the Clean Air act.
2. Drive less: combine errands, drive a fuel efficient car, use public transportation, bike and walk when possible.
3. Conserve energy: turn off lights, insulate your home, adjust your thermostat, and use compact fluorescent light bulbs—they last 10 times longer than incandescent bulbs and use less energy (saving half a ton of CO<sub>2</sub> from the air).

“Air: Quick Resource Card”

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### What Presbyterian Church USA Says:

“The educational role of the church should put considerations of water quality in the context of its basic commitment to eco-justice and restoring creation.” (1990 General Assembly)

“Great natural resources have been entrusted to our nation by Almighty God. We call upon the Christian conscience to recognize that our stewardship of the earth and water involves both a land-use program which recognizes the interdependence of soil, water and man and the development of a responsible public policy which will resist the exploitation of land, water, and other natural resources, including forests, for selfish purposes and maintain intelligent conservation for the sustenance of all living creatures through future generations.” (1954 General Assembly)

### What You Can Do:

1. Drink tap water—and advocate for strong standards and public participation in decisions for local tap water.
2. Turn faucets off as often as possible while brushing teeth, washing dishes, showering.
3. Organize a community clean-up of one of your local waterways.

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# Land

## Background:

Land roots us to God's creation. The Hebrew people linked land (adamah) and people (adam). We are fed spiritually and physically from land—by exploring and recreating in public lands, by protecting and preserving wilderness areas, and by cultivating and consuming products from agricultural fields. However, human activities—including overdevelopment, pollution, deforestation, erosion, mining, and industrial agriculture—damage the land on which we are dependent.

## What Scripture Says:

“God saw everything that God had made and indeed, it was very good.” Genesis 1:10

“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 ever-lasting covenant.” Isaiah 24:4-5

## What Presbyterian Church USA Says:

“Earth-keeping today means insisting on sustainability—the ongoing capacity of natural and social systems to thrive together—which requires human beings to practice wise, humble, responsible stewardship, after the model of servanthood that we have in Jesus.” (1990 General Assembly)

# Creatures

## Background:

God's creatures—animals and insects, domestic and wild, large and small—all play a crucial role in the healthy functioning of Creation. They help Creation thrive through their interdependent relationships with other species: plants, humans, and other creatures. They exist in their own right, pleasing to God. The richness and beauty seen in the diversity of living things reflects God's glory. Yet in the midst of all this goodness, we live in a time of mass extinction of species, destruction of habitat, unbalanced predator/prey relationships. These things threaten the biodiversity necessary for the thriving of Creation.

## What Scripture Says:

“O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.” Psalm 104:24

“But ask the animals, and they will teach you; the birds of the air, and they will tell you; ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare to you.” Job 12:7-8

“Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your judgments are like the great deep; you save humans and animals alike, O Lord.” Psalm 36:6

## What Presbyterian Church USA Says:

“The love of neighbor, particularly ‘the least’ of Christ's brothers and sisters, requires action to stop the poisoning, the erosion, the

wastefulness that are causing suffering and death.” (1990 General Assembly)

“Human life and well-being depend upon the flourishing of other life and the integrity of the life-supporting processes that God has ordained.” (1990 General Assembly)

“The Creator-Deliverer calls human communities to work with God to rectify the abuses whereby human impacts upon the earth are leading to a mass extinction of living species. This mass extinction would fundamentally alter and undermine the life and well-being of the human and other creatures that survive. It would rob all future generations of the gifts of wholeness and diversity that God intends.” (2001 General Assembly)

#### **What You Can Do:**

1. Consider turning part of your yard into *Backyard Wildlife Habitat*, a program through National Wildlife Federation, [www.nwf.org](http://www.nwf.org). If you don't have property, consider helping to restore habitat through local efforts in public spaces.
2. Contact your members of Congress and urge them to uphold the Endangered Species Act and to work for its full enactment.
3. Eat lower on the food chain and choose foods not treated with chemicals. The process of raising animals raised for meat consumes more resources and changes local habitat. Growing grains, vegetables, and fruits without genetic engineering or pesticide sprays does not harm wild plants, beneficial insects, and local habitat.

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“.... preserve wildlands in all the diverse kinds of American ecosystems...protect wetlands...stop cutting remaining pristine forests...manage church lands and properties according to the most environmentally sensitive alternative.” (1990 General Assembly)

“The Creator-Redeemer calls faithful people to become engaged with God in keeping and healing the creation, human and nonhuman.” (1990 General Assembly)

#### **What You Can Do:**

1. Reduce, Re-Use, Recycle and Compost! The less consumptive lifestyles we lead and the more we find places other than landfills for our waste, the more we help restore the degradation of the world around us.
2. Become involved in and/or lend your support to local gardening and agricultural efforts. Participate in the local economy and sustainable agriculture through helping with urban gardens, shopping at Farmers' Markets, joining a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), encouraging organic and pesticide-free zones, and otherwise supporting local farmers.
3. Follow your local development policies and encourage the inclusion of sufficient green spaces, the protection of native plant species, and environmentally friendly design and building practices.

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# People

## **Background:**

Human beings have diverse experiences of living in, enjoying, and protecting God's creation. Some people live with too much while others live with too little. Some people materially benefit from the overdevelopment, consumption, and destruction of the earth, while other people have increasingly less access to natural resources necessary for survival. People who are wealthy and powerful create a global situation in which impoverished people inhabit some of the worst polluted areas and/or they must exploit natural resources in order to survive. As we believe human beings are the cause of much of the economic, social, and environmental injustices in the world, we believe that it is our place and our calling to become accountable, responsible, and active restorers of Creation, including the most vulnerable populations.

## **What Scripture Says:**

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

“This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations.” Genesis 9:12

## **What Presbyterian Church USA Says:**

“Justice today requires participation, the inclusion of all members of the human family in obtaining and enjoying the Creator's gifts for sustenance....Justice also means sufficiency, a standard upholding the claim of all to have enough—to be met through equitable sharing

and organized efforts to achieve that end. “ (1990 General Assembly)

“Profess our solidarity with workers and communities feeling the impact of poor hazardous substance use and disposal practices by supporting policies that (a) encourage the development of consistent environmental regulations across the U.S. and in other nations, (b) provide understandable information to workers and the general public on workplace and community toxic hazards, (c) locate dangerous production facilities away from population centers, and (d) identify and inform those who in the past have been exposed to hazardous substances.” (1995 General Assembly)

### **What You Can Do:**

1. Study PCUSA policies “Restoring Creation for Ecology and Justice” (1990) and “Hazardous Waste, Race and the Environment” (1995) (Order through Presbyterian Marketplace at 800-524-2612 or [pcusa.org/marketplace](http://pcusa.org/marketplace))
2. Attend community meetings about proposed siting/development projects. Pay attention to: the demographics of the community, the actual or potential impact on the community’s environment and health, the degree to which the affected community was meaningfully involved in the decision making process, and what benefits and burdens (direct and indirect) will result from the proposed action (who benefits, who bears the burden).
3. Write letters to members of congress on national public policy that seeks to protect vulnerable communities from environmental pollution.

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