

ITEM B.107
ACTION ITEM FOR GAC BUSINESS

<i>FOR GAC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S OFFICE USE ONLY</i>			
	A. Evangelism		D. Vocation
x	B. Justice		E. Stewardship
	C. Spirituality		F. Audit
	P. Plenary		
			G. PC (USA), A Corporation
			H. Executive Committee
			I. Personnel Committee

Subject: Comment to Overture 024 and 079 to 218th GA (2008)

Recommendation:

The GAC approve the following comment to the 218th General Assembly on Overture 024 and 079:

The General Assembly Council agrees with the concerns addressed in these overtures, and reaffirms the intention of the 202nd General Assembly (1990) policy statement “Restoring Creation for Ecology and Justice” that called for a dual focused strategy that would embody the church’s commitment to caring for God’s creation. This strategy recommended that the GAC develop new creative ministry initiatives for healing the environment and called upon the GAC to incorporate caring for God’s creation into existing GAC ministries.

Recognizing that God’s good creation is suffering from the impact of environmental degradation, climate change and significant loss of bio-diversity, the General Assembly Council has determined that the 2009 and 2010 Mission Work Plan and budget includes significant emphasis, support and staffing for caring for God’s creation as a vital part of the mission of the church.

This revitalized ministry will focus on equipping the whole church to care for creation and will serve as an entry point for church members, congregations and middle governing bodies seeking advice, resources and networking to nurture their faith and witness on behalf of God’s creation. It will work with a re-energized network of Stewardship of Creation Enablers to foster networking, communication of effective ideas for congregational practices, and leadership development.

In addition, it will coordinate environmental ministries already underway in the General Assembly Council, including but not limited to environmental work being done by: the Hunger Program, Presbyterian World Mission area coordinators, Racial Justice ministries, Presbyterian Women, Peacemaking, the Presbyterian United Nations Office, Washington Office, Self Development of People, the Office of Theology, Worship and Education, and MRTI.

A staff project team will develop and implement a focused strategy to infuse environmental stewardship into “theological work, evangelism, education, justice and peacemaking, worship and liturgy, public witness, global mission and congregational service and action at the local community level” (1990 policy).

The General Assembly Council advises that the General Assembly prayerfully support this commitment to environmental stewardship and encourages the whole church to engage in ministry that heals and restores God’s creation.

Overture 024

On Reinstating the Office of Environmental Justice as an Integral Part of the Mission of the Church—From the Presbytery of Heartland.

The Presbytery of Heartland overtures the 218th General Assembly (2008) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to do the following:

1. Reaffirm the statements of the 183rd, 187th, 192nd, 193rd, 195th, 196th, 199th, 201st, 202nd, 204th, 205th, 206th, 208th, 210th, 211th, 213th, 215th, and 216th General Assemblies (1971, 1975, 1980, 1981, 1983, 1984, 1987, 1989, 1990, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1996, 1998, 1999, 2001, 2003, 2006) reflecting the determination of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) that protection of the environment is an essential part of the Christian faith.
2. Direct the Executive Director of the General Assembly Council to reinstate the Office of Environmental Justice in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as a vital and integral part of the ministry and mission of the church to help protect and save God's creation.

Rationale

The Office of Environmental Justice has served as a vital link between the General Assembly office and the local church, providing essential leadership and resources. The office/staff have served to interpret environmental issues, stewardship of creation issues, and to help put into action the other resolutions the church has already put into place. The office was removed at a time critical to sustaining the planet and life on earth as we know it.

Scripture proclaims, "... 'You are the Lord, you alone; you have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. To all of them you give life and the host of heaven worships you'" (Neh. 9:6, NRSV). Ours is a God concerned not only with humanity but all of creation, a God whose spirit is the breath of all life and whose glory is manifest in the creation we share.

The *Book of Order* (W-7.5001a) states that "God calls the Church in the power of the Holy Spirit to participate in God' work of creation and preservation." In (W-7.5003), it reminds us that we are "... stewards of God's creation who hold the earth in trust..."

Justice, peace, and the environment are interrelated. Whenever we humans abuse the environment, whenever we engage in non-sustainable consumption of our earth's finite resources, we are not only endangering the future of life on our planet, but we are committing acts of violence and injustice against other life—both present and future. Protecting and restoring creation is central to our own survival.

Caring for the environment is another way to care for people. We care about people who are hungry and impoverished as well as people who are the victims of pollution and resource depletion; we care about people who share the planet with us today as well as future generations. When we think of loving and caring for our neighbor as Jesus taught us, let us realize that we all live upwind and upstream from someone else—both in time and space. Ecosystems and people systems are intricately interwoven and interconnected, forming the tapestry of life.

We in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) have a rich tradition of justice and reverence for life. Included in our mission is responsible and faithful stewardship of God's earth. We have been commanded to tend the garden.

Historical References

In 1954, the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America stated:

We call upon the Christian conscience to recognize that our stewardship of the earth and water involves both a land-use program that 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 (*Minutes*, PCUSA, 1954, p. 198).

This stewardship commitment has been repeated and reaffirmed by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and its predecessors, as follows:

1967 The Confession of 1967 stresses the justice of sharing resources and the interdependence of resources and living creatures.

1971 The 183rd General Assembly (1971) of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America accepts the Christian Responsibility for Environmental Renewal statement that calls for a new order of values based on an “eco-ethic” and a Statement on Environmental Renewal (*Minutes*, UPCUSA, 1971, Part I, pp. 578–83).

1975 A recommendation is made to the 187th General Assembly to affirm advocacy of the protection of wildlife areas and parklands (*Minutes*, UPCUSA, 1975, Part I, p. 59).

1980 The 192nd General Assembly votes to (1) develop educational resources on the adverse impact that careless technology has on the environment and health of the unborn; (2) instruct the Board of Investment Committee to review corporate responsibility regarding manufacture of dioxins (*Minutes*, PCUS, 1980, Part I, p. 56).

1981 The 193rd General Assembly (1981) of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (UPCUSA) pledges support of the United Nations Drinking Water and Sanitation Decade, 1981–1990, calling upon Presbyterians to develop lifestyles that are consistent with the necessity to conserve water (*Minutes*, UPCUSA, 1981, Part I, p. 254).

1983 The 195th General Assembly (1983) urges the session of each congregation in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to consider making a “commitment to peacemaking” that included making peace with the earth—involve the congregation in efforts to protect and restore the environment (*Minutes*, 1983, Part I, pp. 438–39).

1984 The 196th General Assembly (1984) calls upon Congress of the United States to reduce the emissions of sulphur dioxide and the oxides of nitrogen to a level that will protect the most sensitive environment and states that human stewardship is not a dominion of mastery and calls us to exercise respect for the integrity of natural systems and for the limits that nature places on economic growth and material consumption (*Minutes*, 1984, Part I, pp. 348–49).

1987 The 199th General Assembly (1987) votes to urge the United States government to assure acceptable disposal sites for high-level nuclear waste (*Minutes*, 1984, Part I, pp. 865–66). It also votes to urge each presbytery and local church to encourage and support alternatives to pesticides and support the victims of pesticide poisoning (*Minutes*, 1987, Part I, p. 796).

1988 The Environmental Justice Office is created to study past environmental policies of the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. and the Presbyterian Church in the United States to create a

combined report of environmental concerns for Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The Environmental Justice Office is a ministry of the General Assembly Council of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), lodged in the National Ministries Division, Social Justice Program Area, and is now actively involved in creation care and environmental justice issues (*Minutes*, 1988, Part I, pp. 671–72).

1989 The 201st General Assembly (1989) calls for governments to strengthen regulations and enforcement regarding transportation of oil and hazardous substances, in response to the Exxon-Valdez tanker spill in 1989 (*Minutes*, 1989, Part I, p. 642).

1990 The 202nd General Assembly (1990) passes “Restoring Creation for Ecology and Justice” affirming “creation cries out in this time of ecological crises,” calling the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to respond to this cry and “engage in an effort to make the 1990s the ‘turnaround decade,’” providing the foundation for the work of the Environmental Justice Office. Also, the 202nd General Assembly (1990) calls attention to the problem of global warming and encourages the United States government to take steps toward incorporating environmental damage and depletion into “full-cost pricing” (*Minutes*, 1990, Part I, pp. 646–70).

The Affirmation of Faith from that General Assembly notes that “Restoring Creation is God’s own work in our time,” ... and that “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. ... The future of our children and their children and all who come after is at stake. ... In this critical time of transition to a new era, God’s new doing may be discerned as a call to earth-keeping, to justice, and to community” (*Minutes*, 1990, Part I, p. 647).

1992 The 204th General Assembly (1992) directs all future General Assemblies to “print all official reports on recycled and recyclable paper ... and ... direct all related bodies ... to use recycled and recyclable paper [for] all reports and publications” (*Minutes*, 1992, Part I, p. 846).

1993 The 205th General Assembly (1993) reaffirms the “Call to Restore the Creation,” receives the document “World Scientists’ Warning to Humanity” as a prophetic word to the church, urges President Clinton to follow new policies from the Earth Summit, and directs the Social Justice and Peacemaking Unit to advocate for policies that will reduce carbon dioxide emissions (*Minutes*, 1993, Part I, pp. 896–97).

1994 The 206th General Assembly (1994), within the context of its “Resolution on the United States and Its Asia-Pacific Relations,” listed five basic principles by which past General Assemblies have been guided related to international affairs. One of the principles, and the resolution that follow it, relates specifically to the environment. The General Assembly “has advocated new understanding of the relationship [among] human life, institutions,” and the total stewardship and care for the planet, which is the common heritage of all peoples (*Minutes*, 1994, Part I, p. 310).

1996 The 208th General Assembly adopts the paper “Hope for a Global Future: Toward Just and Sustainable Human Development” as policy for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Just and sustainable human development is the comprehensive enhancement of the quality of life for all, present and future; it necessarily involves the integration of economic, social, political, cultural, ecological, and spiritual dimensions of being (*Minutes*, 1996, Part I, pp. 524ff).

1998 The 210th General Assembly (1998) calls upon the United States to ratify the protocol negotiated in Kyoto and urges Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) congregations and institutions to pursue energy efficiency and conservation in their buildings and property.

1999 The 211th General Assembly (1999) again calls upon the U.S. to ratify the Kyoto Protocol; urges the United States to go beyond Kyoto targets for carbon dioxide emission reductions; directs the Presbyterian Center in Louisville and all other properties of the General Assembly to minimize fossil fuel energy (along with urging local congregations to do the same); and directs the General Assembly to promote education regarding global warming and other environmental concerns (*Minutes*, 1999, Part I, pp. 669–70).

2001 The 213th General Assembly (2001) calls to issue and disseminate the “Call to Halt Mass Extinction.” The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) calls Presbyterians, other citizens, governments, and societal institutions to face the severity of this threat and to take steps to prevent mass extinction and preserve the biodiversity essential to the flourishing of life (*Minutes*, 2001, Part I, pp. 473–75).

2003 The 215th General Assembly (2003) calls on the United States government to join 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 mechanism, to be fully functioning by 2005, with targeted reductions by that time (*Minutes*, 2003, Part I, p. 617).

2006 The 217th General Assembly (2006) asked that the church ask its members to make a bold witness by aspiring to carbon neutral lives (*Minutes*, 2006, Part I, pp. 896–97). It was noted that “without significant changes in public policy and corporate behavior to complement actions of personal discipleship, massive and irreversible climate changes will only accelerate over the next century” (PC(USA) Memorandum; Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy, December 4, 2006)

This overture was drafted by Earthkeepers, a mission unit of MOSJ and Heartland Presbytery’s chapter of the national group, Presbyterians for Restoring Creation.

Ovt 079

On Reinstating the Office For Environmental Justice as a Priority as Resources Allow—From the Presbytery of Mid-Kentucky.

Mid-Kentucky Presbytery overtures the 218th General Assembly (2008) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to do the following:

Request the Director of the General Assembly Council to reinstate an office for environmental justice in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as a priority as soon as resources may allow.

Rationale

Reaffirmation of the statements of the 183rd, 187th, 192nd, 193rd, 195th, 196th, 199th, 201st, 202nd, 204th, 205th, 206th, 208th, 210th, 211th, 213th, 215, and 216th General Assemblies (1971, 1975, 1980, 1981, 1983, 1984, 1987, 1989, 1990, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1996, 1998, 1999, 2001, 2003, 2006) will reflect the determination of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) that protection of the environment is an essential part of the Christian Faith.

Providing an office for environmental justice has served as a vital link between the General Assembly Office and the local church, providing essential leadership and resources. Prior office/staff have served to interpret environmental issues, stewardship of creation issues, and to help put into action the other resolutions the church has already put into place.

The Office of Environmental Justice (a former office of the General Assembly Council) was removed at a time critical to sustaining the planet and life on earth as we know it.

Scripture proclaims, "You alone are the Lord. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you." (Nehemiah 9:6)

Ours is a God concerned not only with humanity but all of creation, a God whose spirit is the breath of all life and whose glory is manifest in the creation we share.

The Book of Order (W-7.5001a) states that God calls the Church in the power of the Holy Spirit to participate in God' work of creation and preservation. In (W-7.5003), it reminds us that we are stewards of God's creation who hold the earth in trust...Justice, peace and the environment are interrelated. Whenever we humans abuse the environment, whenever we engage in non-sustainable consumption of our earth's finite resources, we are not only endangering the future of life on our planet, but we are committing acts of violence and injustice against other life -- both present and future.

Protecting and restoring creation is central to our own survival.

Caring for the environment is another way to care for people. We care about people who are hungry and impoverished as well as people who are the victims of pollution and resource depletion; we care about people who share the planet with us today as well as future generations. When we think of loving and caring for our neighbor as Jesus taught us, let us realize that we all live upwind and upstream from someone else -- both in time and space. Ecosystems and people systems are intricately interwoven and interconnected, forming the tapestry of life.

We in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) have a rich tradition of justice and reverence for life. Included in our mission is responsible and faithful stewardship of God's earth. We have been commanded to tend the garden.

Historical References (Note: identical to references in Ovt. 024):

- In 1954, the Presbyterian Church stated: We call upon the Christian conscience to recognize that our stewardship of the earth and water involves both a land-use program that 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 (PCUSA, 1954, p. 198).
- This stewardship commitment has been repeated and reaffirmed by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and its predecessors, as follows: 1967 The Confession of 1967 stresses the justice of sharing resources and the interdependence of resources and living creatures.
- 1971 The 183rd General Assembly accepted the Christian Responsibility for Environmental Renewal statement that calls for a new order of values based on an "ecoethic" and a Statement on Environmental Renewal. (UPCUSA, 1971, pp. 578-583)
- 1975 A recommendation is made to the 187th General Assembly to affirm advocacy of the protection of wildlife areas and parklands. (UPCUSA, 1975, p.59)
- 1980 The 192nd General Assembly votes to (1) develop educational resources on the adverse impact that careless technology has on the environment and health of the unborn; (2) instruct the Board of Investment Committee to review corporate responsibility regarding manufacture of dioxins. (PCUS, 1980, p.56)
- 1981 The 193rd General Assembly pledges support of the United Nations Drinking Water and Sanitation Decade, 1981-1990, calling upon Presbyterians to develop lifestyles that are consistent with the necessity to conserve water. (UPCUSA, 1981, p.254)
- 1983 The 195th General Assembly urges the session of each congregation in the Presbyterian Church (USA) to consider making a "Commitment to Peacemaking" that included "making peace with the earth -- involve the congregation in efforts to protect and restore the environment."
- 1984 The 196th General Assembly calls upon Congress of the United States to reduce the emissions of sulfur dioxide and the oxides of nitrogen to a level that will protect the most sensitive environment and states that human stewardship is not a "dominion of mastery" and calls us to exercise respect for the integrity of natural systems and for the limits that nature places on economic growth and material consumption. (PC(U.S.A.) 1984, p.349)
- 1987 The 199th General Assembly votes to urge the United States government to assure acceptable disposal sites for high-level nuclear waste. It also votes to urge each Presbytery and local church to encourage and support alternatives to pesticides and support the victims of pesticide poisoning. (PC(U.S.A.), 1987, p. 796)
- 1988 The Environmental Justice Office is created to study past environmental policies of the United Presbyterian Church (USA) and the Presbyterian Church in the United States to create a combined report of environmental concerns for Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The environmental Justice Office is a ministry of the General Assembly Council of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), lodged in the National Ministries Division, Social Justice Program Area, and is now actively involved in creation care and environmental justice issues.

- 1989 The 201st General Assembly calls for governments to strengthen regulations and enforcement regarding transportation of oil and hazardous substances, in response to the Exxon-Valdez tanker spill in 1989. (PC(U.S.A.), 1989, p. 642)
- 1990 The 202nd General Assembly passes "Restoring Creation for Ecology and Justice" affirming "creation cries out in this time of ecological crises," calling the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to respond to this cry and engage in an effort to make the 1990s the "turnaround decade," providing the foundation for the work of the Environmental Justice Office. Also, the 202nd General Assembly calls attention to the problem of global warming and encourages the United States government to take steps toward incorporating environmental damage and depletion into "full-cost pricing." (PC (U.S.A.), 1990, p.646-670).
- The Affirmation of Faith from that General Assembly noted that "Restoring Creation is God's own work in our time",....and that "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.—The future of our children and their children and all who come after is at stake. In this critical time of transition to a new era, God's new doing may be discerned as a call to earth-keeping, to justice, and to community."
- 1992 The 204th General Assembly directs all future General Assemblies to print all official reports on recycled and recyclable paper and to direct all related bodies to use recycled and recyclable paper for all reports and publication. (PC(U.S.A.), 1992, p.846)
- 1993 The 205th General Assembly reaffirms the "Call to Restore Creation", receives the document "World Scientists' Warning to Humanity" as a prophetic word to the church, urges President Clinton to follow new policies from the Earth Summit and directs the Social Justice and Peacemaking Unit to advocate for policies that will reduce carbon dioxide emissions. PC(U.S.A.), 1993, pp. 896-897)
- 1994 The 206th General Assembly, within the context of its "Resolution on the United States in Its Asia-Pacific Relations", listed five basic principles by which past General Assemblies have been guided related to international affairs. One of the principles, and the resolution that follow it, relates specifically to the environment. "The General Assembly has advocated new understanding of the relationship among human life, institutions, and the total stewardship and care for the planet, which is the common heritage of all peoples."(PC(U.S.A.), 1994, pg. 310)
- 1996 The 208th General Assembly adopts the paper Hope for a Global Future: Toward Just and Sustainable Human Development as policy for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Just and sustainable human development is the comprehensive enhancement of the quality of life for all, present and future; it necessarily involves the integration of economic, social, political, cultural, ecological, and spiritual dimensions of being.
- 1998 The 210th General Assembly calls upon the United States to ratify the protocol negotiated in Kyoto and urges Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) congregations and institutions to pursue energy efficiency and conservation in their buildings and property.
- 1999 The 211th General Assembly again calls upon the U.S. to ratify the Kyoto Protocol, urges the United States to go beyond Kyoto targets for carbon dioxide emission reductions, directs the Presbyterian Center in Louisville and all other properties of the General Assembly to minimize fossil fuel energy (along with urging local congregations to do the same), and directs the General Assembly to promote education regarding global warming and other environmental concerns. (PC(U.S.A.), 1999, pp. 669-670)

- 2001 The 213th General Assembly calls to issue and disseminate the Call to Halt Mass Extinction. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) calls Presbyterians, other citizens, governments, and societal institutions to face the severity of this threat and to take steps to prevent mass extinction and preserve the biodiversity essential to the flourishing of life. (PC(U.S.A.), 2001, pp. 473-475)
- 2003 The 215th General Assembly calls on the United States government to join 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 mechanism, to be fully functioning by 2005, with targeted reductions by that time. (PC(U.S.A.), 2003, p. 617)
- 2006. The 216th General Assembly asked that votes that the Church ask its members to “make a bold witness by aspiring to carbon neutral lives”. It was noted that “without significant changes in public policy and corporate behavior to complement actions of personal discipleship, massive and irreversible climate changes will only accelerate over the next century.” (PC (U.S.A.) Memorandum; Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy Dec 4, 2006)

NOTE: MAJOR PORTIONS OF THE RATIONALE SECTION OF THIS OVERTURE WERE DRAFTED BY EARTHKEEPERS, A MISSION UNIT OF MOSJ AND HEARTLAND PRESBYTERY’S CHAPTER OF THE NATIONAL GROUP, PRESBYTERIANS FOR RESTORING CREATION.