

Draft 10/5/06

PROPOSAL TO THE SESSION ASKING CHURCH TO GO CARBON NEUTRAL

Carbon neutral means to reduce our carbon emissions from the burning of fossil fuels, as low as we can, by conserving energy and reducing our reliance on fossil fuels; offsetting the remaining carbon emissions. Carbon emissions are greenhouse gases that are contributing to global climate change.

It is proposed that _____ Church undertake a multi-year mission and stewardship campaign to go carbon neutral in response to the 2006 General Assembly Commissioners' Resolution, "Calling All Presbyterians to Take Positive and Immediate Steps to Live Carbon Neutral Lives".

Background

Many mainstream denominations have recognized that responding to climate change is "the" moral and religious issue of our times. The *urgency, injustice and seriousness* of climate change call us as Christians to act now and boldly to reduce our energy usage. The GA Commissioners' Resolution provides a way to do this.

Carbon neutrality requires our energy consumption that releases carbon dioxide into the atmosphere be reduced and carbon offsets purchased to compensate for those carbon emissions that could not be eliminated. Offsets are purchased from companies that use the money to fund projects that capture carbon emissions or prevent them from being emitted. For example, a Presbytery family has purchased carbon offsets from Native Energy to fund an anaerobic digester to capture methane gas from cow manure on a dairy farm in Pennsylvania. The cost, which is on the high side, is \$12 per ton of carbon emission. This translates to pennies a day per person to go carbon neutral and with future energy reductions, more research and a wise selection of an offset company it is possible that the energy savings will pay for the offsets. In summary, going carbon neutral requires three steps:

1. Determine your energy usage and calculate your carbon emissions using a carbon calculator on the Internet.
2. Reduce your energy usage as low as possible, switching where possible to alternatives to fossil fuels.
3. Offset the carbon emissions that you can't eliminate by purchasing carbon offsets from an organization that funds projects that capture or prevent carbon emissions from being released.

The GA Commissioners Resolution contains the rationale for taking this bold step (See <http://72.54.6.218/Business/Business.aspx> or attached copy). In brief, the

consensus of the scientific community is that human activity is rapidly changing the natural environment in measurable ways through the destructive effect of climate change (commonly called global warming). Global climate change is predominantly caused by our burning of fossil fuels, like coal, oil and natural gas which emit greenhouse gases. It is now widely understood that the impacts of climate change are accelerating and many scientists suggest that we may have as little as 10 years to start reducing our carbon emissions and that by 2050 our emissions must be level in order to avoid runaway and dangerous climate change.

Words aren't adequate to put a human face on the ongoing suffering caused by climate change with just 1 degree of global temperature increase. Our neighbors, known and unknown, living and yet to come, suffer because our lifestyles involve the burning of fossil fuels which release 25% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions, even though we are less than 5% of the world's population. Testimony on the impacts of climate change from our neighbors in Africa, Nepal and Central America is attached.

Proposal

It is proposed that our entire church develop and fund a **mission*** to go carbon neutral.

** It is called a mission because the steps we take in making our facility and actions carbon neutral will reduce the impacts and suffering caused by our actions on our neighbors near and far, but may cost us, at least upfront, over and above what we would normally spend on energy improvements and upgrades for our church. It is no different than if we undertook a mission to send our members to Latin America to install an irrigation system for a poor community or dig a well for them. We would not expect a financial return from such an investment. We would consider it our Christian duty to help our neighbors in need and that is what is proposed here. It may be hard for some to understand how we can help our neighbors by reducing the energy usage at our church.*

Our carbon neutral mission and stewardship campaign will involve our minister and DCE, and most if not all church councils – witness, property, education, finance, and worship.

A **mission team** made up of representatives from the church staff, including the each of the councils will be formed to develop and implement the mission and stewardship campaign. One of the first steps for the team would be to develop an appropriate name for this mission that conveys the message that this is not just about reducing our energy bills, but about helping our neighbors.

This mission team would develop and coordinate the mission and stewardship campaign. Individual councils would also be involved.

- Much work would fall to the **property council** to figure out how best to reduce the church energy usage, make the church carbon neutral and to focus on meeting at least a portion of the energy needs with renewable energy (such as solar, wind, biomass, etc.). Hiring of a renewable energy consultant to advise the church is strongly recommended. One possible

consultant is Richard Heede, Principal, Climate Mitigation Services. John Topping, Director of the Climate Institute and member of the Presbyterian Energy Resolution Team, recommended him. The council would also determine the church carbon emissions using a carbon calculator from the Internet to plug in the energy usage.

- The **witness council** could develop an outreach initiative to connect with a family or even an entire village in the Arctic in order to help us put a human face on climate change impacts. A group called Circumpolar Conservation Union could help us identify a village or family to work with. The Managing Director is Richard Powell. (richpowell@earthlink.net). The church could earmark a portion of the fund raising campaign to address a need caused by climate change in a village or to a family. It could also reach out to other Presbyterian and neighboring churches to inspire them to take similar steps with their facilities.
- The **education council** along with the **DCE** could review and recommend a curriculum that supports this mission for all age groups in the church to help them understand the rationale for this large undertaking. It is envisioned that the youth could sell compact fluorescent light bulbs as a fundraiser, as has been recommended by our PCUSA Environmental Justice Office (<http://www.pcusa.org/environment/cfl.htm>). A Wednesday night series on the rationale behind this mission, as well as on energy options as developed by the property council could be developed. Youth may want to identify young people in countries already suffering from climate change and exchange correspondence with them in order to put a human face on climate change impacts. See recommendation below for Stewardship Council for more information on how to do this.
- The **finance council** could be responsible for developing and implementing the stewardship campaign to raise the funds necessary to implement the mission. They would work closely with the property council to determine the funding target. They would investigate and determine which organizations from which to purchase carbon offsets. Our denomination has used Native Energy twice, three times to offset carbon emissions from the General Assembly biennial meetings. (www.nativeenergy.com.) There are numerous other companies that offer offsets at perhaps a lower price.
- The **worship council** and **minister** will share this mission with our members on Sunday mornings and provide the theological underpinnings. Hymn and worship music selections would also reinforce this mission.

Summary

Responding to guidance from our General Assembly on going carbon neutral is appropriate. There are urgent and life-threatening, as well as biblically based-reasons why the church should develop and implement a mission and stewardship campaign that involves all aspects of our faith life to do our part to reduce the suffering of our neighbors caused by climate change.

The essence of what we are asked to do is to reduce our carbon emissions as low as we can, by conserving energy and reducing our reliance on fossil fuels; offsetting our remaining carbon emissions. All members of the church will share this mission with a special focus on our neighbors who are already suffering from the impacts of climate change.

Love and justice are God's gift to us through his son Jesus Christ and it is up to us to not squander these gifts. Our actions are unjust and creation is suffering, but we are empowered by God to be good stewards and care for the Earth. Addressing our energy usage, offers us an opportunity to affirm our faith, do justice and care for neighbors and creation.

Attachment:

GA Commissioners" Resolution Calling All Presbyterians to Take Positive and Immediate Steps to Live Carbon Neutral Lives.