

Assembly adopted the Committee's recommendation to approve as amended

On this Item by Assembly acted by way of the Committee's consent agenda

Committee Recommendation

On Item 09-22, the Social Justice Issues Committee voted as follows:

Motion was carried by a Counted vote.

- Affirmative:55

- Negative:3

- Abstention:3

The committee hereby recommends approval as amended...(as advised by ACSWP). Comment

Amend Recommendation 1. as follows: [Text to be deleted is shown with brackets and a strike-through; text to be added or inserted is shown with brackets and an underline.]

“1. [~~Declares this to be a ‘Resolution’ according to the definitions provided in Section 1 of the ‘Forming Social Policy’ guidelines of the General Assembly, applying the ‘1981 Energy Policy’ to the current environmental circumstances, until the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) brings a recommended new energy policy to the 218th General Assembly (2008).~~] [Direct the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy to make a study of personal responsibility and carbon-neutrality available as a working paper on the website of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as soon as possible, in order to share its concrete, effective action steps for Presbyterians to take to reduce their energy consumption. This working paper will highlight the threats posed by accelerated climate change and lift up ways for individuals, families, and congregations to reduce emissions of carbon dioxide and other gases produced in heating, air conditioning, transportation and food production, packaging, and shipment. In addition, this paper will suggest policy measures being considered in greater depth by the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy and several consultant theological ethicists and political scientists for eventual report to the 218th General Assembly (2008).]”

Recommendation

Header: Content:

That the 217th General Assembly (2006) does the following:

- 1. Declares this to be a “Resolution” according to the definitions provided in Section 1 of the “Forming Social Policy” guidelines of the General Assembly, applying the “1981 Energy Policy” to the current environmental circumstances, until the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) brings a recommended new energy policy to the 218th General Assembly (2008).**
- 2. Finds that the Christian mandate to care for creation and the biblical promise of the restoration of right relationships between God, human beings, and the rest of creation impels and inspires us to act to reduce our energy usage.**
- 3. Finds that the urgency, injustice, and seriousness of this issue calls us as Christians to act NOW and to act boldly to lead the way in reducing our energy usage.**
- 4. Strongly urges all Presbyterians to immediately make a bold witness by aspiring to live carbon neutral lives. (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.)**
- 5. Directs the ACSWP to make the current draft of the report and recommendations, “A Christian Witness on Energy” available to all Presbyterians, and to the General Assembly Council, at the earliest possible time in order to share its concrete, effective action steps for Presbyterians to take to reduce their energy consumption.**
- 6. Directs the General Assembly Council to assign the appropriate staff to inform all Presbyterians, governing bodies, and churches of the urgent need for them to reduce their energy consumption and the injustice of our current energy practices while ACSWP completes its work.**
- 7. Directs the General Assembly Council, upon receipt of “A Christian Witness on Energy” report, to assign the appropriate staff to prepare an implementation plan for a church-wide carbon neutral program.**
- 8. Calls upon all Presbyterians to take this seriously, to pray asking for God’s forgiveness and guidance, to study this issue, to calculate your carbon emissions, to educate others, and to use less energy, striving to make your life carbon neutral.**

Footer:

Rationale

Header: Content:

It is the consensus of the scientific community that human activity is rapidly changing the natural environment in measurable ways through the destructive effects 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, and accelerating faster than predicted just a few years ago.

Global climate change is directly causing or contributing to harmful changes including but not limited to:

1. Ice sheet and glacial melting at alarming rates;
2. Rising sea levels that, by the end of this century, will encroach or cover many of the world's coastal communities and lands where more than half of the world's population currently resides;
3. A 30 percent weakening of the Gulf Stream in the last twelve years;
4. Episodic coral reef die-off worldwide threatening traditional fisheries, a major food source for many;
5. Island nations, such as Tuvalu, to seek refuge in other countries for their entire populations due to sea level rise;
6. Water shortages and severe droughts in Africa;
7. Record number of killer storms worldwide, leaving more than a thousand people dead and 3,500 missing as of April 2006 from Hurricane Katrina alone, and billions of dollars of damage in multiple states;
8. A violation of the rights of entire populations, such as the Alaskan Inuit, to maintain their traditional culture of hunting and fishing on which their lives depend;
9. Hundreds of species to face extinction—from Arctic polar bears to tropical tree frogs—due to habitat changes.

A growing number of scientists now suggest that we have perhaps only a decade's

grace period to reduce our energy usage before these devastating effects start to become irreversible.

We Americans are champion energy consumers, using 40 percent of the world's oil and emitting 25 percent of the world's greenhouse gases, even though we are less than 5 percent of the world's population.

We have the knowledge, skills, and resources to reduce our energy consumption and switch to alternative energy sources that are less harmful to the environment.

Prompt action and leadership by individuals, organizations, communities, states, and countries can keep global climate change from becoming much worse.

The president of the United States has called upon the nation to reduce its dependence on fossil fuels.

Previous General Assemblies (1981, 1998, 1999, and 2003) passed overtures, resolutions, and policies addressing our unjust energy practices, calling us to develop frugal lifestyles reducing our energy consumption; and urging the United States to sign the Kyoto Treaty and to lead in reducing carbon emissions to combat global warming.

A recent Presbyterian Panel survey indicates that majorities of us believe our energy consumption contributes to global climate change; most agree that energy conservation reflects values of the Christian Reformed faith. Yet less than 50 percent of us have taken even the simplest steps to reduce our energy consumption.

The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy's energy report (in response to General Assembly *Overture 02-57. On Revising the Denominational Policy on the Issue of Energy*) has a draft of the report that will be presented at 218th General Assembly (2008).

We feel called to offer a bold, faithful, concrete plan for action in the meantime to address the urgency of climate change and our excessive energy consumption before the 218th General Assembly (2008).

Bob Crabtree, Presbytery of Florida
Dale Francis, Presbytery of Lake Erie

Footer:

Comments

Comment from the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy *Comment Advice and Counsel on Item 09-22—From the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy.*

The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy advises that Item 09-22 be approved with amendment:

1. Delete the text of Recommendation 1. and insert the following in its place:

“1. Declares this to be a “Resolution” according to the definitions provided in Section 1 of the “Forming Social Policy” guidelines of the General Assembly, applying the “1981 Energy Policy” to the current environmental circumstances, until the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) brings a recommended new energy policy to the 218th General Assembly (2008). Direct the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy to make a study of personal responsibility and carbon-neutrality available as a Working Paper on the website of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as soon as possible, in order to share its concrete, effective action steps for Presbyterians to take to reduce their energy consumption. This Working Paper will highlight the threats posed by accelerated climate change and lift up ways for individuals, families and congregations to reduce emissions of carbon dioxide and other gases produced in heating, air conditioning, transportation and food production, packaging and shipment. In addition, this paper will suggest policy measures being considered in greater depth by the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy and several consultant theological ethicists and political scientists for eventual report to the 2008 General Assembly.

2. Delete Recommendations 5. and 7. and re-number the subsequent recommendations.

The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy also advises that the assembly affirm Recommendations 2., 3., 4., 6., and 8., and all but the last two of the Rationale paragraphs.

Rationale

The commissioners' resolution on climate change, personal responsibility, and carbon neutrality calls for an interim statement on these important matters prior to the completion of the more comprehensive resolution on energy policy called for by the 214th General Assembly (2002). The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy appreciates the sense of urgency of the commissioners, who recognize that the assembly has already spoken several times on climate change or global warming. What is new in the commissioners' resolution is the request that a resource on how to live "carbon-neutral" lives be made available online and otherwise in anticipation of the full energy report in 2008. The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy can do this, while making clear that the current draft report and other materials lack sufficient theological and geopolitical content for a full resolution. The energy resolution team that produced a report focused on personal responsibility and carbon-neutrality was appointed by the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy and thanked for its work in late 2005. Because that document has not been completed, and has not been made available to commissioners, we believe it would best be termed a working paper but nonetheless made publicly available as the commissioners request.

At this time, the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy is concerned not only with the raw fact of rapid climate change, but with the enormous political and economic interests involved in our current dependency on carbon-based fuels. Our nation is engaged in one significant war related, in part, to oil, and our country is particularly the focus of antipathy from large sections of the Islamic world. China and other developing economies are gaining in strength and increasingly competing for energy resources and geo-strategic advantage.

Commissioners may note, then, that the report envisioned by the 214th General Assembly (2002) will be substantially broader than this background resource.

Comment from the Advocacy Committee on Racial Ethnic Concerns
Comment

Advice and Counsel on Item 09-22—From the Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns (ACREC).

Item 09-22 on calling all Presbyterians to take positive and immediate steps to live carbon neutral lives.

The Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns (ACREC) concurs with the advice and counsel of the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP).