

Follow-up Report to Session
First Presbyterian Church

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Response to Issues Raised by Elders on What it means for Our Church to Go Carbon Neutral

At a recent session meeting you considered the "Proposal to the Session Asking First Presbyterian Church to Go Carbon Neutral" and endorsed the concept but had questions about purchasing carbon offsets. The purpose of this document is:

1. Address what I understand are your questions about carbon offsets
2. Re-emphasize the comprehensive nature of what it means to the life and work of our church family to go carbon neutral.
3. Seek a firm commitment from the session to go forward with the carbon neutral proposal or some modified version, and
4. Seek a commitment from the chairs of the education, witness, finance and worship councils to take responsibility for the tasks outlined below and in the original proposal.

1. Questions on carbon offsets:

- a. What about the integrity of carbon offsets?** With any new idea there are lots of questions and confusion, and there will be unscrupulous people trying to make money off carbon offsets, so you are correct in proceeding cautiously and asking questions about them.

Carbon offsets currently are not regulated by any governmental entity, therefore it is critical that any company selected meet standards and their business be verifiable. Currently one of the most respected standards is called the Gold Standard which was created in association with the World Wildlife Fund. There is also Green-e GHG Emission Reduction Product Certification Standards. There are probably others.

Another way to select a company is to read what respected institutions say about the different companies. Just recently two groups have provided reviews of offset companies.

- One is "A Consumer's Guide to Retail Carbon Offset Providers, prepared by Trexler Climate and Energy Services, Inc. for Clean Air-Cool Planet, December 2006. A copy is attached.
- The other is an Internet site prepared by the Stockholm Environment Institute US with Tufts Climate Initiative, called the "Voluntary Carbon Offset Information Portal" ([www. Tufts.edu/tie/](http://www.Tufts.edu/tie/)).

The World Watch Institute in its July/August 2007 issue provides a helpful discussion on carbon offsets value in the wider world, "Carbon Offsets 101". A copy is attached.

Generally these reviews address whether the investment projects truly reduce emissions; the emissions are correctly calculated; the projects are verifiable and the

company work is transparent. I don't recommend we get in the business of evaluating companies.

Recommendation: It is recommended that a representative from the Finance Council review this information and make a recommendation on which offset company to select. Our denomination and the McVety family used Native Energy. I am not pushing them, but based on the information in the review documents they received an overall positive recommendation. There are a limited number of US companies that have been reviewed and are recommended – Native Energy, Climate Trust, and Climate Friendly. There probably are other companies that haven't chosen to be reviewed.

- b. Do carbon offsets really make a difference in lowering greenhouse gas emissions and combating climate change?** The answer is yes, if you select the right project and it is a project that without yours and others support would not be constructed. Voluntary carbon offsetting will not save us from climate change, but it will help in the transition from fossil fuels to renewable by helping to reduce our energy usage (because the less energy we use the lower the cost of offsets) and most important of all it will provide funds to help the fledgling renewable energy industry get started. Carbon offsetting also helps to educate us about climate change, carbon emissions and alternative energy options.

Note: Most experts recommend that one avoid forestry projects, because even though protecting forests is important, the lag period between when they are planted and when they take up the promised amounts of CO2 can be decades, plus we know little about how forests store carbon in the long run.

- c. What will it cost the church to purchase carbon offsets?** The answer to this question depends on our energy usage and which company we select. Our energy usage has two components – our electric usage and our miles traveled. I am not aware if we track miles traveled, but we could.

In looking over First Presbyterian's August 3, 2007 electric bill, our highest demand occurs in September (13,800 KWH) and our lowest demand is in December (6,720 KWH), so we have quite a range. Our total electric energy usage for September 2006 through August 2007 is 112,320 KWH.

EPA estimates that 1.55 pounds of CO2 are emitted per KWH. Thus 112,320 total KWH for the most recent year X 1.55 = 174,096 pounds of CO2 emissions from First Presbyterian Church. The total number of pounds of CO2 divided by 2000 gives you the number of tons of CO2 per year which is 87. The price per ton of CO2 offset varies from \$18 to \$5 per ton. Using Native Energy which costs \$12 per ton, it would cost us \$1044 per year to offset our current electric usage. This number will be lower once we have a new HVAC, double paned windows and solar. To completely offset our carbon emissions we need to determine miles traveled and calculate the associated carbon emissions.

- d. How do we purchase carbon offsets?** We select an offset company using the information provided above. Go to their website and provide the requested information on our energy usage. The company will provide a selection of projects from which we can purchase carbon offsets. We select one and write a check. The company will

provide confirmation and a certificate. This will be an annual occurrence, but the fun will be in trying to get our carbon emissions down each year!

Recommendation: I recommend that a representative of the Finance Committee take on this assignment along with any other church members who are interested.

- e. **Could the church help members to go carbon neutral in their homes and businesses?** Not all the carbon offset companies are 501(c)3 entities, so the church could help individual members by setting up an account for offset funds, so our donations to the church would be tax deductible. The church would use the money on an annual basis to purchase carbon offsets for its church family. This is not a substitution for purchasing carbon offsets for energy usage at the church.

2. Going carbon neutral is more than purchasing carbon offsets:

Congratulations on the “Light from Light” Capital Campaign 2007. It provides as the header says, “...an opportunity for our congregation to remain faithful stewards of the light”. Perhaps never in the history of our church or denomination has the need to be a faithful steward of the light more important as we face the greatest challenge mankind has ever faced and that is transitioning our energy usage from fossil fuels to renewables in time to prevent the worse aspects of climate change. It is therefore a tribute to our church leadership that our capital campaign is guiding us forward in reducing our energy usage by helping us become more energy efficient and by switching a portion of our energy usage to solar.

Going carbon neutral is a comprehensive ongoing mission of our church that does not end when the capital campaign ends or when we have solar, energy efficient windows or a new HVAC system.

Other aspects of it as outlined in the original proposal include:

- Identifying carbon neutrality as an ongoing mission of the church (with perhaps a more descriptive title that conveys the comprehensive nature of this mission. For example *...Light from Light* could work.) - Session
- Determining annually our total energy usage and purchasing carbon offsets for our energy usage that cannot be further reduced – Finance Council
- Reporting regularly to members on the status of our energy usage – Finance Council
- Further energy reductions as opportunities arise, such as replacing appliances – Property Council
- Developing an outreach initiative to connect with a family or village in the Arctic (or elsewhere) to help us put a human face on climate change – Witness and Finance Councils
- Selecting a curriculum for our Sunday school classes that educates all members on the importance of this mission – Education Council and DCE
- Preaching on the theology of caring for creation – Worship Council and Minister
- Updates on the status of climate change – Guest speakers and Stewardship of Creation Enabler
- Internal reviews and evaluations of how well we are “living” our mission with annual report to members – Session

- Developing an "Earth Care Solemn Vow and Covenant Toward Carbon Neutrality" that each member or family would sign and bring forward on a designated Sunday – Education and Worship Councils

Recommendation: These are just a few of the possible ways that our church could live the mission of going carbon neutral and they are only suggestions. It is recommended that a committee composed of representatives from each of the councils, the DCE, minister and Stewardship of Creation Enabler develop this mission for approval by the session and church members.