

Yukon Presbyterians for Earth Care Report

Written February 24, 2014



YPEC, or the Yukon Presbyterians for Earth Care, has been meeting for some time. Beginning in October of 2013, however, the group began focusing on two particular goals—hosting a PCUSA eco-tour on climate change, and encouraging the whole presbytery to make Earth Care an organic part of the presbytery's work.

With this vision in mind, the group began talking to others in the presbytery, and others among our ecumenical partners. The result has been a growth in connections, in relationships, and in ministry. These growing connections have helped us discover a number of other ministry opportunities, which is causing us to expand our goals. For instance:

- We discovered that the St. Lawrence Island Yupik folks continue to work hard on the issue of toxics and, through their connections with the Alaska Coalition Against Toxics (ACAT), have recently been asked to travel nationally or internationally as speakers.
- We discovered that our ecumenical partners are interested in joining with us in working on issues that are near and dear to us in the Presbytery; but they are also hopeful that we will join with them in working on issues that are near and dear to them in their regions.
- We also discovered that many Christians are very active in work beyond their churches and were anxious to join with us. They looked to us to add to their efforts by bringing a spiritual and moral dimensions to the work. As a result One-People-One-Earth, the Mat-Su Coalition and ACAT make an effort to work closely with us.

Out of the momentum that has built behind our efforts, we come to the presbytery to report on how our goals are proceeding, and to request certain actions.

Goal 1: To make the ministry of Earth Care an organic part of the presbytery's work.

1. To introduce this goal, we received permission from the presbytery's Leadership Team to use Earth Care themes in presbytery worship, including the theme verse for this meeting:

“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)

Choosing this passage reflects the reality that humans now represent the greatest single

danger to healthy ecosystems across the planet. God has always called humans to pay attention to nature, because nature points us back to God and to God's desires. Indeed, just as there was a star to point seekers to the Christ child, there are multiple signs in nature today warning us of the consequences if humanity does not observe and respond to what is happening to the world today. We suspect that this point is already self-evident to most of us.

2. However, we do bring reminders of what should be self-evident. One particularly good Christian resource on Earth Care is Larry Rasmussen's *Earth Honoring Faith: Religious Ethics in a New Key* (Oxford University Press, 2013). In it he collected information from indigenous peoples, scientists and economists who have been "listening" to nature. He then printed graphs showing a wide array of human affects on the world over the past 200 years, pointing out how important it is for us to hear what nature is telling us and to respond now. We have copies of those graphs with us, and one copy of his book at our table in the narthex. Other Earth Care resources are also available at our display table.
3. We find that our presbytery's Vision Working Paper is amazingly Earth-Care-friendly. However, it never directly names Earth Care as an important part of our ministry for today. Instead, Earth Care could be interpreted as the work of a committee or group, and not an issue that requires the whole body to engage.

We therefore bring recommendations for amending that document. We bring these proposals for a first reading, hoping to get good input from the various peoples of the presbytery. We hope to improve it before voting on it in October. These additions are meant to challenge us to keep an earth perspective in all our work as disciples of Christ.

Goal 2: An Eco-tour for PCUSA members to see and reflect on signs of climate change.

1. The tour will mix 20 Alaskans with 40 Lower-48 PCUSA members to see and reflect on the effects of the following signs of climate change:
 - a. Vanishing ice: glaciers and sea ice.
 - b. Melting and decaying permafrost
 - c. Ocean acidification
 - d. Effects on plant-life, animal-life and human-life.
2. The tour will include facilitators from the following perspectives to help people reflect on what they are seeing.
 - a. Christian religious leaders (so far, Rev. Curt Karns and Fr. Thomas Weise)
 - b. University of Alaska scientists (so far, Doug Causey and Larry Johnson)
 - c. Native American leaders (so far, Ilarrion Merculief)

This tour has been endorsed by the Presbyterians for Earth Care group (<http://presbyearthcare.org/>). We are therefore advertising this as the first-ever Presbyterians For Earth Care Regional Conference.



Although food, transportation and housing are costly, we are very hopeful that 20 people from our congregations will be interested in participating. A few scholarships are available. For more information, we have brochures available.

Goal 3: To endorse Heartland Presbytery's Sustainability Overture to GA

This overture asks the PCUSA to go on record in support of changes to society that will lead to sustainable development. Under new GA guidelines, if a 2nd presbytery does not endorse this overture, it will not come before the GA even for discussion. We will ask our presbytery to confirm Heartland Presbytery's request for GA discussion and action.



This overture especially endorses the *Precautionary Principle* as necessary to health

for humans and the environment. The Precautionary Principle would require chemicals and other agents to be tested for safety before allowing them to be put into use. Currently, such agents are allowed in use until they are proven dangerous. In the past, such lenience has allowed DDT, PCBs and other dangerous agents to be heavily used before anyone noticed the danger.

With over 7 billion people consuming products in the world, and with the rapid technology for change, this level of policy change is necessary if we are to care for the health of the earth and of people. We believe that Christian spirituality requires this approach to life—a sustainability approach—if we are to live in right relationship with God and God's beloved creation

Goal 4: Partnering with ACAT in a study on how to improve St. Lawrence Is. Health

Together with Norton Sound Regional Health and others, ACAT is applying for a grant to explore how to improve health on St. Lawrence Island. Currently, diagnoses often come too late, referrals do not always go to doctors with the proper expertise, and approaches to social ills are inadequate. ACAT has asked the YPEC and the presbytery to partner with them in exploring these issues, hoping we can be part of a more wholistic response. Unless the Savoonga or Gambell sessions have new wisdom to offer, we have agreed to be involved. As this partnership begins to develop we will bring more information to the Leadership Team with regard to what effective role the presbytery might play.

Goal 5: We wish to explore the feasibility of beginning a New Worshiping Community

A number of groups in Alaska are doing amazing work in raising issues and experimenting with new (or at least different) ways for humans to live sustainably on the planet. Many of the people doing this, however, are either unaware of any spiritual aspect to Creation Care, or point to some general, or New Age interpretation of the spirituality of Earth Care.

We wish to explore with our ecumenical partners as to whether or not this is a time to raise-up a faith community that can bear witness to the Holy Spirit of God as the One empowering us for this work. This does not yet require action from presbytery, but it is a goal we are beginning to explore. Perhaps some in the presbytery will have ideas on how to advance this goal.











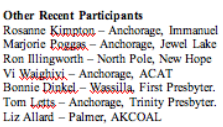
YPEC as an open group

We hope the spiritual energy behind this expansion continues. Since October we have had participation from people from seven churches across the presbytery. We would like to

involve more of our congregations in this work. Toward that end we offer an open invitation.

- As a whole group, we meet monthly by conference call. This meeting uses half its time for worship and education, and half its time for business.
- YPEC sometimes holds meetings for sub-committees to work on the different goal of the YPEC team.

Newcomers are welcome. They can contact the presbytery office (office@pbyukon.org, 907-276-1095) to find out when the next monthly meeting is scheduled.

Yukon Presbyterians For Earthcare Photo-log		Israel Nelson – Palmer, United Protestant	Britt Johnston – Anchorage, Anchor PC
 Barbara Brown-Palmer, United Protestant	 Curt Karns – Eagle River		
 Cindee Karns – Eagle River	 Dan Ketchum – Anchorage, Immanuel	 Tiffany Immingan – Savoonga Presbyterian Maricarmen, Cruz-Guilloty – ACAT	 Danna Larson – Anchorage, First Pres.
 Holly Hallman – Seattle, Regional PEC	 Helen Woodings-Palmer United Protestant	 Other Recent Participants Rosanne Kinnison – Anchorage, Immanuel Marjorie Pogras – Anchorage, Jewel Lake Ron Illingworth – North Pole, New Hope Vi Waighiyi – Anchorage, ACAT Bonnie Dunkel – Wasilla, First Presbyter. Tom Letts – Anchorage, Trinity Presbyter. Liz Allard – Palmer, AKCOAL	