

## Summary of Recommendations and Actions by General Assemblies of The Presbyterian Church in Canada on Climate Change and Energy

1990

The 116th General Assembly (1990) adopted a statement on the environment, “Caretakers or Careless Takers”, and endorsed the Tokyo Declaration of the World Commission on Environment and Development. The World Commission on Environment and Development was established by the United Nations in 1983 to propose long-term environmental strategies. This declaration asked nations to integrate sustainable development into their goals. It called on the Government of Canada to bring forward promised legislation on the environment without delay and to continue urging better environmental legislation in the U.S.

Provincial and federal governments were requested to enlarge their round tables on the Environment and Economy to include representatives from faith groups, to pay particular attention to packaging standards, to expand capacity for recycling and develop ways of dealing with hazardous waste.

General Assembly (GA) commended the World Council of Churches on its work in Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation, instructed agencies of GA to examine the environmental impact of their purchasing practices, and requested presbyteries and congregations to do likewise.

Congregations were encouraged to promote the stewardship of creation in conjunction with local and national environmental groups, and to urge their members to become involved in such groups, to study environmental issues, to promote and advocate sound environmental policies and practices. Sessions were asked to urge members to examine their own life-styles in terms of consumption of resources and generation of waste (A&P 1990, pp. 359-368).



The 116th GA (1990) requested that the Government of Canada work diplomatically to reach firm international agreements for steady and substantial reduction of the gases causing climate change, for halting deforestation and promoting reforestation. It commended the Government of Canada for signing the Montreal and Helsinki agreements. The Montreal and Helsinki agreements aimed to phase out the use of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) which were implicated in the breakdown of the ozone layer of the atmosphere (A&P 1990, pp. 415-416).

1991

The 117th GA (1991) requested that boards and agencies support and participate in networks addressing the greenhouse effect and urged the Government of Canada to participate in negotiations on an international convention on world climate. This convention was signed at the “Earth Summit” in Rio de Janeiro, 1992. It led to the development of the Kyoto Protocol on climate change (A&P 1991, pp. 329-331).

1992

The 118th GA (1992) urged the Government of Canada to re-examine its foreign policy with a view to reversing any of its policies that contributed to continued environmental degradation in countries in the global South (A&P 1992, pp. 331-341).

2003

The 129th GA (2003) encouraged congregations and presbyteries to communicate with local and provincial governments to applaud or encourage positive steps to meet or exceed Kyoto Protocol targets on reducing greenhouse gas emissions (A&P 2003, pp. 301-302).

2007

The 133rd GA (2007) encouraged congregations to conduct an energy audit of their buildings and to implement energy conservation measures that are financially feasible (A&P 2007, p. 326).

2008

The Assembly Council commended the KAIROS document “Energy Workbook for Religious Buildings” to congregations wishing information on ways to conserve energy in their churches. Assembly Council highlighted The Presbyterian Church in Canada’s Lending Fund for congregations requiring financial assistance (A&P 2008, pp. 212-3).

The Moderator of the 134th General Assembly (2008) wrote to the Prime Minister of Canada and the Ministers of Natural Resources Canada and Environment Canada encouraging the Government of Canada to recommit to meeting Canada’s obligations under Kyoto, and to take leadership in post-Kyoto negotiations (A&P 2008, pp. 324).

The PCC became a signatory to the Carbon Disclosure Project (CDP). The CDP is a not for profit organization that encourages corporations to assess and disclose the potential impact of climate change on their operations. The CDP



the largest repository of corporate greenhouse gas emissions data in the world (A&P 2008, pp.327-8). The CDP is an independent, not-for-profit, investor coalition representing over \$87 trillion in assets from 722 institutional investors. These investors include private and public pension funds and faith communities in Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia and other countries.

2009

Groups and courts of the church were invited to hold at least one “100 mile meal” annually and to invite local producers, representatives of farmers’ markets or small businesses to talk about their involvement in the local food economy as a way of exploring environmental stewardship.

2010

The 136th GA (2010) adopts a report, prepared in response to an additional motion on “the cost of holding a carbon neutral General Assembly”. General Assembly commissioners and resource people will record their air and automobile mileage to generate baseline data of the General Assembly’s carbon footprint. The data will be used to assist the church in developing policies and strategies that will reduce the GA’s carbon footprint. Criteria for evaluating potential General Assembly venues will include questions about the energy efficiency and environmental programs and policies of potential sites (A&P 2010, pp. 440-446).

The Moderator of the 136th GA (2010) wrote to the Minister of Foreign Affairs to express disappointment in the lack of progress made by our country in adhering to the original goals set out in the Kyoto Protocol and to encourage the Government of Canada to work for and support an internationally negotiated binding agreement that builds on the Kyoto Protocol, at the December 2010 climate change meeting in Mexico (United Nations Conference of Parties meeting).

The Moderator wrote to the Minister of International Cooperation requesting information on the Canadian International Development Agency’s policies and financial commitments for projects dealing directly with climate change mitigation and adaptation, and to the GOC to ask if Canada will pledge “new and additional” adaptation funding under the Copenhagen Accord.\* The Moderator wrote to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) encouraging the IPCC to take all necessary steps to ensure transparency and openness in its climate change reports.

\*The Copenhagen Accord was written and agreed to by 25 countries when international talks broke down at the UN climate change conference in Copenhagen, Denmark in December 2009. It is a voluntary agreement, and not formally approved by the UN General Assembly.



Congregations and courts of the church were invited to 1) form study groups to learn about climate change and consider steps that can be taken individually, as congregations and as communities to reduce carbon emissions, 2) host community forums on climate change and 3) share with The PCC how they are reducing their carbon emissions and caring for creation. (A&P 2010, pp. 390-405).

2012

The Moderator of the 138th GA wrote to the GOC expressing 1) the GA's encouragement to continue to develop policies and initiatives to promote more responsible stewardship and care of the resources of the earth; and 2) urging the Government to maintain or increase funding of scientific projects which enable Canadians and others to understand the realities of climate change, such as is happening in the Canadian High Arctic, species loss or endangerment in our waterways and oceans, and other environmental concerns. The Moderator wrote to 49 companies that responded to the 2011 Carbon Disclosure Project's (CDP) questionnaire expressing the GA's support and to 17 companies that did not answer the CDP's questionnaire urging these companies to participate in the CDP's survey. As of 2012, The PCC owned shares in these companies. Congregations and presbyteries were requested to calculate the carbon emissions of their commissioners' travel to GA and develop initiatives to offset the emissions.

2015

The 141st GA adopted a recommendation that the Moderator write to the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change encouraging Canada to support the development of an internationally negotiated and binding agreement at the Conference of the Parties 21 (COP21) in December 2015 that sets reductions targets in greenhouse gas emissions in order to limit the increase in the globally averaged combined land and ocean surface temperature to two degrees Celsius. (A&P 2015, pp. 391-2)

### **Summary of Statements by General Assemblies (since 1973) Re Climate Change and Energy**

Theology

- The church must relate humankind's redemption through Christ to the redemption of all creation (Romans 8: 19-21) (A&P 1973, pp. 270-274, 281-282).
- Human stewardship is not a dominion of mastery. It is a dominion of unequivocal love for this world. It is to be exercised with respect for the integrity of natural systems and for the limits that nature places on economic growth and material consumption (A&P 1984, pp. 363-366).
- The earth, and all that is in it, is a gift from God, and to survive, human beings are called to honour God as Creator. Human life relies on the stability of the ecosystem for survival (A&P 2010, pp. 390-405).



## Environment

- Governments and farm organizations should promote and encourage the preservation of plant and animal species to preserve genetic diversity (A&P 1989, pp. 341-348).
- Global warming represents one of the most serious global environmental challenges to the health, security and stability of human life and natural ecosystems (A&P 1990, pp. 415-416).
- Natural resources should be recognized as “capital” to be sustained for future generations (A&P 1994, pp. 301-313).
- The full environmental cost of doing business should be incorporated into the pricing system in both the public and private sector (A&P 1994, pp. 301-313).
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- The full environmental cost of doing business should be incorporated into the pricing system in both the public and private sector (A&P 1994, pp. 301-313).
- A nation’s decision to encourage environmentally-friendly trade should not be treated, under international trade agreements, as a barrier to trade (A&P 1994, pp. 301-313).
- Any denial of access to water represents lack of respect for God’s creation and lack of concern for our neighbour (A&P 2005, pp. 294-307).
- Global climate is a public good. This confers stewardship responsibilities upon all of humanity, especially those who live in countries that produce a disproportionate share of greenhouse gases. The ethics of climate change adaptation imply strong support from wealthy countries to countries that are least able to adapt to climate change, particularly in the Global South (A&P 2010, pp. 390-405).
- The withdrawal of the GOC from the Kyoto Protocol at the December 2011 climate change meetings in Durban is a significant withdrawal of Canadian leadership at a time when there is urgency to work as a global community to respond to the climate crisis (A&P 2012, p. 372).



## Energy

- Congregations are encouraged to conserve energy through improved energy efficiency in church buildings (A&P 1981, pp. 305). The 133rd GA (2007) encouraged congregations to conduct an energy audit of their buildings and to implement energy conservation measures that are financially feasible (A&P 2007, p. 326).
- We deplore the attempts at justification and condemn apathy towards the dangers of nuclear power (A&P 1982, pp. 316-317).
- We encourage responsible and creative use of nuclear technology (A&P 1982, pp. 316-317).
- Energy policy should be guided by the values of justice, participation and sustainability (A&P 1983, pp. 326-329).
- Businesses whose survival is threatened by the cost of a responsible energy policy need to be assisted in the transition (A&P 1991, pp. 286-289).
- Development of energy-pricing policies which embody real, including environmental and social, costs (full cost accounting) should become normative (A&P 1991, pp. 286-289).
- The reduction in fossil fuel use in order to limit carbon dioxide emissions that contribute to global warming needs to be a Canadian priority (A&P 1991, pp. 286-289).
- Funding for research and development of clean, renewable energy resources needs to be substantially increased by redirecting such funding away from conventional fossil fuel and nuclear energy (A&P 1991, pp. 286-289).
- Publicly-owned power corporations should consider favorably purchasing power from industries which use cogeneration (A&P 1991, pp. 286-289). A cogeneration system produces electricity and heat in tandem and is used by industries where there is a significant requirement for both electricity and steam.
- Organizations, including the church, should be encouraged to take steps that reduce their carbon footprint. Policies and strategies that reduce the carbon emissions generated by GA should be developed (A&P 2010, pp. 440-446).
- Purchasing carbon offsets should never replace attempts to reduce overall carbon emissions. (A&P 2010, pp. 440-446).



## Land Use, Biotechnology and Sustainable Development

- The federal government must have the power to enact minimum national environmental standards (A&P 1991, pp. 286-289).
- Provincial governments should be permitted to enact stronger legislation than federally mandated minimum environmental standards (A&P 1992, pp. 298-303).