

## Pennsylvania Council of Churches Resolution on Climate Change

WHEREAS: The Pennsylvania Council of Churches (Council) believes (1) all of creation is a gift from God, given to us to hold in sacred trust, and that we humans are responsible to protect and preserve the environment for present and future generations, and (2) the government must play a role in promoting an environment that protects citizens and communities and provides benefits for the common good through protection and wise management of Pennsylvania's natural resources;

WHEREAS: The Council concurs with the words of Pennsylvania's Constitution, Article 1, Section 27, which states:

*The people have a right to clean air, pure water, and to the preservation of the natural, scenic, historic and esthetic values of the environment. Pennsylvania's public natural resources are the common property of all the people, including generations yet to come. As trustee of these resources, the Commonwealth shall conserve and maintain them for the benefit of all the people.*

WHEREAS: Human activity is the realm in which we live out God's call to stewardship. The links between human activity, increasing concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, and rising global temperature and sea levels are well established;<sup>i</sup> and

WHEREAS: Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, released on May 24, 2015, offers a unique opportunity to amplify and elevate the moral voices of those responding to climate change; and

WHEREAS: In its 2009 Climate Change Action Plan, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection found that the world's climate is changing and that Pennsylvania is responsible for 1 percent of the planet's greenhouse gas emissions attributable to human activity;<sup>ii</sup>

WHEREAS: "Multiple studies published in peer-reviewed scientific journals show that 97 percent or more of actively publishing climate scientists agree: Climate-warming trends over the past century are very likely due to human activities. In addition, most of the leading scientific organizations worldwide have issued public statements endorsing this position;"<sup>iii</sup> and

WHEREAS: The impact of climate change will harm God's gracious gift of creation; the effects of climate change are already clearly evidenced in the melting of glaciers and shrinking of the polar caps, rising sea levels, and changes in weather patterns, threatening many plant and animal species with extinction and societies around the world with loss of food resources, land, ancient traditions and ways of being in the world; and the predicted impact of climate change will have a disproportionate impact on those living in poverty, least developed countries, the elderly and children and those least responsible for the emissions of greenhouse gases;<sup>iv</sup> and

WHEREAS: For years, many Christians and people of faith from all traditions have urged the U.S. government to take the lead in addressing climate change through international agreements and domestic policies to increase energy conservation and efficiency, and to accelerate the transition to safe, sustainable, non-polluting, affordable energy, and thousands of congregations have engaged and are engaging in education about climate change, and are taking measures to increase energy conservation and efficiency; and

WHEREAS: The Council has long been an advocate for the environment, (1) calling for the preservation, sustainable use, and wise management of the Commonwealth's natural resources through local, state and federal policies, and (2) calling for citizens to live in harmony with nature and to avoid over-consumption and waste; and

WHEREAS: From November 30-December 11, 2015, France hosted and presided over the 21st Session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP21/CMP11), otherwise known as “Paris 2015,” and COP21 was a crucial conference in achieving a new international agreement on the climate, applicable to all countries, with the aim of keeping climate change below 2°C.<sup>v</sup>

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT

RESOLVED (1): The Pennsylvania Council of Churches confesses Christian complicity in the damage human beings have caused to the earth's climate system and other planetary life systems, and urges recommitment to the Christian call to responsible stewardship of God's creation, and expresses profound concern for the pending environmental, economic, and social tragedies threatened by climate change, to creation, human communities and traditional sacred spaces; and be it further

RESOLVED (2): The Council urges the United States Government and its representatives in Congress to respond to climate change with great urgency and firm leadership by supporting mandatory measures that reduce the absolute amount of greenhouse gas emissions, and in particular emissions of carbon dioxide and methane, to levels recommended by nationally and internationally recognized and respected scientific bodies; and be it further

RESOLVED (3): The Council urges Pennsylvania's state and local governments to support and invest in energy conservation and, specifically, in sustainable, renewable and affordable systems of transportation; and calls on business and industry to lead in responses to climate change through increased investments in efficient and sustainable energy technologies that are economically accessible and just; and be it further

RESOLVED (4): The Council urges all segments of the Church in Pennsylvania to address climate change in their decisions and investments and in their educational and advocacy efforts; and be it further

RESOLVED (5): The Council instructs the Director of Advocacy and Ecumenical Outreach to communicate this resolution to: (1) the Governor of Pennsylvania, the Speaker of the House, the President of the Senate, the chairs of the House and Senate Committees on Environmental Resources and Energy, and to all Senators and Representatives in Pennsylvania's General Assembly; and (2) the President, the Speaker of the House, the House Minority Leader, the Majority and Minority Leaders in the Senate, Pennsylvania's Congressional delegation, and the chairs of the committees enumerated below:

- House Committee on Energy Commerce
  - Subcommittee on Energy and Power
  - Subcommittee on Environment and Economy
- House Committee on Natural Resources
  - Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources
- House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
  - Subcommittee on Energy
  - Subcommittee on Environment
- Senate Committee on Appropriations
  - Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development
- Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
  - Subcommittee on Oceans, Atmosphere, Fisheries, and Coast Guard
- Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources

Subcommittee on Energy  
Subcommittee on Water and Power  
Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works  
Subcommittee on Clean Air and Nuclear Safety  
Senate Committee on Finance  
Subcommittee on Energy, Natural Resources, and Infrastructure;

and be it further

RESOLVED (6): The Council encourages its member bodies to:

- Seek adherence to denominational resolutions on the environment similar to this Resolution;
- Provide educational materials and resources to their congregations to make them aware of, and to educate them about, the effects of climate change on the Commonwealth's environment and economy, and on the health and welfare of its citizens; and
- Encourage congregations and individuals to seek enactment of legislation and policies that seek to reduce climate change and that protect the Commonwealth and the common good.
- Engage in activities and encourage congregations to: (1) increase energy efficiency; (2) invest in sustainable, green energy sources; (3) consider mechanisms for becoming energy neutral; and (4) educate members and the wider community about energy efficiency and sustainability.

Approved by the Board of Directors of the Pennsylvania Council of Churches on this 13th day of October, 2016.

*Rev. Elizabeth L. Bidgood Enders*

The Rev. Elizabeth Bidgood Enders, President  
Board of Directors  
Pennsylvania Council of Churches

With thanks and appreciation to the United Church of Christ and its 2007 Resolution on Climate Change for much of the language contained in the resolution portion of this statement.

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<sup>i</sup> Faith Based Statements on Climate Change, L&E Whitney, June 2012: "Statement on Global Climate Change & Stewardship of the Earth," Synod of the Trinity, Presbyterian Church (USA), 1990,

<http://citizensclimatelobby.org/files/images/Faith%20Based%20Statements%20PDF%20for%20printing.pdf>, p. 68.

<sup>ii</sup> Executive Summary, <http://www.elibrary.dep.state.pa.us/dsweb/Get/Document-77713/03%20PA%20Executive%20Summary.pdf>.

<sup>iii</sup> <http://climate.nasa.gov/scientific-consensus/>.

<sup>iv</sup> Adapted from "A Resolution on Climate Change 2007" GS26, [http://www.ucc.org/environmental-ministries\\_synod-resolutions\\_a-resolution-on-climate](http://www.ucc.org/environmental-ministries_synod-resolutions_a-resolution-on-climate).

<sup>v</sup> What is COP21/CMP11?, <http://www.cop21.gouv.fr/en/cop21-cmp11/what-cop21-cmp11>.