



**“The United Church of Christ:
Toward a National Environmental Focus”**

**Report to the General Synod XXVI
Hartford, CT 2007**

UCC National Environmental and Energy Task Force

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Preface

The international dimensions of environmental problems are becoming the center of attention as it gains center-stage in debates concerning the future of our planet. The range of issues being discussed is extensive; with certain subjects becoming more common items in most conversations. The coexistence of environmentalism and economic development and the need for cooperation, fairness and equity between countries seems to be one of the major questions.¹

In the midst of our global environmental conversations we must keep in mind that the activities of human society, on a broad scale, are harmful to the planet; to the animal kingdom and to the human race (to some more than others). In the case of global warming, for example, we suffer along with the planet but for island nations that will disappear, or for indigenous communities, it is not only an "environmental problem,"² but the literal destruction of the environment, history, legacy and lives.

In the United States, communities of color are also drastically affected. A recent report notes the disproportionate co-relation between African Americans in the U.S. and climate change. The report argues that African Americans are less responsible for climate change, but suffer more from the health impacts.³

In 1987 the existence of a nationwide pattern of disproportionate environmental risk based on race was demonstrated for the U.S.⁴ This evidence challenged the U.S. environmental movement to recognize its tendency to ignore issues of race, class and gender when setting agendas for social action. Today the mainstream environmental community is involved in serious discussions about how to frame the eco-justice issues along with those dealing with environmental justice or environmental racism. To look at certain environmental issues, as global warming and environmental degradation, as is in opposition to those confronted by the environmental justice movement will be a mistake. There is a need for conversations, and practical integration, between Environmental Justice activists and those interested in the areas of eco justice. This report is one step toward that conversation.

The global environmental movement compels us to rethink our understanding of global environmental problems and existing proposals to solve them. Justice is an essential demand in the aftermath of historic, systemic discrimination and disproportionate environmental degradation of those on the margins.

Every environmental challenge comes with a connection between the local and the global: rising temperatures are already affecting the lives of millions of humans,

¹ Ruchi Anand, "International Environmental Justice: A North-South Dimension," *International Journal of Politics and Ethics*, Vol. 1, 2001

² Ibid

³ "African Americans and Climate Change: An Unequal Burden" Congratinal Black Caucus Foundation, July 2004.

⁴ "Toxic Wastes and Race". United Church of Christ, Commission for Racial Justice, 1987.

particularly in people of color, low-income, and Indigenous communities; the health of the animal kingdom has been already compromised; the financial realities of many countries have become a burden, and their social and cultural lives have been disrupted.

There is only one environment. We must be concerned about wetlands, birds and wilderness areas; we should also be concerned, however, about urban habitats, about reservations, about the things that are happening in the US-Mexican border, about children poisoned by lead in their own homes and about children playing in contaminated parks and playgrounds. The UCC is committed to keep bringing the need of integration of these issues to the attention of our congregations and the community at large. That is precisely the intention of this report.

It is my hope that in this pages you will be able to find not only the principles and values that guided the work of our National Environmental/Energy Task Force, but that will be able to see the important role that the church plays today in the doing (promotion) of justice. We won't be able to achieve sustainable development until we get justice in the environmental protection, particularly in the enforcement of regulations. The church must be part of a long term active movement, not only within the border of the United States but keeping in mind the policies that are being exported abroad. The church has a role in the environmental protection movement, and I hope that this report will help us embrace our call, while embracing the principles of the eco-justice/environmental justice movements opposing everything that relates to pollution, industrial contamination in poor communities and communities of color and greed-driven non-sustainable development and non-sustainable patterns of production.

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The United Church of Christ: Toward a National Environmental Focus

Prologue

We join with many voices in the world-wide ecumenical church and other faith traditions in recognizing and lamenting the damage which humanity has done to God's creation. It is as a people of faith, attentive to the tragic state of God's creation, that we pay heed to the signs of our times.

When a list is made of "environmental problems," the range and severity of issues is staggering: the improper disposal of hazardous waste, often inflicting the greatest harm on communities of color, the poor, and residents of less-developed nations; the rapid and widespread extinction of species; the loss of agriculturally valuable topsoil to erosion, spreading deserts, poisoning from over-irrigation and over-use of chemicals, and from urban sprawl; the destruction of forests which often displaces indigenous peoples; the depletion of the fish stocks of the world's oceans by over-fishing; air pollution, especially in urban areas; acid rain and mercury pollution from coal-fired power plants; the destruction of habitats and communities with "mountain top removal" for coal extraction; shortages of fresh water supplies, and the privatization of water resources; the abuse of livestock in concentrated "factory farming" operations, and the pollution of air, soil and water in surrounding communities from agricultural waste; the bleaching, poisoning and physical destruction of coral reefs world-wide; the loss of wetlands, and the ecological services which they provide; the contamination of lakes and rivers with hormones and medicines; the noise pollution of oceans which causes special damage to whales; the light pollution which disrupts many species and which distorts the human sense of wonder under the night sky; the pollution and ecological destruction of war; the spread of invasive species of plants and animals; the loss of wilderness and the biological and spiritual haven which it provides; the exploding human population, and humanity's increasing demands for resources; and human-induced global climate change, which threatens to disrupt the entire web of life on this planet.

This list, which is only suggestive of the problems found in the US and around the world, provides an essential lesson. With so many problems, of so many different kinds and of such severity, it is clear that our crisis is not primarily a technological one, and that it will not be solved by either new gadgets or revised public policies. This list shows us that there is a problem at the very core of our relationship with God's creation; there is a problem with our entire way of life.

At that level, we recognize that we face a moral and theological problem. The way of life being pursued by the modern, technological world and its globalized economy is profoundly distorted. Western culture has believed that humanity is separate from the rest of the natural world, and that we can exercise unbridled control over nature. We have believed that economic worth is the only significant measure of value, whether of beings or of resources. We are part of a culture dependent on the exploitation of nature and people to maintain an impossible trajectory of continual growth. All of these distorted beliefs stand in conflict with the claims of our biblical faith.

We look to the church – the United Church of Christ, the ecumenical church, and also to other expressions of faith and ethics beyond the Christian tradition – to provide leadership and guidance in addressing these moral and theological problems. We look to religious institutions and religious leaders to name our sin and evil, and to call us to more just, relational and sustainable ways of life. We look to the church to offer new visions of communities which exist in relationship with all persons, with the rest of creation, and with God. We look to the church for prophetic witness, both in condemning the abuses of God's creation, and in lifting up a vivid prophetic imagination that a better way of life is possible.

Introduction

This report has been produced in response to the approval of two environmentally focused resolutions by the General Synod XXV, held in Atlanta in July 2005. These resolutions are summarized below. Full texts are included in the Appendix.

Because of the similarity of the concerns and actions proposed by the resolutions, it was decided to create one Task Force (“The UCC Environmental and Energy Task Force – EETF”) to implement the two Resolutions. Within the EETF an Energy Working Group was formed to focus on the work called for in the Energy Resolution.

The UCC has historically been at the forefront of major social change, starting or supporting initiatives on many fronts. It is therefore appropriate that the UCC in all its expressions promote and support active and ongoing ministries for the education and mobilization of the faithful for environmental protection, eco-justice and sustainable development. These ministries are greatly needed on God’s Earth!

The intent of these resolutions is to create, within the UCC, a much higher level of awareness of these concerns and the solutions for them, and to make clear our obligation as people of faith to take action. In addition, it is important that the UCC develop a more pronounced public policy profile on these issues. It is the purpose of the Environment and Energy Task Force to implement the two resolutions; to develop, coordinate and provide the tools and resources necessary to assist congregations, conferences and the national setting in developing a more pro-active environmental stewardship.

The Environmental Resolutions: a brief overview.

The two environmental Resolutions approved by GS XXV are called:

- “Call for Environmental Education and Action” submitted and co-sponsored by five UCC Conferences and
- “Resolution on supporting congregations and providing guidance for stewardship of God’s creation during the coming period of declining fossil fuels” submitted by ten Minnesota churches.

Summary: “Call for Environmental Education and Action”

This resolution calls on all expressions of the United Church of Christ to implement programs for education and action to address issues of environmental protection, environmental justice and sustainable development. It establishes a Task Force (the EETF) to implement this Resolution in close coordination with Justice and Witness Ministries.

In implementing the Resolutions it is the intent of the EETF to assist UCC Congregations and Conferences in the development of programs and initiatives to:

- (1) increase awareness and change public consciousness about our interaction with the natural world, indigenous communities, eco-justice and environmental racism and its consequences;
- (2) promote the study of our Biblical and historical heritage of caring about the environment;
- (3) create regular congregational and/or community venues for discussions about environmental issues, solutions, and alternatives; and why we believe God wants us to be good stewards of all creation;
- (4) focus collective and individual action to transform our society's unsustainable practices and policies for the long-term benefit and survival of all life on earth;
- (5) work vigorously as advocates and activists for the protection and restoration of our local and global environment.

Summary: “Resolution on supporting congregations and providing guidance for stewardship of God’s creation during the coming period of declining fossil fuels”

The Energy Resolution is offered to initiate exploration by the United Church of Christ of the role of the Church in meeting economic, ecological, and consequent spiritual challenges associated with predicted declines in future oil and natural gas supplies. The UCC is asked to begin a long term program to support faith based actions that will foster a movement toward sustainability at the individual church, conference, denominational, and broader societal levels.

It establishes a Task Force (“The UCC Environmental and Energy Task Force – EETF”) to assist UCC congregations and conferences in engaging this fundamental long term problem by (1) encouraging and supporting a network of congregations to increase communication on energy audits and practical steps to reduce use of fossil fuels; (2) assembling a task force to prepare a report on the challenges to the mission of the UCC and its member churches posed by future reductions in energy and associated resources; and (3) commissioning the task force to report to the Twenty-sixth General Synod on its conclusions with proposals for action to support congregations and provide guidance for promoting stewardship of God’s creation during the coming period of declining fossil fuels.

The Environment: as we see it

Destruction of God’s Creation is morally and practically wrong. Destroying eco-systems eliminates the natural systems that nurture all life, both current and future human and non-human species on earth. We recognize that humankind’s unsustainable practices will affect us all sooner or later, but most often first affects our brothers and sisters who are poor, and in disproportionate numbers, people of color, often with little voice in the matter. Beyond that we recognize the death and destruction of entire non-human populations who have no voice at all. Finally, we recognize that all our fates – rich, poor and creature – are inextricably joined.

Definitions

As we seek to understand the problems we face – recognizing that they are problems about human culture and ethics – we are aware of the challenges in defining the word “environment” which is at the heart of our project. In religious communities, the

scientific world, and in the secular environmental movement, there is debate and confusion about the meaning of this word. The way in which we understand the environment, and our relationship with it, is central to any work that we might do in calling our United Church of Christ into environmental ministries.

We find truth in a variety of definitions of “environment” as those have been expressed by members of our task force:

- “‘Environment’ signifies the entire global setting containing all things, organic and inorganic. It includes the lithosphere, the atmosphere and the biosphere; in other words, the inhabited and uninhabited natural world of earth, water and air along with all the things which have been made by all living beings, from coral reefs to skyscrapers, from beaver dams to human dams, from glaciers and lava flows to parking lots and highways.” (Gordon Bates)
- “The Hawaiians as well as other indigenous peoples have always declared that the land is sacred. It has the status of *Papa hanau moku* or ‘Mother Earth’ which provides life, warmth and nourishment. The Hawaiian term *aina* which is often used to describe the land or earth also means that which feeds and provides sustenance. Symbolically, the concept portrays the earth as a mother nursing her young. *Kama’aina*, which we refer to as residents born and raised in Hawaii, literally means ‘land child.’” (Chuck Burrows)
- “Every moment we as individuals choose between taking and giving to the environment and all the life it supports. Sustainability is the condition of balance between our collective taking and giving; that is, a balance that allows us to be knowledgeable participants in, but not disruptors of God’s life evolution process.” (Phil Cook)
- “One central message of Christian faith is God’s creation of the world and God’s love for the world and all its inhabitants, human and nonhuman. This beautiful, fragile earth belongs to God, its Creator, who called it good, not to humankind.” (Barbara Darling-Smith)
- “In Genesis God makes this good world by breathing God’s breath onto the endless sameness of the waters, pushing them back to make space for the profusion of different created things God has imagined for God’s self. . . . Then God calls on God’s own creations of land and sea to participate in the further birthing of the world by bringing forth the inhabitants of earth and water. So God collaborates and there are creatures swarming and teeming Then God gives the creatures the gift of reproduction that they might fill the earth with even more life.” (Betsy Flory)
- “The environment is at once fragile and robust. The environment is dynamic, with an ever-changing ebb and flow of relationships, populations and conditions. Competition and evolution are essential environmental dynamics. . . . As a Christian, my understanding of God, faith and ethics is profoundly relational. God calls us to love and justice; God calls us into right relationship with all of creation.” (Peter Sawtell)

- “When I think of the Environment, I think of the natural systems that nurture us. We pollute the air we breathe and the water we drink, we cut down forests and destroy ancient trees, deplete natural resources, replace agricultural land with roads and shopping malls, fill in wetlands and kill many endangered species. Why do we destroy the natural systems that we need to nurture us, others, our children's children and future generations?” (Hugo Steensma)
- Within the environmental justice movement, the environment is often defined as “the places where we live and work, play and pray.” (from discussions with Justice and Witness Ministries)

As is obvious from the statements above, there is no single understanding of environment among the task force, or likely among any group of people. Yet we believe that considering the combined perspectives brings us closer to identifying the issues that concern us as well as their possible solutions. We also understand that because of the changing and interrelated nature of the processes we are dealing with, any statement on an environmental issue or definition of environment will always be a “work in progress”.

There are many, many terms used to discuss these issues; environmental justice, eco-justice, environmental racism, environmental class-ism, environmental protection, sustainable development, to name a few, are all different ways of talking about the issues and the possible solutions. Whatever set of words you or your community use to talk about the interrelationship of humans and earth systems, this document intends to address you. Further we expect that more ways of talking about humans in the environment will arise and we expect to address those, too. Like life itself, the language to discuss it will continue to grow and change.

Even so, we also find it necessary to limit acceptable definitions of the environment. We do **not** think a definition of the environment is true if it sees human beings and environment as completely separate. Thus, we reject a view of the environment as simply pretty places. We also reject a view which sees creation as simply the backdrop for human activity.

We speak of “the creation” as a holistic expression which encompasses humanity and “nature.” “The creation” is a term which reminds us that humanity and the rest of creation are inseparable parts of one whole.

A History of the UCC and Environmental Issues

For many years, and in many ways, the United Church of Christ has addressed "environmental" issues. Our history is long and complex – and because of that complexity, it is hard to summarize succinctly.

As our Task Force has listened to many people across the denomination who have been involved through the years, and who have passionate environmental interests, we have heard many stories and many perspectives. Rather than trying to harmonize those into one statement of "the history", we find it more fruitful to outline several historical

perspectives. The four expressions of our environmental history listed here all speak truth, even as they describe very different sentiments.

After outlining these perspectives, a few learnings and observations will be presented.

An honorable tradition of leadership

The United Church of Christ has been an early and consistent leader in the cause of environmental justice, and in the fight against environmental racism. Our involvement began with the protest against the establishment of a toxic waste dump in a predominantly Black community in North Carolina – a very visible and ultimately unsuccessful protest. Growing out of that event, the UCC Commission for Racial Justice conducted the now-famous statistical survey on "Toxic Waste and Race" which was completed in 1987, and has now been updated twice. The UCC sponsored two "People of Color Summit Meetings". The first of those meetings generated what is now seen as the classic list of ethical norms for the environmental justice movement.

Staffing to address environmental racism was initially provided by the Commission for Racial Justice (CRJ) with support from the Office for Church in Society (OCIS); staffing is now provided by Justice and Witness Ministries (JWM). Some of the key staff persons involved in this work have been Charles Lee, Ben Chavis, Charles Cobb, Adora Lee, Wally Ryan Kuroiwa and Carlos Correa.

Through the years, the UCC has actively provided support to a variety of grassroots groups addressing specific instances of environmental racism, such as hog farming in North Carolina, the environmental destruction from military activities in Vieques, Puerto Rico, and pollution along the Mexico-US border.

The UCC's emphasis on environmental racism has been strengthened by its relationship to our denomination's strong stands and constituencies related to racial justice, a well-established "issue-based" action strategy, and advocacy methods similar to that used for other justice work within the UCC.

Our work on environmental justice is a strong, ongoing, distinctive, and movement-shaping role of which we can be very proud.

A history of stands and advocacy

Going all the way back to 1959, Synods of the UCC have taken stands on a wide range of environmental issues. On the basis of those policy stances UCC staff in the Washington, DC office (OCIS and JWM) have often engaged in advocacy around environmental issues, and the UCC action networks (now JPAN) have lifted up environmental causes.

Between 2001 and 2003, Terry Yasuko Ogawa served as an intern with JWM, providing broad environmental programming across the denomination. She helped convene a meeting of the "environment table" in December, 2001, bringing together members of the national staff from all four Covenanted Ministries to build awareness and cooperation for existing environmental programs.

The UCC has participated in ecumenical efforts for environmental education and advocacy, especially through its relationship with the National Council of Churches. The UCC, through staff at the Pension Boards, brought a strong emphasis on the use

of socially responsible investing principles to advocate for pro-environmental policies and behaviors from corporations. Wider Church Ministries has often embedded ecological and eco-justice principles in its work with partner churches around the world.

The environment has been one issue among many that the UCC has addressed through the years. These stands have been consistent with our long-standing record of prophetic resolutions and advocacy.

A grassroots movement that stalled

The UCC Network for Environmental and Economic Responsibility (NEER) is a grassroots effort with a broad eco-justice agenda. In the late 1980s and early 90s, NEER was a prominent and effective agent for environmental organizing and advocacy, both in the UCC and ecumenically.

NEER was active in promoting "Whole Earth Churches" on the model of "Just Peace Churches", and over 300 congregations made that declaration. The group led efforts for environmental prominence in the Synod priority for "The Integrity of Creation, Justice and Peace".

NEER gathered a large delegation of UCC members to attend the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio, and organized several regional conferences for education and leadership training. NEER continues to be a recognized constituency at General Synods, where it gives voice to the interconnection between ecological sustainability and peace and justice concerns for human communities.

NEER's impact across the years has been diminished by its inability to maintain an ongoing, dynamic network of churches and individuals. The "network" now exists only through a small steering committee, and the presence at General Synod.

A story of inaction and resistance

In spite of a long list of General Synod resolutions, NEER's grassroots organizing and the presence of Whole Earth churches, and cooperation with ecumenical environmental efforts, the UCC has ranged from tepid to resistant in addressing environmental issues. Other than the strong, specific focus on environmental racism, the national expressions of the UCC have provided little in the way of moral leadership or supportive resources for this cause.

In the late 1990s, when seven volunteer "Eco-Justice Coordinators" were appointed to work with conferences, no funding or support was provided from OCIS. A review of printed materials available from United Church Resources shows an embarrassing shortage of publications. The UCC website provides virtually no information or help for those who wish to explore environmental issues or theology.

The denominational response to several Synod resolutions has been perceived by some as exceptionally weak. Members of the Collegium – who speak strongly on many other issues – are rarely heard to even mention environmental issues in public settings. The UCC has often been absent in "signing on" to important environmental statements of the ecumenical church.

The historic weakness of the UCC witness on environmental issues seems to be tied to confusion or conflict about core understandings of what is meant by "the environment," and by a sense that some ecologically-grounded issues are in conflict

with long-standing UCC commitments to racial or economic justice. Furthermore, a broad environmental commitment requires a long-term confessional approach which differs from the more confrontational style of issue advocacy that has been central to the UCC's justice work. Some environmental issues challenge notions of progress and freedom which are deep-seated in the UCC.

While the UCC is generally seen as one of the most engaged and committed denominations on matters of peace and justice, the environment has not been included in that history of vibrant engagement.

There is truth within all four of these accounts, and there are constituencies within the UCC who give clear voice to each of these perspectives. Even as our denomination has provided exceptional leadership in some parts of the environmental cause, we have been exceptionally weak in others. At times, denominational staff and networks have done well at lifting up environmental concerns, and at other times, those voices have not been clear or effective.

In comparing these four historical perspectives, a few observations about successes and failures offer guidance and context for future efforts.

- Our ministries have been most visible, durable and effective when they have been tied to active support from denominational staff and agencies.
- Our ministries have been most vibrant when they have meshed with other social justice issues, approaches and constituencies. They have been least visible when there have been perceived or actual conflicts between ethical principles, strategies for advocacy, and the interests of core groups within the denomination.
- Our ministries have been at their best when there is an active, vocal and well-organized constituency which holds the denomination to high expectations. Our ministries have suffered when those constituencies have been disorganized, fragmented or passive.

Current Environmental Focus Areas

Each year the Environmental Justice Program of the UCC Justice and Witness Ministries chooses focus issues for the coming several years' work. The focus areas below reflect the Environmental Justice Program's stated intention to address inequalities which result from human settlement, industrial contamination and development as well as reflecting the EETF's special interest in climate change and the urgent need for a move away from fossil fuels.

Energy and Climate Change

Since the approval of a resolution on declining fossil fuels, the reality of how fossil fuel use contributes to a myriad of societal and ecological problems has grown in the public consciousness. For many, the effects are now observable and the predictions of climate change and consequent environmental damage alarming. Less observable are the consequences of the depletion of fossil fuel reserves, particularly for oil and natural gas.

While recent increases in energy costs have captured much attention, it is difficult to comprehend a world in which oil and natural gas demand exceeds available supplies. Discussions under the “Peak Oil concept” have recognized the need for all humanity to prepare, years in advance, for the use of sustainable energy, while maintaining the biosphere’s life support systems. Some experts believe oil production is already entering a plateau that will precede an irreversible decline in oil availability. Cheap energy is one of the main presumptions on which our global economy functions. Without it, scarcity becomes the norm and competition exacerbates geopolitical instability and human suffering, especially among people already living in poverty. Therefore, it is our duty as people of faith to explore ways to prepare for a future in which energy costs will be much greater and local to global community solidarity a critical need. It should not surprise us that the development of alternative and sustainable energy sources for all will require us to reduce our energy consumption. We can go forward strengthened by the knowledge that this will also benefit our environment, the well-being of our Churches, and be the most positive response possible to reduce the severity of climate change.

We on the task force believe that global climate changes of the scope predicted by the current science constitute the greatest challenge before humankind – a challenge which will affect all life on earth. Already serious and irreparable damage has been done to ecosystems, water supplies, agriculture, and weather patterns. One need only look to the communities of the Gulf Coast to see the economic and social impact of relatively local extreme weather events. As sea level rises, permafrost melts, and droughts increase, people and wildlife are already being displaced from long established habitats. Perhaps not fully realized is the intricate negative interplay possible between projected energy resource limitations and the ability for people to cope with the cumulative effects of a rapidly changing climate. The 100,000 people displaced by the local event of Katrina may swell to many millions worldwide at the very time when the resources needed to repair damage and bring aid to the suffering may be shrinking.

Clearly, our faith must be mobilized to look into the future of humanity and the biosphere. We must accept God’s mandate to be good stewards of the earth. We will continue working to spread appreciation and wise use of the great energy resource gifts still at our disposal and to prepare the way for future generations.

The task force will provide a vision for future UCC actions and policy recommendations, as well as provide resources for congregations and conferences that will help educate, prepare, and facilitate positive responses related to the critical issues of energy depletion and climate change. A full report will be available from Justice and Witness Ministries.

Water

We may live on a planet that glows blue from space as a result of our many oceans, but only two per cent of the water on our planet is fresh and can be drunk or used for bathing or farming. Of that two per cent, half is inaccessible or contaminated by industrial or farming pollution. Many times, human use and abuse of available water leaves rivers dry or so polluted or depleted the species natural to its depths and banks perish. Time and

again we have seen that ecosystem degradation and species loss is a harbinger of calamity for the human members of the ecosystem, too.

Access to clean drinking water is far from assured in huge numbers of human communities. But the problem is worsened by the privatization of water supplies by multinational corporations. What should be a gift of God's good creation to all God's creatures becomes a commodity to be bought and sold by the highest bidder. In many places, the poor simply cannot afford the minimum amounts of water they need for hygiene and drinking. Leaving enough water for healthy rivers and streams and their non-paying, non-human communities isn't even a consideration. And the trend is spreading, with serious implications for all human communities and the ecosystems of which they are a part.

These concerns are summarized in a pioneering ecumenical documentary entitled "Troubled Waters," which was produced and aired in selected areas of the United States in collaboration with ABC-TV in October, 2006. Film crews traveled to the Middle East, Bolivia, Brazil and US cities such as Boston, Milwaukee and Washington, D.C. The Rev. Wally Kuroiwa of Justice and Witness Ministries was the project producer. Contact the Justice and Witness Ministries Office on the availability of the "Troubled Waters" DVD.

Toxic Waste

The UCC's eye-opening 1987 report "*Toxic Waste and Race*" described in the "History" section of this report had far-reaching effects after its release. But twenty years later, communities of color still remain the most likely to be the site of toxic waste dumps and disposal facilities. Much remains to be done.

To that end the report has been updated and revised. The new report will be released and both the new and original authors honored at General Synod XXVI and at the Caring for Earth Conference preceding Synod. Thereafter, both reports will be available from Justice and Witness Ministries.

Globalization

Globalization encompasses numerous things. It can refer to the interaction and sharing of cultures on many levels, some from deliberate colonialism or imperialism, some happening randomly through tourism and the internet. Globalization can mean the growing international economic and political influence of modern corporations, some good, some destructive. It can even encompass the gradual evolution of an increasingly homogeneous civil society around the world, a goal hoped for by some, feared by others.

Globalization also includes the cumulative impact of the above factors upon the environment, incrementally or massively. That impact has been beneficial for a relatively small segment of humanity. But it has been destructive, unjust and ultimately lethal for many, many more. Globalization has already had the following negative effects, among many others, on environments of many regions of the world:

- The shipping of toxic wastes from highly industrialized countries to less developed nations who are unaware of the deliveries or unable to prevent them;
- The wholesale depletion of rain forests in the tropics as foreign corporations purchase timber rights from governments that disregard the rights of the communities that reside in the forests, and as land is cleared for cattle to satisfy the world-wide demand for meat;
- The creation of free-trade agreements which often preclude legislative environmental protections;
- The deliberate movement by multi-national corporations of environmentally harmful activities from countries which require accountability for such operations to countries which cannot or do not have such protections.

To these could be added the unfettered globalized exploitation of minerals, fresh water and fossil fuels; the uncaring elimination of wetlands; the unnecessary damming of rivers; the excessive generation of carbon dioxide; and vast ecological injustices inflicted on those helpless to fight for their human rights. All these actions are grounded on the assumption that unlimited industrialization and a similar expansion of transportation and consumption of goods remains the only viable path nations and corporations can follow.

A new report will call the UCC to a radical reassessment of that assumption. It challenges the consequent destructive aspects of globalization and advocates a set of personal and corporate actions and lifestyles - beginning with our own congregations - that will better care for the earth now and hopefully assure that future generations will have a fertile and sustainable earth to inherit.

Resources for Churches and Other Expressions of the UCC

The EETF is called on to locate and/or create resources for education and action outlined in the resolution which created it. Nothing could be more central to the task than theological resources. Just as we have found truth in these diverse understandings of environment and creation, we recognize the theological diversity among faithful Christians, and in particular, among faithful members of the United Church of Christ. Yet within that diversity, we acknowledge what we share in common.

THEOLOGY

Our Affirmation

Creation is God's handiwork and God treasures it. The Earth, and the universe of which it is a part, belongs to God. Creation is alive and dynamic, full of life. It exists in relationship with God, and has moral standing – the integrity of creation means it has meaning in and of itself.

Human beings are called by God to “be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:28). We believe that means we are to inhabit the creation within its natural limits. Human beings are called in Genesis 2:15 to “till the garden and keep it.” We believe that means to maintain the fragile order given to us. God's desire for *shalom* (a Hebrew word for peace,

wholeness and health) encompasses the whole creation; God calls human beings to live together with each other and with all other creatures in *shalom*.

Our Confession

When we ignore the integrity of creation we break shalom and find ourselves using up and defiling the creation, deceiving ourselves that we are separate from it. The Book of Revelation spoke judgment to the political and economic systems of that day. We too name economic globalization and corporate agriculture as significant parts of how humanity tries to pretend that it is separate from the rest of creation.

All through the Hebrew scriptures, wherever human relationships are out of balance, the natural world suffers. In our times, whenever we violate the integrity of creation, we are also harming human communities, especially the most vulnerable of humans.

We acknowledge that the evolutionary universe is constantly changing. Trying to preserve things just as they are is impossible. But there is a natural pacing and flow to that change which humanity is forcing at absurd, destructive rates, which is morally unacceptable and sinful.

Our Hope

Our UCC tradition teaches us that new ways of thinking, and the in-breaking of the light, are possible. Indeed, we expect it. We are promised reconciliation, a new heaven and a new earth; because we believe those promises we are able to shape a way of life and community that should be sustainable. We have practices in our tradition that point us in that direction. One example of such a practice is the Eucharist, a common meal, where we share a table blessing open to all. We cannot exploit someone who sits at the table with us. We hold up the many rituals we have that honor the body: ritual bath (baptism), laying on of hands, Jesus' healing practices. We affirm that benediction, the powerful ritual practice of concluding our worship, means sending people out to re-create community. Retreats and pilgrimages engage us with places and remind us that human life is a journey toward transformation. We celebrate the blessings of the animals, and Sabbath-keeping, the weekly practice which reminds us that all of creation needs a periodic rest.

Our seeking for justice is born out of the conviction that human systems should reflect God's desire for Shalom and that we should work for that. Our deepest meaning and value and joy come in seeking to do and be shaped by God's will--not in simply finding a pragmatic solution to environmental problems such as pollution control. We place our hope in the ultimate power of God's will as we in turn hope for reconciliation and Shalom.

Within the United Church of Christ, the ecumenical church and other faith traditions, there are many theological perspectives which bring distinctive styles and insights to environmental ethics and spirituality. It is important to note that almost every recognized "camp" of Christian theology is taking heed of the ecological crisis, and addressing this as core matters of faith and ethics.

All of these environmentally-concerned Christian voices are saying from different perspectives that we must face up to the fundamental flaw in the human relationship to the earth. This environmental crisis is not just another issue to deal with; this is a challenge that we have to face up to in all the ways that we “do church,” in all the ways we *are* the church.

As a recent (February, 2005) statement from the National Council of Churches said:

We believe that caring for creation must undergird, and be entwined with, all other dimensions of our churches’ ministries. We are convinced that it is no longer acceptable to claim to be “church” while continuing to perpetuate, or even permit, the abuse of Earth as God’s creation.

We are calling church leaders in every expression of the United Church of Christ to name these vital problems and to frame them theologically; to say, “We care,” and to make that concern central to our self-understanding as the United Church of Christ. We also call on church leaders to name an alternative reality, to inspire us to believe in – and work toward living out – another paradigm for a more sustainable ecological relationship between humans and the rest of creation. This context of committed and prophetic leadership forms the basis for the specific items on our list of programmatic recommendations.

PROGRAMMATIC RECOMMENDATIONS

The EETF has adopted general guidelines for choosing the resources and services to be offered to the denomination. Resources will be geared for the assumed three levels of congregational understanding and commitment: beginners who are just being presented with the issues and becoming educated, inquiring congregations that have done basic education and are investigating at a deeper level so as to find ways to respond, and committed congregations that are already involved in advocacy and life-style changes.

Particular emphasis will be placed on materials useful for youth and young adults, as they are most likely to bear the brunt of either success or failure. Careful attention will be paid to the disproportionate environmental damage done in poor communities and communities of color. Preference will be given to recommending a few high-quality resources. Resources and services will be chosen with an eye to their pedagogical value. Attention will be paid to experiential learning, retreats and immersions. Attention will be paid to both the local and the global dimensions of environmental issues. Priority will be given to creating networks of involved churches. We will use existing structures within the UCC to disseminate these commitments and weave them into the UCC ethos. (See the Policy/Polity section) Finally, but most importantly, we will remember that our ultimate goal is transformation. We are dealing with a soul-sickness that can only be healed by God’s transformation of our values and beliefs. Above all things we seek to embody Jesus’ practices of Shalom.

In the Public Sphere:

Christians share many activities with others who would protect the environment: recycling, reusing items instead of always buying new; refusing toxic pesticides and germicides; and rethinking the unsustainable patterns of our lives and our culture. We also share with others the citizen's responsibility to monitor our legislators as well as elect them: advocating for laws and public policies that protect the earth; speaking out against legislation that permits corporations or individuals to pollute in search of profits or that promotes "urban sprawl" and the accompanying damage to the earth.

Numerous environmental groups - such as the Sierra Club, the Natural Resources Defense Council, Earth Charter Initiative, Friends of the Earth, The Nature Conservancy, Union of Concerned Scientists, Familia Agricola, Pesticide Action Network, and WorldWatch Institute to name a few - have developed extensive web-based resources. Using these resources, one can audit a church's energy practices, measure a family's environmental footprint, or find out how much water it takes to raise a pound of beef. You can find information on peak oil or locate Community Supported Agriculture options from which to buy locally grown foods. The point is, there are plenty of existing secular organizations who have developed excellent educational tools and mobilization resources. We should take care to join with them for change. We do so because we acknowledge their expertise, share many of their concerns, agree with many of their conclusions and suggested reforms, and want to bear our part in shaping the public response made to these various crises and dilemmas.

However, we do so also because of our Gospel-led desire to join with others in facing and redressing the injustices created by our own actions: injustices done to the many poor and vulnerable groups of people who lack the political voice to resist; injustices done to our fellow species which have no voice at all and no protections from human greed and their own extinctions; injustices done to the planet itself, facing the destruction of its natural cycles and its ability to sustain life.

Within the Local Congregation:

As Christians in the UCC, we have much that we can do within our local congregations that is our particular contribution to a sustainable environment for future generations:

- Integrating environmental care and concern into worship; scriptural teachings, sermons, hymns and prayers all must be instruments of weekly concern and commitment, not just annual Earth Day services.
- Integrating environment care into the educational patterns of the church; Curricula, videos and DVD's are available for all age groups.
- Integrating the arts into the life and worship of the church; appropriate visual art can remind church members of God's call to be stewards of creation, inspire the desire to cherish the beauty of creation, and highlight the interrelationship of humanity and creation.

- Integrating environmental lay ministries into the life of the congregation; recognize and celebrate professional and volunteer involvement of church members in environmental activities to raise the level of consciousness in all our congregations.
- Integrating responsible stewardship of natural resources into all aspects of congregational life; encouraging the church's use of environmentally friendly electricity, heating and cooling, paper, plastics, cups, lawn chemicals; and the avoidance of hazardous products. Urging congregants to take similar steps in their homes and workplaces.
- Integrating ecological concerns in pastoral care practices; developing ways to address feelings of helplessness about ecological damage, indicating ways to redress the harm and foster hope, whether the damage is from an intense storm or the loss of a job to globalization.
- Lifting up the implicit ecological integrity already present in traditional Christian spiritual disciplines and practices; simplicity, Sabbath-keeping, Eucharist and Baptism, among many others, are already deeply ingrained in our tradition. They are intrinsically sustainable practices when congregations are taught to understand them that way.
- Integrating "green" standards into our churches' decision-making processes; initiating "green" oversight of all church processes and connection with "green" organizations and resources from outside the congregation.
- Integrating ecologically and socially responsible investing principles into the stewardship policies of our local churches; financial investment decisions in many local churches are still made solely for their profit potential rather than on the basis of how the funds are being used. Environmental impact must become one of the major standards for Christian investment policies.
- Integrating Christian eco-justice ethical considerations into any political advocacy that is offered publicly or within the larger church; the writings of theologians John B. Cobb Jr., Sallie McFague, Larry Rasmussen, Rosemary Radford Ruether, John Haught, Dieter T. Hessel - along with environmental writers such as Thomas Berry, Rachel Carson, Gretel Ehrlich, Loren Eiseley and Wendell Berry - offer spiritual depth and valuable insights into the implications of the gospel for the environment. After doing our homework, seek the help of Conference staff to develop resolutions on the environment and on energy usage for consideration at Conference meetings. Remember that in UCC polity such resolutions or declarations speak *to* the churches and not *for* the churches. In the public forum, advocacy based on Christian ethics and biblical justice can support and give depth and balance to advocates who speak strictly from a love of nature or from a scientific analysis of the crises such as fossil fuel depletion and global warming.

- Encouraging ecological awareness in vacations and business trips of members of the congregation including reducing or eliminating unnecessary travel. Encouraging congregants to get in direct touch with the environments around them – to open grateful eyes on the one hand to the diversity of systems that weave the global biosphere; and on the other hand to be aware of the threats to their existence; to see with compassionate eyes the ecological degradation, exploitation and destruction that often precedes or accompanies the creation of popular vacation destinations. Christians cannot be content to relax and vacation, knowingly or unknowingly, on the backs of the poor and dispossessed, whose lives are destroyed by the expropriation of their beaches and property, by the subversion of local economies and by the restrictions that make such resorts accessible only to those who can afford them. These are quite literally matters of life and death and as such cannot fall outside the scope of our concerns.

In short, it is imperative that we integrate, on all levels of our daily lives, our justice and ecological concerns. We perceive the world as a nexus of relationships, and recognize that we are not called as Christians to a series of discrete and disconnected actions in one area of crisis or another. None of us can participate in every potential action. But all of us can acknowledge that all nature and all of human life are woven together in a seamless web. To ignore that fact is to bury our heads in the sand of willful ignorance. “God so loved the *world* . . .” (John 3.16) must be the foundation of all we do in caring for the environment that God has provided for all living beings.

In order to disseminate these resources and recommendations the EETF is developing means to communicate with local churches through existing bodies within the UCC. We are developing a section on the UCC website which will include articles, references, suggested links and other helpful materials. We will make use of LCM mailings, church bulletin inserts and the *United Church News* to get the word out. Additionally we are developing a list of contacts in each Conference so that there is a “go-to” person for environmental events and programs developed by the UCC. And there is an LCM staff member assigned to our task force to help facilitate our communication with the local churches and Conferences.

Public Policy

The UCC can be proud of our commitment to speak not only to our churches, but also to the world beyond our denominational structures. This sense of relevant engagement is embedded within our core beliefs, which are listed on the "**What Is the UCC?**" page of the UCC website. Perhaps most pertinent to our purposes are the principles which state that there is yet more light and truth to break forth from biblical interpretation and our lived experience, and the call for Christians to work for a just and peaceful world.

Beyond the general guidance of our central principles, the particulars of denominational policy are shaped and directed by resolutions made and passed at General Synods. Such a resolution created this task force. An important aspect of this process is the "bottom up" route proposals usually take to the General Synod floor. Most often such resolutions

originate within local congregations, are honed there or at Conference levels, and then presented to the national body for consideration or reworking in committee before they are taken to vote at General Synod. In theory, any resolution which is discussed and passed at General Synod already has built-in local support for its implementation at the national level. Our polity provides that national policy is informed by local congregational concerns.

Within the UCC, much of our interest in public policy matters is expressed through legislative advocacy. Decisions about which policy issues to address are informed by Synod resolutions, and also are shaped informally in response to the secular legislative agendas to which our UCC advocacy staff must respond. This raises two important points about policy and polity. First, policy is considerably affected by national budget for staffing. The denomination can only field so many advocates with available budget and must therefore concentrate on restricted numbers of bills, according to the staff available to do the work. Actual denominational policy may not always get the staff time its proponents would hope for, though our advocates do a worthy job of representing UCC positions in Washington DC, with the available resources.

Second, policy choices are often affected by whether or not the UCC can join with other denominations or faiths in working toward a preferred outcome. The broader the base of support, the more clout there is behind advocacy efforts, making the most of UCC staff energies and resources. Our staff in Washington DC often works in close collaboration with their ecumenical and interfaith colleagues. The UCC remains an active and critical part of the Environment and Energy Group of the Washington Interfaith Staff Community, an advocacy mechanism for the religious community, and our staff advocate, Mari Castellanos, is an officer of the National Council of Churches Eco-Justice Working Group.

Our strong sense of inter-denominational cooperation led to a decision at the denominational level that has had unintended – and we believe unfortunate – results. Budget considerations at the time of the UCC's restructuring required hard choices about which issues could receive major attention in staff portfolios. In an effort to maintain our distinctive witness on environmental racism, and to reduce duplication of efforts between denominations, the UCC effectively divided issues under the umbrella of "environment" into two separate sets of concerns: (1) those which were perceived to affect the state of natural systems, or which have diffuse impacts on humans, and (2) those which were perceived to have direct and disproportionate impact on human groups – especially marginalized ones. The UCC decided to leave those issues perceived to have less direct bearing on human groups – sometimes called "earth justice" – to the ecumenical environmental policy program at the National Council of Churches, while retaining its own staff persons dedicated to environmental racism and human justice issues.

The result of this decision to divide environmental concerns into two camps has been that the UCC does not have staff devoted to publicizing specifically UCC positions on key ecological or "earth justice" issues. Rather we opt to "sign on" to NCC statements, and to defer to the NCC in the development of church resources. These ecumenical documents

are poorly publicized within the UCC. As a result, we often appear to the public eye – and to our own churches – to be silent on matters of great significance. We have failed to develop a clearly UCC voice for speaking about the whole interconnected range of challenges that face us.

As a task force, we hold that the strong distinctions between "human justice" and "earth justice" are artificial and only serve to hamper work toward a just and peaceful planet. Our denomination has done an admirable and necessary job of lifting up the sins of environmental racism and other social abuses related to ecological issues. But we worry that the circle of concern has been drawn too narrowly to continue to effectively advocate for human justice. Human beings are inextricably a part of the environment. We are not separate from it in any fashion. By way of example, we can point to any number of social justice abuses prior to and following Katrina's visit to the coast, such as the large number of hazardous materials storage areas and dumps in communities of color, the location of the poor in the lowest-lying areas, etc. All of these need to be addressed. But had the circle of concern been drawn more broadly in years past, to include advocacy for coastal ecosystems (i.e., preservation of habitat for species, preservation of natural wetland systems which moderate and limit storm surges, runoff and wind damage, preservation of the folkways and local economies which were founded on these eco-systems prior to the "development" of the wetlands, and the destruction of which contributed to the large concentrations of poor in the city) the scope and the disproportionate human costs would have been greatly reduced. The fact of the matter is if we wait to take action until we are wrangling over the location of hazardous wastes, we have waited too long to prevent injury and injustice. In order to care properly and justly for our human communities we must care properly and justly for our broader earth community.

Among the many Synod resolutions on environmental topics, and other denominational documents, there does not appear to be any explicit, guiding statement of the UCC's definition of "the environment" and humankind's proper relationship with it. As noted above, our advocacy positions and internal policies are primarily driven from a human justice perspective, alone, without giving heed to the need for protection of the earth for its own sake. By way of example of this mindset, a quote in the sidebar on p.8 of JWM's 2005 Briefing Book, an excerpt from a General Synod 11 resolution, states that the resolution being offered is an attempt to broaden the understanding of John 3:16, "God so loved the world." Remarkably, the speaker broadens the interpretation of "world" from "Christians and well-behaved people" to "all people", completely overlooking the planet which constitutes our world and the many other beings with whom we share it.

It seems, then, necessary and faithful to consider adopting an explicit UCC statement on environment which can bring together our concerns for human justice and for the whole web of life. The sharp division of environmental concerns – some handled within the denomination, and some outsourced to the NCC – has not served our churches well. There must be a more integrated approach.

The ability to address environmental concerns across the life of the church has been hampered by the structure of the covenanted ministries. The environment has generally

been considered an "issue" for public witness, and thus assigned to JWM. Environmental considerations have only rarely been featured within the other ministries.

It appears that incorporation of policy into the broader denominational culture was at one time handled by such bodies as inter-ministry "tables", at which representatives of the varied instrumentalities of the UCC discuss the challenges and opportunities for furthering specific policies in their own spheres of influence. Such discussions seem essential to the implementation of corporate change. However, while notes from the 2002 inter-ministry environment table were full of interesting and perceptive ideas about raising awareness of environment, it was also striking that most suggestions about implementation were directed outside the national body. There was little mention of ways the national offices themselves might become "greener" in their behavior or model practices which bear in mind their impact on the earth, therefore modeling more just societies.

As a means of bringing environmental perspectives into the whole church, we are recommending that the Task Force have a section on the UCC website for these issues, as well as links to additional sites. Further, the Task Force is seeking standing as a permanent body within the UCC to better advocate for the "greening" of the denomination.

At this point in time, policy is integrated into UCC corporate culture by communication (formal and informal) between instrumentalities. Currently Local Church Ministries includes five teams: Evangelism, Stewardship and Church Finance, Worship and Education, Publications, Resources and Distribution, and Parish Life and Leadership. Our task force may best inform both the corporate UCC culture and the local congregations through conversations and education with the LCM teams. For example: the task force might encourage or provide resources to the Stewardship team with their existing green building program, or meet with the Publications team to encourage the development of appropriate written resources. We might develop curricula that could be used by Worship and Education or help Youth and Young Adult ministries develop eco-themed immersions. An LCM liaison has been appointed to our task force who will help us make these connections. It is possible to make use of UCC monthly mailings and the *United Church News* for additional advertisement and education about resources and issues. Additionally, we have the opportunity to help shape JWM priorities for each year, in conversation with our contact person, Dr. Correa, and to advocate for the full incorporation of environmental concerns into the work of JWM. To these ends the task force is seeking standing as a permanent body within the UCC. As noted in the history section, environmental advocacy has been most effective when there has been a staff person formally (and enthusiastically) related to the efforts, and when those efforts have been successfully organized and integrated into the larger denominational outlook.

We suspect that the internal corporate culture of the denomination may be slow to turn inward and take a look at its own daily practices for sustainability. It seems likely that the most visible way of encouraging that assessment is with the polity tools already at our disposal. Perhaps a resolution concerning the greening of the national offices is in order.

Local/Public

According to the UCC Briefing Book on advocacy issues in the nation's capitol, the choice of which issues to pursue is driven by the body of resolutions built up through the years at General Synods. As the denomination articulates a stance on an issue, the UCC advocates at the public level for legislation and government policy which will serve the denominational priorities of a just and peaceful society for all. But anyone who has made a foray into the UCC archives will know that the array of resolutions and accompanying commentary is mind-boggling – and stretches over 50 years of changing understandings of the in-breaking of new light. Additionally, these resolutions either sketch concerns very broadly, or address very specific situations. There is need for interpretation in order to apply these resolutions to new issues, actions and behaviors. We are still not clear how the specific issues are chosen which will receive the UCC's time and energy for advocacy. In other words, how did ANWR make it into the briefing book? And why did the debates over the use of Extreme Low Frequency sonar, for example, not receive UCC attention?

Much of this has been discussed in preceding sections of the report. The choices are shaped by a combination of formal policy, available personnel and budgets and the arenas in which the questions are being settled. But it is necessary to add that this task force was commissioned by a General Synod resolution to inform just such decisions. Specifically this task force is to "develop policies and procedures to identify, prioritize and take action on the environmental subjects covered in this Resolution and to define and suggest actions to be taken by the UCC denomination and /or its Congregations and Conferences." We have been commissioned specifically to help articulate the policies which inform advocacy decisions concerning the environment, addressing our concerns through JWM, and staying in frequent and in-depth communication with JWM staff.

Additionally, we are to "implement such policies and procedures" as the task force has identified and prioritized. We understand that to mean at the level of the local congregation that we will help resource any congregation that chooses to act on the resolution, pointing them towards appropriate materials, persons or events to foster their education and appropriate action. Further, we can suggest areas of policy advocacy that congregations might attend to in their local settings, even if they are beyond the scope of our national advocacy staff's focus area. Again, we will work through existing instrumentalities of LCM to further these goals.

Many questions remain; how are necessary resources and services that may not coincide neatly with an existing instrumentality offered to local congregations? Does the task force have a budget? How does the task force receive and evaluate feedback on what it is offering? How does it measure the success or failure of its efforts? How is that feedback and evaluation looped back into conversations about advocacy policy? Much remains to be decided, but we have made a solid start on defining the relationship between policy and polity.

Task Force

The preceding paragraphs outline the issues which face the task force in its external workings. Thus far, the process of defining and prioritizing policy issues *within* the task force has been done by articulating personal theologies, community-building and consensus. There are a wide range of theologies and personal backgrounds among our task force. Our time to speak to one another has been limited and hampered by lack of face-to-face communication. But significant work has been done despite – and often because of – the challenges of difference and distance we face.

Within our group, we have agreed to hold in mind the pedagogical value of various issues when we are faced with choices about how to divide energy and resources. We have agreed to keep in mind that human justice and caring for the earth are one and the same action. We have agreed to try and learn to see systems rather than single issues as we gather resources and develop positions. We have agreed on a number of guidelines for choosing resources, which can be found in the resource report.

Some task force subcommittees have made their work easier by adopting a theological statement with which to ground their decisions. The theological focus on God and God's purposes calls us beyond pragmatics and politics. For we recognize that no policy or polity, no matter how well thought out or how well implemented, will accomplish the work we have been called to if it is not accompanied by our willingness to be transformed – personally, corporately and socially.

It is the primary purpose of the Task Force to identify or develop resources and initiatives to support individual Churches and Conferences in their activities focused on education and action related to the areas of the environment, eco-justice and sustainable development. It will do so in close coordination with Justice & Witness and Local Church Ministries.

The Task Force currently consists of 14 members representing different Conferences and geographical areas, ranging from Puerto Rico to Hawaii. In addition, while most ministries that are a part of the Council for Racial and Ethnic Ministries are represented, as well as GLBT diversity, it is the goal of the Task Force to ensure that all of the UCC's constituencies are represented. The Task Force does its work through different sub groups, which are focused on specific areas of interest. The Task Force "meets" approximately every 5 weeks by teleconference, and once a year in person. Its first face-to-face meeting was held in Berkeley California in July 2006. The next in person meeting will take place during the General Synod, in Hartford Connecticut, in June 2007. Please contact us if you have an interest in serving on the Task Force or one of its sub groups.

Brief overview of plans and initiatives for 2007 - 2009

The following is not an exhaustive list of the activities of the task force in the coming two years, but it is a starting point for a sustained work of education and mobilization within our denomination.

- 1) Organize a Pre-Synod (GSXXVI) Conference on June 21, 2007: “Caring for Earth”, open to all interested pastors and laity. This conference will provide thought-provoking theological and practical resources.

- 2) Identify and Develop Resources for Congregations
 - Ideas on how to start environmental action in parishes
 - Worship Resources
 - Education Resources: biblical, educational and scientific
 - Media Resources: suggested websites, books and video’s / DVD’s
 - Suggestions for individual and congregational action, for example:
 - Fair trade products (coffee / tea / other);
 - Recycling programs
 - Energy Audits
 - Hike, reflect and learn – ecological and experiential education
 - Forum / discussion group / workshop on environmental subjects for adults
 - Youth and Sunday School programs

- 3) Develop Communication Networks:
 - User-friendly web site within www.UCC.org
 - Create and circulate written materials (UCC News; regular mail etc)
 - Write text for four Sunday Bulletins
 - Create an e-mail list of interested pastors and laity
 - Create or locate materials for environmental presentations to
 - Conferences and Associations
 - Create studies on related issues, such as “Globalization and its Consequences”

- 4) Coordinate our work with other entities such as:
 - Like-minded faith-based and secular organizations
 - The UCC’s Faith and Technology Task Force

- 5) Working through or alongside Justice and Witness Ministries to develop and/or coordinate public policy positions and action to be taken by the UCC

- 6) Continue the work and current structure of the EETF

- 7) Identify and recommend an organizational structure for the ongoing work of the EETF beyond the General Synod in 2009.

Conclusion

We may well be facing the greatest moral and theological challenge of our human history. Our tradition tells us it is God’s intention for the world to be filled with life in all its myriad manifestations. Yet the behavior of our single human species threatens God’s intention for life for all of us. In the process of flouting God’s intention we create all kinds of suffering for ourselves and our fellow species. As UCC members, as Christians,

as people of faith, we must confess our complicity in these sins and repent of our ways. We must take action as Christians. But we must also take action simply as human beings who have common cause with all other human beings for the love and preservation of this good earth.

To that end, the Environment and Energy Task Force calls on the United Church of Christ to commit to the denomination-wide education and actions recommended in this report. Further, we urge the UCC in all its expressions to thoroughly examine its practices in light of Jesus' commands for simplicity and love of neighbor to see what light breaks through that would aid incorporation of environmental awareness and stewardship into every aspect of our corporate life. Further, we urge that the UCC continue its long-standing practice of ecumenical and interfaith action that we might all work together for the healing, restoration and preservation of God's beloved world.



“Never place a period where God has placed a comma”

Gracie Allen