Paul, the Apostle, is disturbed. In Galatia the Christians are reverting back to legalistic rule-based religion. And in such religion, those who best hold to the rules justify themselves and then control the less capable. The liberating Gospel of Jesus, counters Paul, is summed up in one law—Love your neighbor as yourself. Contrast Gospel freedom with the self-indulgent pseudo-freedom that pervades much of our present society. Paul lists vices that are self-loving rather than other-loving. Paul then follows with a list of fruits of The Spirit, namely love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (Galatians 5:16-26)

The recently held national election campaign has stoked sharp division, anger, and fear. The profound freedom and rebirthed hope we have through the resurrection power of Jesus calls us to counter division with reconciliation, anger with forgiveness, and fear with love as we focus on God's justice, peace, and restoration (Ephesians 1:10).
Using Our Freedom To Liberate by Allen Johnson, Editor

Freedom. This simple two syllable word, “freedom,” or its companion synonym, “liberty,” symbolizes in the minds and hearts of American citizens our country, our way of life, our hopes and ambitions. School children learn early on that the birth of the United States freed people from tyrannical rule because “all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” Further school lessons point out struggles for racial equality as epitomized by Martin Luther King’s ringing hope, “Free at last, free at last, thank God Almighty, I’m free at last.” Soldiers’ job is to defend freedom. The American Flag is a revered symbol of freedom.

Many of our competing political battles and court cases revolve around ideological definitions and applications of “freedom.” “Rights” are promoted as liberty axioms. Gun rights, gay rights, unborn baby rights, abortion rights, business rights, labor rights, property rights, animal rights, children’s rights, voting rights, states’ rights—these are examples that encompass some of the left to right spectrum.

Pop culture offers its definitions of freedom. Janis Joplin sang, “Freedom’s just another word for nothin’ left to lose.” Movies, television, and print media increasingly justify more explicit sex, profanity, and violence as freedom for artistic expression and emancipation from censoring prudery.

Freedom is a central theme throughout The Bible. Tempted and deceived, Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit for a liberty to be like God. Misery for the human species (and the rest of creation) is the consequence of this pseudo-liberty. Later, God chooses Moses to liberate his people from slavery. The preface to the Ten Commandments, “I am God, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of a life of slavery” is followed by a list of “thou shalls” and “thou shall nots” that actualize this freedom. Tragically, the people reject God’s prescription of freedom and fashion their own “liberties.” Consequently their personal lives and society suffer. Prophets come and go with their futile calls to turn back to God’s path.

Finally, God comes into this desperate situation as a vulnerable human and demonstrates that true freedom is lived out fearlessly in truth and love. This scandalizes those whose false concepts of freedom is to seize and manipulate power, and they (representing each and all of us) crucify Him even as He prays forgiveness for us (Luke 23:34). God resurrects this One into life who then imparts Spirit into who would trust and follow Him in this way. Living this new way is true freedom fueled by the living presence of The Spirit. What the New Testament calls the Kingdom of God touches down here “on earth as it is in heaven” as followers of the Liberator, liberated from enslavement to death’s grip of fear and manipulative power’s self-aggrandizing allure are released into the freedom to reach out into a hurting world with selfless love. Even the creation that is in such desperate straits is promised liberation as the imparted Spirit works through the Liberator’s followers (Romans 8:18-23).

Many of you who read this are active advocates for justice, peace, and wholeness in hurting, chaotic, uninhabited neighborhoods, regions, and indeed the world. How then do we engage our Christ-imparted liberty into these situations?

The Bible points out a spiritual battleground. “Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God.” This armor is truth, righteousness, faith, the announcement of The Liberator’s (Jesus) peace-giving work, trust in God’s word, and directed knowledge through our salvation. (Ephesians 6:10-18) The Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom (2 Corinthians 3:17)

Let’s confidently exercise Christ’s liberty in our workplaces, our business transactions, our politics, our family lives. As we pray, The Spirit will lead and empower us to make inroads against injustice, oppression, violence, and despair. Freedom encompasses the hope of God’s Kingdom for physical, spiritual, and community well-being.

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” (Jesus, as attested in Luke 4:18-19)
We invite you to please send a generous contribution to Christians For The Mountains (CFTM) as we stand with people and communities devastated by extreme energy extraction such as mountaintop removal and fracking.

Rebuilding Appalachia will require concerted focus, creativity, selfless leaders, and lots of time—above all, God’s grace and empowerment. Malaise is so often spiritual at root. Exploiters and oppressors are spiritually impoverished, but so are, in another way, those who are exploited and oppressed. This is an opportunity for Christians to open hearts and minds and hands to God’s saving way.

Christians For The Mountains is a leading voice dedicated to addressing spiritual issues that underlie environmental abuses while drawing upon God’s leading to bring hope and restoration. CFTM works alongside numerous religious and secular organizations and persons regionally and nationally. We maintain our Christian identity while bridging with the scientific, political, and organizational strengths of secular groups.

As a CFTM member, your prayers, counsel, and financial support enable CFTM to publish twice-yearly issues of The Mountain Vision, maintain three websites and two Facebook pages, contribute 10% of our bank balance to relief when tragic flooding hit West Virginia, be on leadership teams that plan and hold conferences, and push for just, enforced regulations and policy in state and national government. College students doing projects, as well as media, often request interviews. CFTM continues to be engaged in health research in mountaintop removal communities with Dr. Michael Hendryx, including this recent spring (and more to come) in a project also involving Duke University. CFTM is sponsoring the Larry Gibson Biography project.

Our nation has just gone through a most bruising election. New challenges lay ahead. Our prime gift to movements for a more just, harmonious world is Christian Hope. We welcome you to join us in confidently stepping out to each new day with the heart-knowledge that God is with us.

Please be generous with a tax-deductible donation to help CFTM reach others like you, who understands our God-given directive to “act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God.”

THANK YOU!!!

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Invitation to Join Together With Us

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We welcome any other information you would like to share
(such as your faith; experience; skills; special interests; etc....use separate sheet)

Mail to: Christians For The Mountains 12664 Frost Road, Dunmore, WV 24934
[Note: This form is not necessary. We welcome pertinent info. Our web online form is also available.]

CFTM has 501(c)3 nonprofit tax exempt status through a partnership with World Stewardship Institute. P.O. Box 7348, 3840 Finley Ave., Bldg. 33, Ste. 202 Santa Rosa, California 95407. Contact is Fred Krueger. Telephone 707-573-3161.

Your donations are tax deductible. Thank you for prayer support.
L
ike a long letter written home filled with stories and sentiments of longing, a new pastoral letter shares important insights from the people of Appalachia. Issued last December by the Catholic Committee of Appalachia (CCA), the pastoral, “The Telling Takes Us Home: Taking Our Place in the Stories That Shape Us,” continues the voice of the church in the mountains based on experience, to raise awareness of the problems and possibilities of the Appalachian region. It greets the reader with unique regional stories and suggests a vision of how Appalachia, and indeed the dominant U.S. culture, can evolve.

Bishop John Stowe, OFM Conv., whose diocese of Lexington contains 40 Appalachian counties in eastern Kentucky, reflected that the pastoral came from over a thousand people in numerous listening sessions across Appalachia sharing their experiences “with special attention to marginalized persons and the devastated earth.” He noted that Pope Francis’ recent encyclical, Laudato Si, “treats the themes of the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth in ways that resonate with great importance in our part of the world.” He commended members of CCA for listening “with their hearts as Pope Francis has called us to do.”

Appalachian Pastoral

This pastoral, commonly called “the People’s Pastoral,” continues the tradition of reflections arising from the situation in the mountains. In 1975 the Appalachian bishops wrote their seminal pastoral, “This Land Is Home To Me” which underscored the powerlessness of the people in light of corporate ownership and power. It called for establishing centers of reflection where rich and poor alike could discuss the mandates of the Gospel. Twenty years later in 1995 the Appalachian bishops issued their second pastoral, “At Home In the Web of Life,” which situated Appalachia in the global economy which views the region as a mineral colony. It summoned people from the culture of death to the culture of life by living and consuming in a sustainable manner. Now, again twenty years later, this third pastoral coming directly from local folks and people involved in community ministry, captures a lost way of viewing reality: understanding Appalachia through stories.

Stories Have a Point of View

The pastoral states that in Appalachia stories connect people to one another and the land. It then draws the conclusion: “When the story of these mountains as ‘resource’ takes over the story of the mountains as ‘home,’ we become homeless in our own place, and disconnected from Earth and one another.”

During the Second Industrial Revolution (1870-1914), Appalachia yielded great quantities of timber and coal that fed America’s burgeoning industrial output. Large stands of poplar, chestnut, hickory and oak—some feet in diameter—were purchased by Northern agents and hauled by rail to their sawmills. Huge coal seams, sometimes five feet thick, produced a minimum of five thousand tons per acre for outside steel mills. The economic story of Appalachia revolved around its immense abundance of resources.

When, however, the story of the mountains moves from “resources” to “home,” a different picture emerges. The enormous wealth and profits of Appalachia were drained from the region leaving many in their home communities impoverished and staring at a desecrated earth. As global capitalism sought to maximize profits at any cost, its wake left a homeland of increased health hazards and sicknesses from pollution: asthma, cancers, tumors, liver disease, kidney stones, lung disease, rashes, burning eyes, birth defects and stillbirths.

Even worse, death stalked from indifference and negligence: the Sago Mine disaster of 2006 killed 12, and the Upper Big Branch explosion in 2010 took 29. Yet, few remember the 2004 tragedy at Inman, a town a few miles north of Appalachia, Virginia.

At 2:30 a.m. one morning a bulldozer driver building a road to a strip mine dislodged a three foot round boulder causing it to roll down a 600 foot mountain crashing through the side of a house killing a three year-old child asleep in his bed. Numerous folks had previously complained to the company about their foundations and walls being cracked from blasting. They had rocks and boulders rolling into their yards, “but nothing can be compared to losing a child’s life,” said a horrified neighbor.

When life and culture get so easily dismissed for the sake of profit, the region readily shows itself, in the words of the pastoral, as “a sacrifice zone.”

Change the Story

Because stories illustrate a point of view, they can be misused to continue situations of injustice. For example, many offer simplistic reasons to explain the situation in the mountains: too much regulation killed the coal industry, poverty is a product of the culture, or Appalachia is a land left behind.

On the other hand, stories coming from people directly affected by the social and economic forces and those about the earth itself assume an integrity that gives them authority. For example, McRoberts in Letcher County, KY, a coal camp, experienced no significant flooding from 1957, but beginning in 2000, it faced five major floods in eighteen months. The town was ringed with strip mining. Were the floods an act of God? Did McRoberts experience the bad luck of a hundred-year flood five times in a row? No, change the story. The residents were the victims of human inspired activity, and the earth was disturbed beyond its capacity to absorb the rainfall.

The Magisterium of the Poor and the Earth

Stories add the living dimension to any topic, and the pastoral presents a multitude of people voicing their struggles. They include the land, women, coalfield residents, miners, the economic vulnerable, the homeless, the imprisoned, people of color and the LGBT community.

The People’s Pastoral by John Rausch

The pastoral uses the phrase, “culture of encounter,” which has become a catch phrase of Pope Francis to mean engaging everyone and everything in dialogue and with respect. Biblical theology consistently hears the voice of God coming more from the least among us than from those with wealth or power. The pastoral states, “We believe that the voices of the poor are to be in some sense our first teachers.” Later, linking with thoughts from the Holy Father, the pastoral continues: And more, we believe, like Pope Francis, that Earth ‘is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor,’ abused and used up in ways that do not respect its integrity and limits.” Hence, the pastoral uses the term “magisterium,” or “teaching authority,” in phrases like the “magisterium of the poor” and the “magisterium of the earth” to affirm the importance of the stories from the marginalized and our common home.

The Stories Continue

The People’s Pastoral emphasized stories as a way to understand reality concretely and not by ideology. Glenmary Fr. Les Schmidt said, “Embracing some three years of sharing stories, the pastoral invites us to join that harmony of listening. In the footsteps of Pope Francis, listening promotes the first step for solidarity with the poor and the devastated earth.”

Fr. John Rausch has served Appalachian communities as a Glenmary priest for almost 40 years. Rausch was 2007 Pax Christi “Teacher of Peace,” has ‘led numerous tours on mountaintop removal, and is a Steering Committee member with Christians For The Mountains.

Another Rausch article is on page 11.
Launching Larry Gibson Biography Project

“Can you find someone to write a book about me?” During the spring and summer of 2012, Larry Gibson asked several people to help him write his biography. Those of us who knew Larry also knew he was modest and self-effacing. What Larry wanted was for the principles and causes he spoke about and stood for to carry on through his life story. Agreed! Then suddenly, on Sunday September 9, 2012, Larry died.

After Larry’s death, Allen Johnson, Coordinator of Christians For The Mountains, discussed a biography project with board members of Keeper Of The Mountains Foundation, the nonprofit organization Larry founded. Johnson has volunteered to collect stories, remembrances, and articles from family members as well as from people whose lives have been deeply impacted by Larry. Elise Keaton offers to transcribe recorded stories. The foundation offers the resources of its extensive files.

A major goal of CFTM is to have Larry’s biography completed in 2017. Some interviews, stories, and photographs are already compiled, with much more to gather. We plan to line up a talented, committed author(s) who knew Larry well to write the biography. The goal is a biography to challenge, inspire, and motivate readers for the cause of love and justice as Larry himself did for so many of us. A well-written book for a popular, non-academic market should sell well. All profits will go to the Keeper Of The Mountains Foundation.

This is how YOU can help:

1. Do you have any personal, first-hand stories and thoughts about Larry Gibson? We will take type-written or digitized anecdotal stories; good quality audio recordings to transcribe; or we can arrange for personal or phone interviews. We will need your permission for the Larry Gibson Biography Project. We cannot guarantee inclusion into the final project, but we will at least make mention in the book credits and archive your submission at the foundation.

Besides anecdotal stories, please share your personal impressions of Larry and his message that has influenced your life.

2. At this point we are not actively seeking photos. However, if you have any exceptionally unique or otherwise special photos that have good printable resolution, please describe and we might contact you later.

3. Family members and friends are being contacted to construct the timeline of Larry’s earlier years and the influences and life experiences that led him to have such powerful impact in his later activist years.

4. We invite volunteers to assist the editorial team to help compile and winnow through the material.

5. Some financial costs will arise as the project shapes up. CFTM will undertake the biography project as a major component of its work in 2016. Donations designated to the Larry Gibson Biography Project will be used for the specific purposes of developing the biography and will be noted in the book credits.

6. We will happily appreciate constructive advice. Please pass this announcement on to others. Pray for us. Thank you! Contact: allen@christiansforthemountains.org and note in subject line “Gibson Book Project.”

Appalachia Health Update: A Crisis!

Central Appalachia has the worst health in the nation, according to reputable studies. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation analyzes the health of every county in the nation. The Gallup/Healthways studies quality of life in several categories in states, municipalities, and congressional districts. Invariably such studies reveal low scores on physical and emotional health, personal lifestyle (e.g. obesity, diet, smoking), and lesser access to basic services. For example, West Virginia (#50) and Kentucky (#49) have stayed at the bottom in state rankings in Gallup/Healthways since studies began in 2008.

Why poor health? A stereotypical retort is the “hillbilly culture.” Lower rates of education and related poverty relate to an increased likelihood of poorer lifestyle choices and habits. Health problems creep up and too often treatment is neglected. Again, why? A clue is in the Gallup/Healthways Well-being Indices for Life Evaluation, a measurement of hope and hopelessness. West Virginia and Kentucky rank at the bottom, and counties with extreme energy extraction, especially mountaintop removal, are much worse. The pollution and ecological and scenic degradation of landscapes, coupled with the historic legacy of the danger of coal mining, form a plausible hypothesis for bequeathing despair. Compounding this despair are the droves of talented, motivated young people who graduate from their local schools and bolt for promising pastures outside the region. And exponentially worsening these communities is a plague of abused painkiller drugs, heroin, and meth. West Virginia has the highest rate of drug overdose deaths in the nation. Negative social feedback loops hollow out communities.

Mountaintop Removal continues to destroy mountains and sicken people. Permits continue to be granted granted and operations eviscerate mountains. Yes, the coal industry is sluiping due to factors such as the overall United States energy glut, sharply reduced exports, abundant competing natural gas, and federal regulatory stiffening. This coal slump has led the eyes of some of our environmental justice friends to think that mountaintop removal is dying off and so they shift their attention to other issues such as unconventional shale gas fracking and transport. The Appalachian Community Health Emergency (ACHE) Act that again will be introduced in Congress needs your support. Two dozen peer-reviewed studies (some of which CFTM had a hand in) reveal that mountaintop removal continues to harm, sometimes fatally, the health of many nearby residents. This is a community health travesty that constitutes a national moral failure if not swiftly addressed.

Yet another form of extreme energy is plaguing Appalachia, that being shale gas extraction and the associated interstate pipelines. Even though horizontal fracturing (fracking) is a very recent technology, already communities are plagued with health problems likely related to the accompanying air pollution. Although drilling is almost at a standstill due to the energy glut, interstate pipeline expansion is full throttle ahead. The Federal Energy Regulatory System (FERC) has a history of approving all pipeline projects. Opponents of these massive pipelines, including CFTM, point out the high risk of water contamination where pipeline construction would cross karst areas; that proposed areas to be served already have projected gas capacity through 2030; that construction on steep-sloped rugged terrain would be unprecedented; that eminent domain for private corporate gain is wrong and unconstitutional; that pass-through rural areas would receive no jobs or gas yet would suffer property devaluation and diminished quality of life; and methane leakage in the natural gas cycle contributes significantly to climate change.

Regional Pipeline Summit Held On Strategy

Allegheny-Bluegrass Alliance (ABRA) hosted 200 people representing dozens of regional groups opposing proposed Mountain Valley Pipeline and the Atlantic Coast Pipeline to work together on strategy. Among outstanding panel and speaker presentations was Jane Kleeb, leader of Bold Nebraska, and Chase Iron Eyes, an attorney and member of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe.
Cal DeWitt is standing in front of a bobcat stretched on an outdoor table. Someone has brought the fully-grown fresh roadkill to Au Sable Institute, a Christian environmental studies center in Michigan where I am attending a conference. DeWitt, a professor of Environmental Sciences at the University of Wisconsin-Madison as well as director of Au Sable Institute, is discussing with our gathered group the habits and ecological niche of the Bobcat.

What profoundly struck me in my first encounter with DeWitt was his childlike wonder at this marvel of God’s creation. This bobcat was not simply Lynx rufus, an object of scientific analysis. DeWitt caressed the animal, lamented its untimely death, and gazed at its dappled beauty. DeWitt’s awe was contagious, and for a moment in time all of us, too, were enraptured by God’s creation.

That incident two decades ago freshened in my mind as I read DeWitt’s academic article, “Earth Stewardship and Laudato Si” in the Quarterly Review of Biology (September 2016). DeWitt quotes British philosopher Mary Midgley, “What is not generally appreciated is that serious scientists experience a sense of awe...about a particular thing in the natural world....Whatever it might be, the study of this thing moves them to reverence....And most great scientists have named awe of this kind as their deepest reason for pursuing science at all.”

Integral Ecology is a key concept in both DeWitt’s and Pope Francis’ understanding. Specialties such as in science, technology, sociology, economics, the arts, and religion need to be in open, respectful dialogue with each other within an encompassing framework. Pope Francis writes, “Any technical solution which science claims to offer will be powerless to solve the serious problems of our world if humanity loses its compass, if we lose sight of the great motivations which make it possible for us to live in harmony, to make sacrifices and to treat others well” (Laudato Si, sec. 200).

Stewardship as Reciprocating Con-Service is one of DeWitt’s favored terms. Unpacking this term brings forth two intertwining concepts. Reciprocity derives from Genesis 2:15-16, in which the human is to nurture and protect the garden [Eden] and then in turn the garden provides food. Every modern day gardener, even the hobbyist, knows that a garden needs planted, watered, weeded, and protected from threats in order for that garden to produce a strong harvest of food. Con-service derives from the Latin con [together] and servare [to keep]. Or combined, “to preserve.” According to DeWitt, “Both realms— of serving and safeguarding—together form the larger realm of stewardship.”

Essential to successful stewardship is “knowledge—both of the affected system and of the effects of human action within it.” Knowledge then is a partnership of technology and ethics. “Knowledge of stewardship and supporting ethics must be correspondingly extended, made fully accessible, shared, and applied in ways that counter and correct for real or impending degradation of people and environment.”

Laudato Si is subtitled, On Care For Our Common Home. The word “care” profusely populates phrases in the pope’s encyclical. The oft-misunderstood “Dominion” of Genesis 1:28 can thus be read in this light that as God cares for us, so we are to care for earth’s life. From an earlier presentation DeWitt offers his justification for stewardship, “Stewardship dynamically shapes and reshapes human behavior in the direction of maintaining individual, community, and biospheric sustainability in accord with the way the biosphere works.”

Key ecological principles have correspondence in scripture, as DeWitt summarizes:

**Earthkeeping:** We should respectfully return the keeping of us and all life with keeping of our own (Genesis 2:15).

**Fruitfulness:** We may take of the fruit of the Earth and biosphere but must not degrade or destroy its fruitfulness (Genesis 1:20–22; 6–9; Deuteronomy 22:4,6; Ezekiel 34:18).

**Sabbath:** We should provide the conditions for restoration, rejuvenation, and sustainment of the Earth, its biosphere, its creatures, and life support systems (Genesis 2:2–3; Exodus 16:23; 20:10; Deuteronomy 5; Leviticus 19:9; 25–26).

**Global Crisis** is now of such serious import that a sufficiently moral and actionable response is desperately urgent. DeWitt defines crisis [from the Gr. Crisis] as “the point in the progress of a disease when an important development or change takes place which is decisive of recovery or death.”

In Laudato Si (sec. 54) Pope Francis confronts the challenge of obfuscation when he writes, “There are too many special interests, and economic interests easily end up trumping the common good and manipulating information so that their own plans will not be affected.” Citing The Aparecida Document of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops, which says “the interests of economic groups that irrationally demolish sources of life should not prevail in dealing with natural resources,” the pope notes that “the most one can expect is superficial rhetoric, sporadic acts of philanthropy and perfunctory expressions of concern for the environment, whereas any genuine attempt by groups within society to introduce change is viewed as a nuisance based on romantic illusions or an obstacle to be circumvented.”

The Precautionary Principle is invoked (sec. 186) when the pope echoes the Rio Declaration of 1992, “Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a pretext for postponing cost-effective measures which prevent environmental degradation.” The pope elaborates on upon this (sec. 187) with a strong chastening that “profit cannot be the sole criterion to be taken into account, and that, when significant new information comes to light, a reassessment should be made”

**Beauty, integrity, truthfulness, and love for God** are values that a price tag cannot be placed. Pope Francis writes (sec. 215) that “If someone has not learned to stop and admire something beautiful, we should not be surprised if he or she treats everything as an object to be used and abused without scruple. If we want to bring about deep change, we need to realize that certain mindsets really do influence our behavior.”

This brings me back to Cal DeWitt and the dead bobcat he reverently eulogized at the sunlit table in Michigan. Life is a miracle, God’s gift for us to treasure, our privilege for us to care for in God’s behalf. Amen!
Janet, what are important influences and experiences and background in your childhood and early adulthood that have shaped the person you are?

Several things come to mind. First off, my Grandmother Napier, my maternal grandmother, had a tremendous influence on me. She was the icon of a strong, Appalachian woman. As a faithful Christian, she nurtured a very large family, nearly on her own, including many grandchildren, myself included. She was an active member of the Madison Avenue Church of God in Huntington and rarely missed a Sunday or Wednesday service. I often attended church with her and was also an active member by the time I went off to college. Because both of my parents worked, she was my primary care-giver. As a role model, I believe she passed along to me several values that have served me well in my work and life—perseverance, resilience, self-reliance, belief in a God and hard work.

My mother owned and operated a small grocery store in the Westmoreland area of Huntington; she never turned over much profit because families in need could depend on her for credit to buy groceries. When she closed the store in the late 60’s, the majority of that credit went uncollected. She taught me to be generous to those in need. Mother also taught me to enjoy the simple things in life; she and one of her sisters would take my cousins and me to 12-Pole Creek on a hot summer’s day for a picnic and a swim. It was Mom who drove my sister and me the slow and winding Route 60 highway all the way to Virginia Beach where I saw the ocean for the first time. This adventure awakened in me new curiosities of the natural world—the gulls, the sandy beach, and the vast waters, all with an allure of their own. This was the furthest I had ever traveled!

My father and several of my aunts also helped cultivate my love of nature. Daddy would take me fishing with him on Saturday mornings at a nearby lake or the Ohio River. Like many folks, the fish we caught were also food for our table. I especially loved being on the water in a small fishing boat, enjoying the peace and quiet. At one point of my childhood, dad operated a small bait shop out of a garage adjacent to our grocery store. I helped him seine for minnows and crawdads, wading up and down the creeks on a warm summer afternoon, thrilled when the net was full of chubs. These were joyful times spent with my father.

Throughout my childhood, I spent countless hours out-of-doors in free play with my friends or cousins. Several of my aunts lived in the country where I spent the weekend with unfettered time in nature—roaming and exploring—climbing trees, making mud pies. I loved to catch lightning bugs on a summer evening then fall asleep as they blinked in a Mason jar beside my bed. Often in early July, I would get up at daybreak to go blackberry picking with my aunts, stopping in the noonday heat. I was learning about the abundance of nature and the turning of the seasons in an informal way. This natural world, without windows, walls or doors, creates a sense of awe and freedom that I seldom feel elsewhere.

“As an adult, it was my ‘love affair’ with birds that drew me to environmental work.”

As an adult, it was my “love affair” with birds that drew me to environmental work.

I appreciate the opportunity to tell you the story about what’s now called the Eastern Towhee (back when I saw it—the Rufous-sided Towhee) and how it was instrumental in changing the direction of my life. Back in the late ’70s, I was married and had just moved into a beautiful home on the Southside of Huntington, the affluent part of the city. Unlike where I grew up in a blue-collar neighborhood (on the “other side of the tracks”), our house set on more than an acre of property and was just a hop, skip and a jump from our city park. The property was surrounded by big trees, a hillside covered in native trees and vegetation behind the house, and even a pond set into one of the patios on the property. Fortuitously, and perhaps not so coincidentally, the first year that we moved in, I filled the bird-feeder left behind by the former owner, just outside the dining room window.

“I didn’t realize until later that that bird changed my life dramatically. Why that bird and why then?”

During the first snow, I happened to look out the window at the feeder, and there on the ground I saw a beautiful, slender bird that I had never before seen. I had spent much of my childhood outside and couldn’t at the time imagine how in my twenty-something years, I had not seen this bird. I remember how the black back and head contrasted with the Robin-colored patches on its side and then the stark white belly as it scratched at the seed on the ground. I had to know what this bird was, had to. That’s when I bought my first Little Golden Guide to Birds. When I thumbed through the pages, there it was—a Rufous-sided Towhee, which lives and breeds here (and in southern Saskatchewan and east to Maine) and prefers undergrowth and edges of open woods. Our house was situated on its habitat. I felt a moment of triumph!

I didn’t realize until later that that bird changed my life dramatically. Why that bird and why then? From that moment forward, my fascination with birds grew into a passion. I joined the local bird club so I could learn everything I could about birds—those that lived here and those that were only passing through. I became one of those crazy birders who would get up predawn to be in the field regardless of the weather discovering that inclement weather often sent birds off course—birds I hadn’t seen before—“life birds”. As a person who loves to learn, birding satisfied my need for challenge and stimulation. No matter where I traveled, there were generally new birds to listen to, watch and study. The possibilities for me were endless, really. I was awestruck by their beauty, seeing colors that only nature could create.
Who are some people who have or do influence you in connecting your faith journey with your environmental and social justice advocacy? Do any books or scripture stand out for you?

Dianne Bady, OVEC’s founder and a dear friend, has been a most profound influence on my faith journey as well as in my environmental and social justice advocacy. After I began working with Dianne at OVEC, I watched a segment of Earthkeeping, a PBS documentary which featured Dianne and OVEC’s work to rein in the harmful air pollution coming from the then Ashland Oil refinery in Cattleville, KY, now the Marathon Oil refinery. It showed Dianne sitting in the New Hope United Methodist Church in Proctorville, OH; the narrator spoke about how her reliance on God allowed her to persevere in the face of great pressure and public criticism and harassment. Dianne had become a target of daily rants in the local newspaper because she dared to challenge the pollution and lawlessness of what was one of the largest employers in our Tri-State region. Dianne met regularly with the local pastor of her church as well as prayed and meditated about her and OVEC’s efforts.

No group had ever taken on polluters in our region. There was no roadmap or “how to” book to address these particular environmental issues here. But rather than devise a grand strategy, Dianne waited to be shown the way. Dianne referred to this method of strategy as “walking through the fog,” an apt description, especially since earthy power and money is clearly on the side of big polluting industries. In my mind, “walking through the fog” is just another way of saying that this work is buoyed and informed by Faith.

In a collaborative ethnography developed with our input by the Wagner School at New York University, a result of OVEC winning a Leadership for A Changing World Award from the Ford Foundation in 2001, Dianne explained OVEC’s unique leadership style:

“In our work we are often thrown into totally unexpected circumstances that we don’t know how to deal with. Our carefully developed plans often become suddenly irrelevant by a new development on the part of the Coal industry or the local, state, or federal government’s capitulation to coal’s demands. Or even by Laura’s death. (note: Laura Forman, who unexpectedly died in 2001, was an organizer on OVEC’s leadership team that won the Ford Foundation award.) This not knowing is very difficult to deal with.

Over the years, Janet and Laura and I together realized that part and parcel of our jobs was this total disruption of our plans and our subsequent not knowing what to do next. We learned together that in these situations, we needed to rely on pure spiritual trust.

We developed the idea that sometimes we just walked through a fog, and that this is the way it’s supposed to be, it’s not just a total disruption of our work—it Is our work.

We learned together to rely on the trust that even though we don’t see much of that path through the fog, if we consciously acknowledge our unknowing and our total confusion, and ask for the Grace to see the next few steps, that we WILL know what to do next. Maybe only the next step or two. But first, we must just live with the uncertainty and accept it. This approach has required a great deal of personal growth. It did not come naturally to us. But learning to think and act in this way has been crucial to our ability to continue fighting issues that many others have seen as impossible to win (from “Waging Democracy in the Kingdom of Coal; OVEC and the Movement for Social and Environmental Justice in Central Appalachia,” personal communication, June 7, 2003).”

When I think about the enormity of the issues in West Virginia related to air or water pollution, especially in regards to the politically powerful coal industry, how in the world could anyone or group have any meaningful influence? While a written work plan is a must needed guide to advance our goals, we trusted, prayed and meditated in order to “see” through the fog for the next steps. And in the 24 years that I served OVEC, we always seem to get what we need, when we need it.

“In my personal belief, Creation is God’s Great Work, and we are a part of it—not something separate and we are to be good and faithful stewards.”

One of the first things that Dianne gave me to read after I started working for OVEC was a magazine article by the theologian, Walter Wink, entitled “Jesus At the Margins.” I kept that article and have read it many times over. I’ve come to understand that working at the margins includes not only people, but also nature. How else does nature have a voice in matters of the world if not through our own speaking out? In my personal belief, Creation is God’s Great Work, and we are a part of it—not something separate and we are to be good and faithful stewards.

I believe that as people of faith, we speak for the marginalized when we raise concerns about the destruction of nature, for example bird, bat or salamander habitat. We are serving the marginalized when we speak out against the destruction of mountains and the immediate death of all the plant and animal life caused by extreme mining practices like mountaintop removal. And we, like Jesus, are working at the margins when we stand and rally with people whose health and homes are destroyed by...
extreme energy extraction—people whose courage is buoyed when openly supported by those in the faith community. Sadly and historically, the Appalachian people have been marginalized purposely through the use of stereotypes so that profiteers can exploit the rich (and valuable) natural resources of our region.

“In my work, I know for sure that I am supported by the Creator.”

In my work, I know for sure that I am supported by the Creator. One of my favorite and most comforting scriptures is Psalms 91: 1, 2, 4, says it all: He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress; my God; in him will I trust. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shall thou trust.”

What words of counsel would you give people who engage social justice advocacy?

If a person is planning to engage in environmental and social justice advocacy for the long-haul, I can’t emphasize enough the importance of meditation, prayer and faith—as well as letting go of one’s ego and outcomes. Meditation, prayer and faith provide the grounding for facing certain difficulties and challenges and also helped me to let go of my ego and outcomes.

I recall in my earlier life as an activist working to “save” a local wetlands (before joining OVEC). My ego was so out-front; and I was frantically working to keep the issue in the limelight. I felt devastated by every presumed “failure” and spent way too many hours fretting—such an energy drain. My ego was so invested, that I came to believe that I was the one in charge of how things would turn out. I stayed up until wee hours of the morning writing letters or articles not realizing that I couldn't be very effective with my ego leading the charge, and instead, I was only exhausting myself.

In a few short years, I was clearly burned out to the extent that I decided my future role in helping to preserve our natural world would be as a scientist rather than an activist—away from the pressure and criticism that was crushing my spirit and draining my energy. Just add another brick to the wall of science—a safer and easier path. Of course, as it turned out, God had other plans for me! In 1992, I went to work for OVEC until my recent retirement this year.

As 1Corinthians 13:12 says, “for now we see through a glass, darkly...” and in my mind that means that as humans and conduits for God’s love and action on earth, we have absolutely no idea how something needs to happen. The fact is, we may never live to see the impacts of our work during our lifetimes, but that doesn’t mean that we haven’t been a part of God’s plan.

Where might you be trying to grow spiritually? And do you have any thoughts on where your faith journey will further lead you?

At OVEC we say that personal growth is not optional. Although I’ve “retired,” my guess is that more spiritual growth is on my horizon. The very fact that I’m still alive and well assures me that God isn’t finished with me yet. I still have things to learn, and I have been truly blessed with curiosity and a passion for life. While I wasn’t one of those people who knew early in life what they wanted to be “when they grow up,” I’ve come to understand that in spite of the twists and turns of my young adult life, I landed where I was most needed—specifically, my work with OVEC. (I knew that I had found my calling because of the joy that I felt despite the sometimes overwhelming emotion and seemingly impossible tasks set before me.) As a project coordinator, a student at Marshall University asked how I had prepared myself for my position at OVEC. Up to then, I really hadn’t given it much thought.

After a brief pause, I told her that I believed that I was “being prepared for the work” all of my life—my childhood curiosity about famous Americans who had made a difference in the lives of others, several years of teaching in the public school system which made me feel comfortable speaking in front of crowds, and graduate work in public relations, journalism and then biology. All of these things provided a good foundation for the work that I would carry out at OVEC. In other words, while I may not have known what I wanted to be “when I grew up,” Grace had steered me in the right direction all along.

“I learned to be open to God’s will and comfortable with uncertainty.”

Once I began working for OVEC where my spiritual life truly deepened, I learned to be open to God’s will and comfortable with uncertainty. That’s really where I am right now...comfortable with uncertainty. I now have more time to spend with my little family (including a beguiling grandson), time to read or write or go birding, and time to consciously wait for some direction, confident that in time, the fog will clear and God will show me the next step or two along my path.

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The Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition (OVEC) formed in 1987 under Dianne Bady’s leadership to confront a proposed huge BASF chemical company hazardous waste incinerator near Ironton, OH. By closely with a trade union and members of the local community, the proposal was cancelled. OVEC then successfully took on other polluting industries in these early years through grassroots community organizing. During that time frame Ashland Refinery in Catlettsburg, Kentucky was spewing health-damaging toxins into local communities. In response to persistent (ten-years) and intense pressure from OVEC members and the organized surrounding communities, the US Department of Justice fined Ashland $5.8 million, and forced them to put aside over $30 million to bring their three US refineries into full compliance with pollution laws.

In 1997, OVEC won a nationally significant victory, after organizing and coalition building for over eight years, preventing the construction of the continent’s largest pulp and paper mill, after the company insisted on using heavily polluting technologies, and refused to use less – polluting technologies in a low-income, already polluted area. State economic development officials had promised the pulp mill company over one billion dollars in various forms of corporate welfare, even though the company would not commit to hiring West Virginia workers.

OVEC was one of the earlier organizations to actively oppose mountaintop removal as well as the many hazardous toxic slurry impoundments and injection sites. More recently OVEC is engaging the fracked gas and pipeline threat. OVEC often joins with other organizations in lawsuits to enforce environmental regulatory compliance.

For more details on the work of OVEC, go to their website, www.ohvec.org, and also sign up for their newsletter, Winds of Change. CFTM recommends OVEC as worthy of your financial support.

**Staff Reflections Of Janet Keating**

DIANNE BADY, OVEC FOUNDER: Janet has been a huge influence on my life. When we first met, my family was new here and I was having a hard time letting go of the grief I felt in leaving my home state of Wisconsin. Through a series of coincidences, I found myself working with people who lived near the Ashland Oil refinery, and whose families were suffering from illnesses brought on by the refinery’s then illegal air pollution. We were trying to get others to understand how the pollution was harming many people, but no one wanted to hear it (outside of other refinery neighbors).

It was painful and grueling. I’d lost touch with the spark of joy within myself. When I first met Janet, she looked like she sparkled with light. It was very weird. I was so drawn to her!

Without Janet putting it into words, she was the spark that reconnected me to joy; the joy that is so closely linked to my connection with the natural world.

When Janet came to OVEC, we talked daily and together worked through the inherent pain in the struggle to protect people and nature from corporate greed. Coming from what was then known as a progressive state, the political collusion here with polluting and extraction companies was a huge shock to me and I honestly wished there was a way we could just go back to Wisconsin.

If I hadn’t found Janet, I would have burned out long ago. But instead, I’ve found a home and a place here. And maybe now she and I will have more time to “do nothing” together in nature.

JEFF ALLEN, OVEC BOARD CHAIR: We will miss Janet. Her dedication to the environment and to West Virginia is unmatched.

## The OVEC Story (sourced from the website, www.ohvec.org)

**Tonya Adkins**, **Maryanne Graham** and **Dustin Thompson** call her to find out. “What would Janet do?” Fortunately, we can find out.”

**Janet Keating** says of her successor, Natalie’s love for our people and iconic mountains drives her passion for justice and a better quality of life for everyone—traits that are essential for OVEC’s executive director.

**Viv Stockman**: Dianne Bady, who founded OVEC, was the one who knew we had to hire Janet before someone else did. Smart move! Over the years, Janet grew the organization and cemented OVEC’s reputation as a little group who gets big things done. Janet prepared well in advance of her retirement for the day she would no longer be our ED. She and the board of directors were so smart to hire Natalie. We are in great shape to move into our 30th year. Nevertheless, now and then we are left wondering, WWJD? --What would Janet do? Fortunately, we can call her to find out.”

**ROBIN BLAKEMAN**: It was truly an honor to work under the supervision of, and side by side with Janet for close to 8 years. She has a special kind of vision and passion for justice which I associate with a deep and abiding faith. Her unique sense of wonder and appreciation for the beauty, diversity and mysterious connections found within the glorious Creation shared by all is admirable. I will miss her encouraging words and collaborative style, yet wish her many years of happy and peaceful retirement.

**JEFF ALLEN, OVEC BOARD CHAIR**: We will miss Janet. Her dedication to the environment and to West Virginia is unmatched.

## OVEC, WE THANK YOU

Christians For The Mountains (CFTM) is deeply grateful to the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition (OVEC). The impact that OVEC continues to have in central Appalachia is exceptional especially considering the powerful polluting industries it confronts. OVEC is a superb team player, too, as bespeaks its name as “a coalition.” Several other excellent grassroots organizations cover aspects of environmental justice in our region, so networking and coordination are important in order to maximize impact and minimize “stepping on toes.”

OVEC has helped Christians For The Mountains in many ways since our founding in 2005. OVEC’s Executive Director, Janet Keating, helped convene our initial organizing meeting in May 2005, and provided invaluable counsel and networking support during those first crucial months. Early on, OVEC provided CFTM a substantial loan to cover startup costs such as our Mountain Mourning DVD Collection. Janet continues on our Steering Committee. Janet connected CFTM with the Civil Society Institute that has subsequently provided us major operational funding. Janet connected us with The One Foundation that then provided grant funding for our Appalachian Community Health Service Project that involved Christian students conducting family health surveys in mountaintop removal neighborhoods. OVEC provided direct financial support and an employee, Dustin White, to help with our health study in 2014. OVEC has also jumped in with financial support for the Appalachian Community Health Emergency (ACHE) coalition, an effort that CFTM is deeply involved with toward legislation for a moratorium on new mountaintop removal permits.

The OVEC staff has been friendly, helpful, and supportive in so many ways to CFTM. OVEC lets us use their nonprofit bulk mail permit for uses such as this Mountain Vision paper. Viv Stockman generously provides her shockingly-stunning photographs of mountaintop removal for us to publish. Viv keeps up with the vast data on regional environmental issues and publishes useful information for many groups to use. Rob Blandeman is an ordained Presbyterian minister (PCUSA) who expertly bridges the secular/religious worlds, along with her numerous OVEC responsibilities. CFTM is glad to have Rob in as a sounding board and to engage with in projects involving religious-themed justice activities.

The aforementioned Dustin White committed capable help in our 2014 health study. Tonya Adkins, a talented musician in her own right, and Maryanne Graham are always cheerful office personnel. OVEC’s founder, Dianne Bady, continues to provide us supportive counsel. Then there are the numerous board members and former employees such as Chuck Nelson, Maria Gunnoe, and Larry Gibson who inspired us to greater effort.

So thank you, OVEC. We look forward to future years in partnership efforts to strengthen our Appalachian communities, and we warmly welcome Natalie Thompson in her new role as Executive Director.
Lucius Thompson built an addition onto his mobile home in Tom Biggs Hollow in McRoberts, a small coal camp in Letcher County, Kentucky. Strip mining gauged deep scars into the surrounding mountains, and even decapitated some of them by mountaintop removal (MTR). The constant mine blasting eventually separated his addition from the main structure, so when it rained, he caught the drippings in buckets.

That worried him, but he freaked when his three small grandchildren playing in his front yard came in moments before a strong gusher washed through the hollow with power enough to sweep them away. The destruction of the mountains can trigger threats to human life.

I came to appreciate the glories of creation through the sufferings of people. My training for ministry taught me to help victims of floods, storms and sickness, but frequently I saw the human factor linked to these natural disasters. I began looking over the shoulders of those suffering asthma and cancer caused by the disturbed environment, and glimpsing the beauty of the mountains that in contrast promised health and wholeness. With that I was reborn an environmentalist, preaching care of creation as part of the Gospel mandate.

In 2015 Pope Francis issued Laudato Si, an encyclical letter, quoting the opening lines of the Canticle of the Creatures in Italian by St. Francis of Assisi: “Laudato Si,’ mi Signore”—“Praise be to you, my Lord.” Following the saint, the pope recognizes how intrinsically connected everything is: “how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace” (par. #10.).

Because Pope Francis sees an urgent challenge to protect our common home (par. #13.) it seems appropriate that certain implications flow from this to promote peace and friendship, thus defeating “the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness” (par. #139.).

In Appalachia social planners frequently fail to alleviate poverty significantly through an overemphasis on one aspect, whether education, job creation or welfare reform. A holistic approach must include an array of social indicators incorporated with a respect for creation. Everything in the world is connected (par. #16.).

Pope Francis appeals for a new dialogue that includes everyone (par. #14.). Too frequently in the past, special interests and economic interests have thwarted the common good and manipulated information to protect their own plans (par. #54.).

He says that countries that have benefitted from a high industrialization at an enormous cost to the environment have a greater responsibility for providing a solution for the problems they have caused (par. #170.).

In Appalachia I once participated in a dialogue between coal-related executives and church and community workers. The first meeting produced more heat than light, but a subsequent meeting brought a mutual agreement that more coal severance money should be returned to coal counties for development. Years later, now that demand for coal has fallen precipitously because of environmental concerns, these same executives admit little future exists for coal, while they pursue alternative investments. No one industry can simply replace coal, but numerous, modest and creative efforts might build a sustainable future in the mountains.

5. To save the earth, we need a change of heart.

Pope Francis encourages a change of lifestyle that dethrones consumerism as the source of happiness. “Less is more” represents a Christian spirituality that proposes an alternative understanding of the quality of life (par. #222.). Living with moderation allows each person to appreciate the little things of life and derive satisfaction from beauty. This integral ecology encourages a kind word, a smile and a small gesture to promote peace and friendship, thus defeating “the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness” (par. #230.). E.F. Schumacher encapsulated this approach with his saying: “The greatest well-being with the least consumption.”

Traditional Appalachian values reverence family, religion, and neighborliness. The slower pace of rural living allows time for visiting and appreciating nature, and opportunities for helping someone in trouble, whether part of the community or on the side of the road. Indeed, saving the earth might depend on rekindling respect for people and a reverence for the land—traditional values lost amidst the pile of consumer goods that distract us.

Pope Francis ends his encyclical with the meaning of Sunday, and the Jewish Sabbath, which is “meant to be a day which heals our relationships with God, with ourselves, with others and with the world” (par. 237.). A day of contemplative rest is not unproductive, but actually necessary to give meaning and appreciation to work, beauty, relationships and community. It will connect us with all of creation and reveal our ecological vocation as co-gardeners with God.
Chicken Little was in the woods. A seed fell on his tail. Chicken Little said, “The sky is falling. I will run.”

Chicken Little met Henny Penny. He said, “The sky is falling. Henny Penny.”

Henny Penny said, “How do you know, Chicken Little?”

Chicken Little said, “Some of it fell on my tail.”

“Some of it fell on my tail.” said Henny Penny. “We will run and tell the king.”

“We will run,” said Henny Penny. “We will run and tell the king.”

The sky is falling!! A well-known nursery story tells of a chick who, when struck by a falling acorn, cries out to his mother that “the sky is falling.” Terrified, they tell others who then alarm others as a panic sweeps through the animal neighborhood. Undesirable results follow. Eventually the red-faced inhabitants shamefacedly admit their mistake. The sky is fine. Their interpretation of an event is faulty. The moral, as such fables have, is do not set off false alarms.

Fear-mongering has been nicknamed the Chicken Little Syndrome for instilling an unfounded or exaggerated sense of fear and despair that paralyzes people from action. In some versions of Chicken Little, the panicked animals end up telling a fox the gloomy news whereupon the fox devours them.

So is Climate Change “Chicken Little” alarmism? Sure, some of us may be suffering extra hot weather spells, drought, or flooding. But so what? There have always been hot days, droughts, and floods. Life goes on, and we have other matters to concern ourselves. Climate change for most of us is simply day-to-day trivial.

Yet the sky is falling!!! Indeed! YES!

So say climate scientists. Maybe the sky is not “falling” so much as it is “falling” to provide the climate atmosphere human civilization has adjusted to for ten millennia. And the problem, already severe, will be exponentially worse in short decades to come. Even if an immediate all-out effort is launched to throttle back carbon emissions, the climate future will be tumultuous what with massive extra CO2 already loaded in the atmosphere and ocean, ice sheets melting, and the albedo effect compounding warming as sea ice diminishes. And yet our modern societies are far from giving an all-out effort! Alas!!!

The incessant drumbeat of the dismal, indeed dire climate future can be too much to bear: Mass extinction of half of the planet’s species; many cities such as Miami already doomed to unavoidable sea level rise; millions of refugees fleeing uninhabitable lands; the marvel of coral reefs that will be but a memory; unprecedented storms, floods, droughts, and scorching hot weather. Personal and societal Cognitive Avoidance is a psychological coping mechanism to avoid a stressor. So we plunge our minds and energies into our jobs, our hobbies, our sports team, our community volunteerism and good deeds.

Bill McKibben, an influential climate advocate, recently published an article in New Republic (Aug.15, 2016) titled World At War with a daunting subtitle, We’re under attack from climate change—and our only hope is to mobilize like we did in WWII.

McKibben notes, “It’s not that global warming is like a world war. It is a world war. And we are losing.” So how do we turn from defeat? McKibben says that just as World War II required nationwide concerted retooling and commitment, so analogously the climate war necessitates comparable all-out effort.

The prophet Ezekiel (chapter 33) tells of a watchman whose job is to safeguard the city. As the watchman scans the distant horizon, he sees an approaching enemy and sounds the alarm. (Now a choice is to be made) If the townspeople hear the alarm and take measures, they will be saved. If they ignore the alarm, they will perish. But at least the watchman did his job. On the other hand, if the watchman is asleep on the job, or ignores the danger of the approaching enemy, or fears bothering the sleeping people, and so does not sound the alarm, the enemy will destroy the city and the watchman will bear guilt for not sounding the alarm.

Friends, most of you reading this acknowledge that human-caused climate change is encroaching and impacting the Earth with much graver consequences ahead. Casualties will increasingly mount. We grow weary in the fight, frustrated at the lack of progress, hoarse from shouting warnings that too few seem to heed. Yet we know that to turn climate defeat into victory for future civilization will take a massive global effort with the United States taking a strong lead.

Climate denial continues to pervade American consciousness. Many political leaders deny that anthropogenic (human-caused) climate change is real, and those that do believe it is real are not treating it as the national and global “life-and-death” emergency that it is. That is, at a proportionate level as if our nation was attacked by a strong foreign power. So we as watchmen grow weary. “Why won’t people listen? Why won’t governments and businesses and religious institutions and everyday people take climate change as the greatest menace facing our futures?”

So friends, let’s not let fatigue, discouragement, or opposition wear us down. Let’s be watchmen who persevere awakening our countryside into concerted action, and through God’s empowerment stop this “climate enemy at the door.”

Jonah was a prophet commanded by God to warn the city of Nineveh of impending judgment and destruction for its evil behavior. Jonah at first tried to avoid God’s call, which did not work out (the famous “swallowed by a whale story”). Jonah then obeyed God and went to Nineveh where he preached that in forty days Nineveh would be destroyed. Amazingly, the Nineveh king, his court, and all the citizenry repented from their evil, humbled themselves through fasting and privileges, and shut down their exploitive economy. God relented from the impending judgment and averted destruction for the 120,000 citizens and the many animals of Nineveh.

God’s word for us is repentance. As used in the New Testament, the Greek word is metanoia that denotes a transformative change of heart with corresponding action. We as individuals and as societies need to repent of our cavalier exploitation of God’s creation in order to avert the judgment that God’s physical laws hold.

God has another word for us—HOPE. The Gospel message is one of hope. God is with us. God loves the world (cosmos), as the well-known Bible verse that John 3:16 affirms. That God loves us and all creation can impel us to persevere with our urgent task to avert disaster over our planet homeland that God has gifted to us to manage well and thence to receive our livelihood.

Apostle Paul writes, “For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38) ***
Christians For The Mountains

Steps To Put Brakes On Global Warming And Heal The Climate

Christian Hope is not apathetic or paralyzed from action. There are promising steps that can be taken that can stop worsening climate change. Some of these steps involve technology, others involve economic incentives, others political concords. These should mesh together. Strong citizen support is crucial to push such steps forward.

This list is not prioritized from most to least important or viable. Nor is this list comprehensive, as proposals and creative ideas come forth all the time. Details of proposals on this list can be found with some research.

1. KEEP EXISTENT CARBON IN THE GROUND

Most untapped coal, oil, and gas reserves must remain untapped. On September 22, 2016, Oil Change International analyzed data from Norwegian energy consultants Rystad to conclude that for the planet to not top 1.5°C climate temperature rise (which even that would be risky), we can release no more than 353 gigatons more CO2 into the atmosphere. But the Rystad data shows coal mines and oil and gas wells currently in operation worldwide contain 942 gigatons worth of CO2. Which means almost 2/3 of projected production must stop!

Key Recommendations:

- No new fossil fuel extraction or transportation infrastructure should be built, and governments should grant no new permits for them. Immediately stop all leasing on public lands.
- Some fields and mines – primarily in rich countries – should be closed before fully exploiting their resources, and financial support should be provided for non-carbon development in poorer countries.
- This does not mean stopping using all fossil fuels overnight. Governments and companies should conduct a managed decline of the fossil fuel industry and ensure a just transition for the workers and communities that depend on it.

2. PUT MORE CARBON INTO THE GROUND

Land, properly managed, can capture carbon at the rate of one ton of carbon per acre per year, and can safely store it in the soil, potentially for millennia. Worldwide restoration could result in the removal of an estimated 12 billion tons of carbon from the atmosphere every year. With a serious global commitment, there is the potential of storing some 200 billion tons of carbon in soils within decades, bringing atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations toward safe, pre-industrial levels.

Sequestering carbon in the soil:

- Stabilizes climate and weather patterns
- Restores biodiversity and soil health

3. PUT A PRICE ON CARBON

Carbon should be taxed with most or all receipts returned equitably to citizens. The tax rate should be ratcheted up every year to approach balancing its negative external costs. Although consumer costs would rise, most people’s rebates would more than compensate. With conventional fuel and electricity, some agricultural products, and long-distance transported consumer goods costing more, people would be incentivized toward efficiency, and the business community would respond to deliver carbon-efficient solutions. The upshot would be a reduction in carbon emissions.

4. REDUCE FARMING’S CARBON FOOTPRINT

Animal agriculture makes up about 15 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions, according to the Center for Biological Diversity, which also notes that Americans throw away about 40 percent of our food. Methane from livestock and factory farm manure lagoons, industrial agriculture’s reliance on chemical fertilizers, diesel, and natural gas, and multi-thousand mile transport of many food products should be significantly trimmed. On the positive side, locally-produced small scale

5. POLITICAL ADVOCACY FOR A JUST TRANSITION

Those whose livelihoods depend upon the fossil fuel industry need transitional support toward other comparably-paying work. Green energy jobs will play a major role in this transition if well-located geographically. Job retraining, support for industry-promised pensions and health pensions, and community rebuilding in lieu of lost tax and business revenue are just measures. Furthermore, climate reparations, mitigation, and clean energy infrastructure aid to poor nations will enable to further a global just transition.

The power of dirty energy dependent corporations to influence state and national government must be broken. Our democracy predicated on government “by, for, and of the people” depends upon citizens reclaiming our voice. Bribery, even if legal, must be condemned (Proverbs 17:23). Flagrant polluting companies and their irresponsible leaders must be prosecuted to pay substantially with fines, imprisonment, confiscation of assets, and/or shutdown of their businesses, which then send an unmistakable deterrence message to business communities.

Trade policies with other nations must be open, fair, environmentally just, and influence1 transactions strongly toward climate justice.

(Endnotes)

1 The Sky’s Limit: Why the Paris Climate Goals Require a Managed Decline of Fossil Fuel Production, Oil Change International (Sept. 22, 2016)
2 Pamphlet, Biodiversity for a Livable Climate
3 Ibid
4 Breaking the Climate Procrastination Habit: How to Bring on America the Sustainable, Emily Shwartz Greco (Bill Moyers, Sept. 19, 2016).

"Every good action and every perfect gift is from God. These good gifts come down from the Creator of the sun, moon, and stars..."
James 1:17a, CEV)
2016 Week in Washington

Rev. Margaret Bullitt-Jonas is the 2016 Steward of God’s Creation

The National Religious Coalition on Creation Care (NRCCC) held its 18th annual Prayer Breakfast in Washington, DC on September 12. Rev. Margaret Bullitt-Jonas received the prestigious Steward of God’s Creation Award for 2016. One of the nominators, Rev. Tom Carr, said that Margaret goes “deep into her own soul” to reflect and seek God’s wisdom and then emerges to effective action. Rabbi Fred Scherlinder Dobb echoed that sentiment after mentioning Margaret’s humble nature. “As a Jew, I will say the adage of Margaret who is one who teaches the gospel.

In her acceptance talk, Margaret mentioned a three-part framework for the heart as a way of helping us to respond wisely and creatively to the challenges we face: First, an awakened heart that is more deeply, frequently, and consciously attuned to love. Second, a broken heart that enters into the pain and suffering in the world, shares it, and touches it with love. Third, a radiant heart that bears witness in tangible ways to God’s love that has set us free. [See page 19 for full remarks]

Dr. Chad Hanson, Director of the John Muir Project, gave a plenary speech about the value of forested lands. Among his insightful remarks, Hanson said that if U.S. National Forest lands are protected instead of logged, these woods will annually sequester the carbon emissions of 15 to 24 million vehicles. Conversely, if we go back to higher levels of logging as some in Congress are calling for, it will lead to an annual addition of carbon emissions equivalent to 20 million more vehicles. Hanson also spoke of the ecological importance of natural occurring forest fires and how some efforts in Congress are seeking to use fire suppression as a backdoor effort to subsidize and increase logging cuts in national forests.

Additional talks and prayers were given. This prayer breakfast had lighter attendance than in some years yet the spirit and comaraderie was among the best.

NRCCC Meets With Top White House Officials

A key meeting was held at the White House Executive Office Building on September 13. Twenty representatives from America’s leading religious groups concerned about the increasing threat of global climate change met with White House officials. The purpose was to present religious perspectives on U.S. climate policy and to emphasize the increasing impacts that rising levels of carbon dioxide are having on the oceans and climate generally.

The White House delegation was led by Rohan Patel, Special Assistant to President Obama. Mark Antoniewicz is Assistant Director for the White House Council on Environmental Quality. Kate Segarra is the Assistant Director of ocean policy for the White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) and Oceanographer for the U.S. Navy. Bo Machayo, Office of Public Engagement, CEQ, and Drew J. McConville, CEQ.

Dr. Richard Miller (Creighton University) and Rev. Tom Carr asked that President Obama give a major nationally-televised talk from the Oval Office to the nation on the critical need to address climate. The President needs to be truthful with the American people and the world about our situation, to state that we need to act swiftly and boldly, and to declare this crisis is not only a moral, ethical and spiritual issue, but a matter of generational justice as well.

Continued ... White House Meeting

Second, a key step for the Administration would be to apply its climate policy more consistently across government departments. For instance, Rohan Patel quickly responded. He says that the Obama Administration is vigorously promoting renewable energy via programs such as its Desert Conservation Plan. The Administration’s strategy combines a carrot and stick approach – promoting solutions that increasingly cost less in the future, while making other energy options costlier. The hope is that the next administration will continue to use fuel efficiency standards, and tax credits, and ramp up the cost of fossil fuels.

Chad Hanson said that the U.S. Forest Service should end salvage logging. He then reported on a new study that shows that forests which are not logged are less likely to burn in forest fires. Logging reduces the resilience of forests to fire. Rohan Patel seems amazed. “We haven’t heard that before,” and asked Hanson to send him the research. [At a prior White House meeting in 2015 Rohan Patel had declared the importance of some logging for purposes of forest thinning].

Dave Carroll, Grantsburg, Wisconsin, recommended the use of the 1973 Presidential War Powers Act to address climate change. The purpose is to redirect the DoD to speed the implementation of worldwide solar power. The Pentagon’s analysis confirms climate change is the number one threat to national security. “Drop solar systems, not bombs.”

Other participants added to the conversation. The gathering commenced and concluded with prayer. Further details, photos, and videos will be on the website, www.nrccc.org
Continued....Washington Week

A group of us with NRCCC met at Sen. Bernie Sanders’ office with Katie Thomas, Policy Advisor for Energy and the Environment, to discuss Sanders’ influential leadership in the climate movement. We urged that Sanders lead a major event this spring. Our discussion was hopeful.

Several of us accepted invitations to participate in EcoAmerica’s 2016 Climate Leadership Summit. 250 organization leaders in health, business, religion, culture, philanthropy, and community interacted toward improving effectiveness on climate. Stellar presentations, conversational breakout sessions, and interpersonal networking made for an inspirational and informative gathering.

Clean Energy Revolution Summit

Hundreds of environmentalists, community leaders and scientists attended the Summit for the Clean Energy Revolution in Philadelphia on Saturday, July 23. The event was held a day ahead of Sunday’s march in the city with thousands of people. Allen Johnson, Coordinator of Christians For The Mountains, participated.

The Summit included a religious-activism workshop headed by Rabbi Mordechai Liebling. The Summit was sponsored and funded for participants by Food & Water Watch, whose founder and anti-fracking activist, Wenonah Hauter, participated. Other leaders included biologist Sandra Steingraber, and Robert Howarth who has pioneered studies on methane from the gas industry on climate.

A number of native Americans representing several western tribes and ranging from youth to seniors spoke eloquently about the injustices their people suffer from invasive, polluting extractive industries.

On Sunday thousands marched for climate justice in downtown Philadelphia. The following Monday another large contingent marched from downtown Phillie to a FDR Park adjacent to the Wells Fargo Center where the Democratic National Convention was getting underway. The rally called for policymakers to commit to stronger action to address the mounting threat of climate chaos.

It’s A Gas Summit

It’s a Gas! That’s fracking, pipeline construction, and the pollution that comes with it. Leaders from several states convened at the Old Historic School in Oak Hill, West Virginia, July 29-31 for the second “It’s A Gas” summit. This was a roll-up-our-sleeves work session by activists to align our organizations on a shared strategy for resisting fracking and related infrastructure such as pipelines and compressor stations.

The gathering worked on effective strategies. Tom Genung from Bold Nebraska shared the successful tactics that eventually quashed the proposed Keystone XL pipeline. Dana Dolney discussed her organizing principles from the frontlines in Pennsylvania including gathering personal stories from impacted people. Ellen Darden and Laurie Ardison of POWHR, told about their organizing landowners in Monroe County, WV. Brandon Richardson and locals discussed how they gained massive local support to get a county commission ordinance banning frack waste that has plagued their nearby neighborhood. Allen Johnson, Christians For The Mountains, and activist Matthew Louis-Rosenberg conducted a session on direct action. Jim Kotcon of WV Sierra Club and others worked on regulatory strategies. The next “It’s A Gas!” Summit will be held in January 2017.

Although unconventional fracking is currently slow due to a worldwide energy glut with resultant low prices, proposed massive pipelines are in the works. And so is resistance. For example, the proposed 42” Mountain Valley Pipeline (MVP) and the proposed 42” Atlantic Coast Pipelines (ACP) would cross some of the most pristine, karst-laden, scenic, and ecologically-fragile areas in the East. These multi-billion dollar projects would lock despoiling fracking in for many years as well as continuing climate-damaging methane leakage. Pass-through rural regions would get no gas or jobs yet incur significant negative economic consequences such as ecosystem damage, scenic degradation, property devaluation, and potential gas explosion. Christians For The Mountains is engaged in local and regional leadership to thwart yet another predacious extreme energy exploitation in Appalachia.
Why Christianity is Incompatible with Libertarian Philosophy

by Fred Krueger

Statesmen may speculate about Liberty, but it is religion and morality alone, which can establish the principles upon which freedom can securely stand.

President John Adams, June 21, 1776

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ver the past fifty years, roughly since the failed presidential candidacy of Barry Goldwater, Libertarian politico-economic thought has risen into national prominence. Libertarian ideology is driving the Tea Party movement and electing governors and representatives across the country.

What makes this growth startling is the deep contradiction between America's historical roots, particularly its Judeo-Christian values, and the contrasting beliefs of Libertarian ideology.

Libertarian philosophy promotes freedom from coercion as the highest political goal. Proponents declare a dislike for government because they say it restrains personal liberty. Thus they call for redistribution of power away from what they call a coercive federal government and toward a long list of voluntary actions based on the free market.

In a libertarian government, you pay for everything. Nothing is without price because that implies coercive taxation. Schools should require tuition. Welfare should be eliminated because those who need help are " moochers." Besides, they claim, the present government takes from those who have and redistributes money to those who have not. This, they insist, is socialism.

While libertarian influence reaches into the major political parties, the Libertarian Party is forthright. At its 2016 convention in Orlando, Florida, the Libertarian Party platform proclaimed "Respect for individual rights is the precondition for a free world." It further states, "No one should be forced to sacrifice his or her values for the benefit of others." This might sound okay, but what does it mean?

To understand this concept of rights (without corresponding responsibilities), let's examine the thinking and values behind the rise of this recent philosophy. The primary intellectual founder behind this movement is the Russian emigre Ayn Rand. As a teenager she witnessed the Bolshevik revolution and saw her parents' business confiscated by communists. She hated the collectivist spirit of communism and sought to develop an exact opposite which would enshrine individualism.

In her political philosophy, Ayn Rand concluded that we are only to love ourselves because most people are not worthy of our love. "Money," she said, "is the only true value."

“Historical morality,” she wrote, should be "thrown out the window" because no individual should hold any standard besides one's personal opinion about behavior. Government has no business regulating personal behavior, social life, the environment, or restraining the use of private property. Taxes therefore are theft; restraints on business are inappropriate, as are restrictions on gun possession, toxic waste regulation, minimum wages or rent control. Help for the poor and welfare should be eliminated. Any restraints on business or corporate affairs are restrictions on personal freedom and so anathema.

In Ayn Rand’s view, government’s only role is to protect property rights, resolve disputes, and provide a legal framework for trade and business.

Rand’s agenda stands in stark opposition to Christianity and the historical ethics that come down out of antiquity. In Christianity, people love and obey God and love their neighbor. This is because we share one origin, possess one life, and may inherit the same destiny. The love of money, the Bible says, is “the root of all evil.”

As for the earth and the environment, we care for it because it belongs first to God and we are commanded to steward it with care. Besides we are all connected interiorly and spiritually. Thus, as the U.S. Constitution declares, we are concerned for the common good – because we all share the same world and what befalls one, eventually affects us all.

Evangelical leader Charles Colson described this materialist philosophy this way: "Rand has inverted biblical norms. Look at how she exalts selfishness and condemns altruism."

The Roman Catholic Pontifical Council for Social Ethics, after studying libertarian thought, declared, "The ideology of radical libertarianism is mistaken and harmful. The error lies in exalting freedom to such an extent that it becomes an absolute, which would then be the source of values... There is no room for community, the common good, and solidarity in this way of thinking."

Libertarians seek Christian voters to support their agenda. But how can Christians support this radical approach to government? If libertarianism is so backward from a religious perspective, why has it taken off and grown so fast?

An answer is that many corporations and super rich persons love this amoral philosophy. Multinational corporations together with their foundations and think tanks are far and away the largest donors to the libertarian cause. They and their wealthy donors are behind the rise of the Tea Party movement. They fund the candidates who support a libertarian view with fat contributions and spread misinformation about how the world operates. They seduce ordinary citizens into supporting this relaxation of social morality and promote the carrot of less taxes and fewer regulations. But the real beneficiaries of these goals are large corporations and the ultra-rich. By promoting libertarian values America’s plutocrats have established a method to amass ever growing amounts of profit and influence over government. Today in late 2016, we are at a point where 85 of the world’s wealthiest individuals now own as much as the poorer half of the entire world’s population. Similarly, 22 of the wealthiest Americans own as much as the bottom half of the U.S. population! This is the unjust condition which America’s Founding Fathers sought to avoid as they saw the problems that wealth concentration created in 18th century Europe. Historically progressive taxation leveled the wealth of society. Those who earned the most paid higher taxes. In stark contrast, in recent years in America the influence of libertarian economic radicals has allowed tax laws to be rewritten to sharply drop corporate tax rates.

This is why super wealthy Charles and David Koch are champion supporters of Tea Party and libertarian political candidates. This “Movement” is cultivated with millions of dollars by a small circle of America’s super wealthy. They orchestrate massive resources to promote their concept, and manipulate the economic unrest of the past decade for their own purposes. They use tax-deductible donations to fund this movement so that they can slash taxes on the rich and cut regulations on industry. This enables them to increase their profits. For the most part, they hide their roles behind laws meant to protect the anonymity of philanthropists.

The center of their philosophy is a political theory that is a crude rationalization for self-interest. This fraudulent theory of economics claims that the laws of supply and demand provide a pure market economy that needs no regulation. This is grossly false! The economy does not exist in isolation but is a dependent subsidiary of the environment. It only takes a little reflection to realize that the economy is rooted in the resources of the land, in minerals, forests, agriculture, water, and energy, plus human labor and ingenuity.

Once there is acknowledgment that the economy is rooted first in the environment and the wisdom and knowledge of citizens, the concept of an unregulated market economy is fabrication. It is public relations propaganda perpetuated on honest citizens by unscrupulous legislators and selfish manipulators who have seared consciences and stony hearts.

It is important to understand these roots behind the Tea Party and their lapdog politicians who repeat these deceptions. Honest citizens must make a concerted effort to overcome the public relations and promotions behind this sinister ideology propagated by the leaders of multinational corporate America. (Cont. p. 17)
If today Congress cannot function with respect for each other or find common ground, this is not merely a clash of personalities or party loyalties. This is a clash of opposing concepts about religion, government and society. Our country is under assault from an alien ideology, reactively born out of the bloody horrors of Soviet communism. On the surface the clash is over the role of public money, taxes and government. But at a deeper level we witness a linkup between corporations and their lobbyists over government policy to change the philosophy and purposes of our union. The clash is actually a hardball battle for the mind and future of America.

People have the constitutional right to choose whatever government they wish that serves their interests. But issues need to be on the surface so that voters can make informed decisions. For this reason, it is wrong to conflate Tea Party libertarianism with Christian altruistic values.

Informed commentators declare that Tea Party libertarianism is the polar opposite of everything for which Christianity stands. While libertarianism stands for the individual self, Christianity is clear that love of God and active love of neighbor goes hand in hand. (Matthew 22:36-40; Luke 10:29ff; 1 John 3:17; etc. etc…)

Libertarianism is not just about politics. As this concept creeps into society, social attitudes shift and a view emerges that denies moral values beyond financial self-interest. Consequences are profound. People become isolated from each other; attitudes and language become coarser; historic values come under assault; selfishness and lawlessness increases; white collar crime increases; respect for life and land fades; cynicism grows; corporations grow in influence, and any sense of civic or social responsibility disappears.

If there is a single unified message which is pushed by those financing this Tea Party agenda it is that government, rather than business is America’s problem.

The implication is that we who respect America, who uphold the Constitution and defend it against foreign aggressors, should see in this foreign ideology a threat to the principles for which America stands. This sterile new materialism is frighteningly similar to the fascism against which Americans fought in World War II and just as evil as the communism which we opposed during the Cold War. If America is to preserve its integrity, we must expose this deadly virus that has infected American political life. We should teach that support for Tea Party libertarianism is antithetical to religion, the environment, social services, and traditional American values.

Please encourage your friends to prayerfully discern libertarian ideology contrasted with Christian teaching. If you love America and respect its traditions, then help expose the deception of libertarianism and its rationalization of selfishness as the primary value of our world.

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Rand in Contrast with Christianity

"There is a great, basic contradiction in the teachings of Jesus," Ayn Rand writes. She argues that when Jesus teaches about “the salvation of one’s soul,” that’s individualism and therefore good. But when it comes to ethics, Jesus goes off the rails. Jesus’ mistake, per Rand, is the idea that, “in order to save one’s soul, one must love or help or live for others.” And that, Rand concludes, leads to Christianity’s “failure.”


“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” Jesus said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” (Matthew 22:36-40, NRSV)

“An end must be put to the inhuman practice of draining the productive to subsidize the unproductive. An end must be put to the primordial notion that one’s life belongs to the tribe, to “the community,” and that the superlative wealth-creators must do penance for the sin of creating value.”

“Give Back? Yes, It’s Time For The 99% To Give Back To The 1%”, by Harry Biswanger (Forbes.com, Sept. 17, 2013) [Note: Biswanger is a board member of the Ayn Rand Institute]

Please help the king to be honest and fair just like you, our God. Let him be honest and fair with all your people, especially the poor. Let peace and justice rule every mountain and hill. Let the king defend the poor, rescue the homeless, and crush everyone who hurts them. Do this because the king rescues the homeless when they cry out, and he helps everyone who is poor and in need. The king has on the weak and the helpless and protects those in need.

Psalm 72: 1-4, 13, 14) [Note: This prayer is for righteous government, represented by the king]

We’re not born with inexplicable duties to serve God or society. We only have one life, and the good is to live it. Join with other people when you have real values in common and go your separate way when you don’t. Don’t try to be your brother’s keeper or to force him to be yours. Live independently.

Ayn Rand (www.anyrand.org/ideas/overview)

“Who is my neighbor?” asks a lawyer seeking to justify himself. Jesus responds with the parable of The Good Samaritan. (Luke 10:29)
We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America. [Preamble]

The Preamble to the U.S. Constitution includes a fundamental biological fact that all higher living organisms aspire, namely to defend against threat. The course of life involves acquiring food, habitat and shelter, protecting against enemies, and ensuring progeny to carry on the species. We humans are no exception to this basic biology, although we additionally desire personal happiness, social harmony, liberty of mind and spirit, and a thirst for Ultimate Meaning and Purpose.

Military and Anti-Terrorism

In the minds of most Americans, “common defense” means military protection and intervention against foreign threats. Police protection, fire and rescue services, and neighborhood patrols also come to mind. The United States Department of Defense, headquartered in the Pentagon, is charged with military actions abroad, with a budget of about $600 billion, about 54% of the nation’s discretionary budget. This funds the Army, Marine Corps, Navy, and Air Force branches. Major expenditures include the salaries of uniformed and civilian personnel, military operations, and acquisition and maintenance of facilities and equipment. This is more than the cumulative total of the next seven countries’ defense budgets.

The Department of Homeland Security is the third largest cabinet position behind the Department of Defense and Department of Veteran’s Affairs. With an annual budget of about $41 billion, Homeland Security involves anti-terrorism, border security, cybersecurity, disaster prevention and management, and immigration and naturalization. The stated Mission of Homeland Security is “a concerted national effort to prevent terrorist attacks within the United States, reduce America’s vulnerability to terrorism, and minimize the damage and recover from attacks that do occur.” Its Vision is to ensure a homeland that is safe, secure, and resilient against terrorism and other hazards.

But What About Defense Of Nature?

It is axiomatic that flourishing human life depends upon clean water, air, soil, along with goods and services such as food, fiber, and raw materials provided by natural ecosystems. Defending these necessities from degradation, depletion, or unjust distribution should be clear and inarguable. Such defense, tragically, is not the case for much of the world’s present population. In the United States, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has the Mission “to protect human health and the environment.” The annual EPA budget is under $8 billion and declining due to concerted industry-driven attacks by Congress. To show perspective, the EPA budget is barely over 1% of that of the combined Defense and Homeland Security budgets.

Earth faces the real possibility that life on our planet could terminate through human causality. Large-scale nuclear warfare would blink out life almost instantaneously with blast, radiation, and consequent interminable winter. The world is armed with over 15,000 nuclear warheads, over 90% of which are roughly divided by the United States and Russia. Although stockpiles have dropped over the past three decades, current tensions between NATO nations and Russia are ominous.

Planet-wide Ecosystem collapse could also massively worsen or possibly terminate human life although at a slower, gradual pace. Global warming from mounting atmospheric greenhouse gas concentrations, unless curbed, will eventually reach a tipping point of runaway climate change through unstoppable amplifying feedback loops such as methane release from permafrost. Also unless greenhouse gases are cubed, ocean acidification will alter and destroy keystone ecosystems such as coral reefs, and destructively raise sea levels. Suffering human populations would act in desperate ways.

Question: Can we reconsider and redefine national defense and homeland security?

A New Vision for Security

Three decades ago Wendell Berry wrote a passionate essay, “Property, Patriotism, and National Defense” that quotes from the French writer Jean Giono’s 1932 novel, Blue Boy. “If it were a question of defending rivers, hills, mountains, skies, winds, rains, I would say, ‘Willingly. That is our job. Let us fight. All our happiness in life is there.’ No, we have defended the sham name of all that.” (Home Economics, North Point Press, 1987, p. 98).

Theologian Jürgen Moltmann argues that “every democratic government has two responsibilities: 1. To protect the people; 2. To protect the land.” Moltmann goes on to discuss proposals on the Rights of Nature that correspond and are interconnected with Human Rights. Theologically these rights are grounded in God’s lasting intergenerational covenant. “Behold,” says God, “I establish my covenant with you and your descendants after you and with every living creature” (Genesis 9:9-10). People are to respect creation for God’s sake. (God For A Secular Society, Fortress Press, 1999, pp. 110-112).

Indigenous tribal people across the planet are leading the defense of creation. The Standing Rock Sioux “Water Protectors” against the Dakota Access Pipe Line are joined with representatives from over 250 tribes are leading Americans in prayer to “protect our people, our sacred places, our land and our resources. We won’t step down from this fight. As peoples of this earth, we all need water. This is about our water, our rights, and our dignity as human beings.” (Dave Archambault II, Chairman of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe) Their adversaries assailing God’s creation are those who consider themselves advanced and civilized.

In August 2016, Bill McKibben published an essay in New Republic, “World At War.” In a nutshell, McKibben calls for an all-out mobilization akin to that of World War II in order to avert climate catastrophe. This means immediately and massively retooling our economy to clean energy and conservation. McKibben calls for the President to issue executive orders to implement this shift. Desperate times require full-engaged action, now! Patriots, let us arise to defend the ecological viability of our nation, the world, and the future! Christians, let us honor God with our concerted action, for “The earth is the Lord’s and all it contains” (Psalm 24:1).

Drop Solar Panels, Not Bombs

In days to come the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised up above the hills. Peoples shall stream to it, and many nations shall come and say: “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, TO THE HOUSE OF THE GOD OF JACOB; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord will be a light to the nations. He shall judge between the many peoples, and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore; but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the Lord of Hosts has spoken. (Micah 4:1-4; parallel Isaiah 2:2-4)

The prophets foretell God’s plan for a peaceful, harmonious, and just world. Arbitration rather than war will settle disputes. People will have means to provide their sustenance. Fear will dissipate.

Dave Carroll, a friend who is an accomplished inventor of technology such as improved LED lightbulbs, offers a Solar Defense Concept. Inasmuch as Pentagon analysts suggest that climate change is the #1 threat to long term security due to accompanying social unrest, Carroll suggests the President, under the War Powers Act/Resolution, redirect a proportion of the Defense Department to implement solar systems worldwide. “It is better and cheaper to build and even give away solar power systems than to react militarily to the coming geopolitical chaos.”

[Then] swords will be beaten into plowshares, spears into pruning hooks, nations will not war, and peace will drive out fear.
Acceptance Speech 2016 Steward of God’s Creation

Thank you so much for your generous comments and for giving me this award. My husband, Robert Jonas, won this award 15 years ago and I am proud to follow in his footsteps!

When we think about climate change, we know that the news is grim. The web of life is unraveling. Bill McKibben puts it succinctly: “Our old familiar globe is suddenly melting, drying, acidifying, flooding, and burning in ways that no human has ever seen.”

Given what we know about the crisis in which we find ourselves, what happens to the emotional and spiritual dimension of our lives? How do we face our fear and grief without being overwhelmed? How do we move out of denial and despair into a life that is filled with grief without being overwhelmed? How do we move from the place of our fear and our grief, our guilt – is perpetually met by our mercy and love of God. One way or another, we live with a new sense of spaciousness and freedom, unattached to results.

We need people – in fact, we need lots of people – willing to face the most challenging, even devastating facts, people who are learning how to enlarge their reserves of courage, faith, and hope, people who will step out to bear witness in very concrete ways to the God in whom we live and move and have our being, and who entrusted the world to our care.

So here is a 3-part framework for the heart, a way of “holding” the climate crisis in a way that helps us to respond wisely and creatively to the challenges we face: we cultivate an awakened heart, a broken heart, and a radiant heart.

We begin with an awakened heart. What is an awakened heart? It is a heart that is more and more deeply, more and more frequently, more and more consciously attuned to love. A person with an awakened heart is someone whose heart is repeatedly touched by a boundless love that seems to well up from somewhere or that unexpectedly shines out in the world around. A person with an awakened heart is someone who is learning to see themselves, and others, and all creation, with eyes of love in each and every moment. This is when we perceive the beauty and preciousness of God’s creation. We experience gratefulness, wonder, amazement, awe. We discover how cherished we are as creatures that are part of creation.

Experiencing our God-given preciousness is a powerful antidote to the messages we hear that human beings are “a cancer on the planet,” a “virus” taking down life. I understand the anger and deep frustration behind such statements, the anger evoked by the enormous damage that humans are doing to the eco-systems on which all life depends. It’s true that our industrial economy, based on fossil fuels, is acting like a cancer that takes down life. But the only way forward is not to feed the voice of self-hatred, but instead to listen to the inner voice of love that is always sounding in our hearts and that alone can guide us on a new path. As I see it, all the world’s religious practices, from mindfulness meditation to practicing gratitude, are disciplines we’ve been given to help our hearts awaken.

As we walk forward with awakened hearts we experience a broken heart. Of course none of us wants to move into this second stage of the journey, and there are many reasons we fear and repress our grief. As Joanna Macy, the Buddhist eco-philosopher, points out, we don’t want to feel pain; we don’t want to look morbid; we don’t want to bring other people down; we don’t want to seem weak and emotional. And yet we do feel pain for the world. We can’t help it. No one is exempt from it, because we’re part of the whole, and suffering in one place ripples across the planet.

So, as you consider the suffering caused by climate change, where do you feel the grief? What are the tears you need to shed? What is breaking your heart? And how do we open to the pain of our precious world without drowning in the pain? The divine love in which we participate does not close itself off from suffering, but enters it, shares it, and touches it with love. For Christians, the symbol of that divine sharing in our suffering is the cross of Christ. So, as a Christian, I go in prayer to the cross, where I believe that everything in us – our pain and anger, our grief, our guilt – is perpetually met by the mercy and love of God. One way or another, all the world’s spiritual traditions teach that there is no escape from suffering and that, paradoxically, a broken heart can be the gateway to hope and even joy.

Here is the third part of this spiritual framework. Filled with love, because day by day our heart is awakened, and wide open to our suffering and the suffering of the world, we want the love that is flowing into our lives to pour out into the world around us. We’ve been cultivating an awakened heart, we are accepting a broken heart, and now we want to express what I’m calling a radiant heart. We want our lives to bear witness in tangible ways to the love that has set us free.

What we feel sent out to do can take many forms. Commitment to care for the earth will affect what we buy and what we refuse to buy, what we drive and what we refuse to drive, how we heat our homes, how much we re-use and re-cycle, and how ardently we join hands with other people to push for the enormous systemic changes that are required if we’re going to save life as it has evolved on this planet.

Yet just because we’re very busy doesn’t necessarily mean that we’re manifesting a radiant heart. For example, sometimes I get super-busy because I’ve lost touch with my basic preciousness: I think that I must prove my worth, demonstrate my value. Then I say to myself, “Margaret, remember that you’re cultivating an awakened heart. Let yourself rest in God’s goodness. Breathe in God’s love, recall how loved you already are, and let that energy carry you into the next situation.”

Or I get busy because I want to stay one step ahead of my feelings -- I don’t want to feel the pain or grief; I’d much rather keep moving. Then I say to myself, “Margaret, remember that you’ve accepted a broken heart. Go back to the cross of Christ. Let yourself stop for a while and bring whatever you’re feeling to the crucified Christ, where everything in you – like it or not – is met with love.”

When we know that we’re cherished to the core and when our anguish is met again and again by the ever-merciful love of God, then our actions are more likely to spring from wisdom than from fear or compulsion, and we live with a new sense of spaciousness and freedom, unattached to results.

Thank you, friends, for this award. Thank you for standing with me. Thank you for all you do to embody and bear witness to the love that sent us into this world, that sustains and guides our lives, and that will meet us at our journey’s end. I’m grateful to be sharing the journey with you.


The Rev. Margaret Bullitt-Jonas, Ph.D., serves as Missioner for Creation Care for the Episcopal Diocese of Western Mass. and for the Mass. Conference, United Church of Christ. She maintains a Website: RevivingCreation.org.

The Mountain Vision Fall 2016
No man is an island,
Entire of itself,
Every man is a piece of the
continent,
A part of the main.
If a clod be washed away by the
sea,
Europe is the less.
As well as if a promontory were.
As well as if a manor of thy friend’s
Or of thine own were:
Any man’s death diminishes me,
Because I am involved in
mankind,
And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls;
It tolls for thee.

-------John Donne

Therefore,
let nothing hinder us,
nothing separate us,
nothing come between us,
wherever we are,
in every place,
at every hour,
at every moment of the day,
everyday and continually, let all of us…
hold in our heart and love,
 honor, adore, serve,
praise and bless,
glorify and exalt,
magnify and give thanks…

-------St. Francis of Assisi

When we allow freedom ring, when we let it
ring from every village and every hamlet, from
every state and every city, we will be able to
speed up that day when all of God’s children,
black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles,
Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join
hands and sing in the words of the old Negro
spiritual:

Free at last! Free at last!

Thank God Almighty, we are free at last

-------Martin Luther King, jr.

Oh give thanks to
the Lord, for he is good, for
his steadfast love endures
forever!

-------Psalm 107:1

This is the day that the Lord has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.

-------Psalm 118:24

Happy 102nd birthday to Ken Hechler
In Romney, WV, pictured with Allen Johnson

Upcoming for The Mountain Vision

CFTM is planning its ninth edition for summer, as our schedule permits.
Please let us know if your friends would like a sample copy.

We invite you to send your own personal stories of your conversions
to Kingdom of God ethics with emphasis on
environmental justice.

Mountain Vision is an outreach ministry of Christians
For The Mountains. Copies are sent free of charge to
advocates for God’s “will to be done, on earth as it is
in heaven” (Mt. 6:10).