I will listen to what God the Lord will say. For He will speak peace to His people, to those who are right with Him. But do not let them turn again to foolish things. For sure His saving power is near those who fear Him, so His shining-greatness may live in the land. Loving-kindness and truth have met together. Peace and what is right and good have kissed each other. Truth comes up from the earth. And what is right and good looks down from heaven. Yes, the Lord will give what is good. And our land will give its fruit. What is right and good will go before Him and make a way for His steps.

(Psalm 85:8-13, NLV)

God is for us, and indeed, for all God's beloved creation.

Love within the Christian understanding originates from God. The Greek word Agape is used to describe a love that is freely given, unconditional, and cannot be earned or bought. Such love is life-giving because it is the essence of God (1 John 4:8). Such love can operate only in freedom. That is, one cannot coerce this love, but only give and receive it as gift. In Christian parlance, this gift is called grace.

Back in the 1980’s I became an avid reader of the French theologian and social critic, Jacques Ellul. In one of his most incisive works, “The Subversion of Christianity,” Ellul points out that grace is a scandal. We humans in our arrogance want to merit and deserve God’s favor. And we tend to justify ourselves through comparing our relative goodness with others who are moral failures in the eyes of our society. Thus our hand closes into itself and is not open to receive God’s grace, any more than I cannot receive a present if my hand is closed.

Jesus tells several parables to illustrate God’s grace—The Good Samaritan; the Pharisee and the Tax Collector; the Prodigal Son; the Lost Sheep; and more.

We will make progress in our efforts for a better world when we act toward others with truth couched in love, and demonstrate God’s pathway by living our lives in attitudes and practices of freedom and peace.

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Visit us on the Web at www.christiansforthemountains.org Our Facebook community welcomes you!
Almost daily I hear strong criticisms leveled at Christianity. The criticism usually involves a charge of hypocrisy. “You Christians say you are morally upright, yet you promote [ ] and mistreat [ ] and ignore [ ] and self-serve yourselves by [ ] and you voted for [ ] instead of [ ].” I understand, and as a Christian I often feel embarrassed by behavior exhibited by church people and institutions. And in reflection (truth be told), sometimes embarrassed by my own attitudes and behavior.

Often those criticisms can be categorized into cultural/political lines. Left wing/liberal/progressive people and right wing/conservative/libertarian folks are often at each other’s throats. Each side claims to possess the truth, claims to seek justice and liberty, and claims altruistic motives. The left expresses contempt at the right, saying they see social justice only within a narrow framework of anti-abortion and traditional sexuality while ignoring the plight of the poor, refugees, the environment, and buildup to war. On the right, conservative people express contempt at the left, asserting they are moral degenerates uprooting family, nation, culture and other traditional pillars of society. The blogosphere is full of this ranting. The term “United States” may be an oxymoron, as “united we are not.” Congress is almost dysfunctional in its divisiveness. Church bodies, too, are fractious and splitting.

Almost every page of the Bible seems to speak to this divide. First, we cannot justify ourselves. Second, we fail, yet God desires to forgive us and set us aright. Third, we are commended to align our personal attitudes and lifestyles and conduct to the standards God has revealed. Fourth, we are called to advocate for and directly serve the good of others. And fifth, we are to be witnesses of God’s reconciling outreach even to enemies and opponents.

I have made a practice subscribing to periodicals and reading books and blogs that encompass a wide spectrum across the liberal/conservative spectrum. I choose both religious and secular materials produced by people I feel have integrity and seek the good of society. While reading, I engage my thoughts in a running dialogue trying to listen to and understand the points being made. Some of those points I sharply disagree with. Yet do I take my disagreements to the point of wishing bad things to the person expressing those disagreeable views? If I am to desire opponents to change their minds, am I willing to open my own mind to change?

I was a sophomore at a small Midwestern college in February 1968 when Martin Luther King spoke to our student body. This was a big deal for our college. The press clamored for space in our crowded auditorium. I remember King giving a stirring speech, followed by a thunderous standing ovation. But I sat in my seat, arms crossed, a scowl on my face. To my mind, King was an enemy promulgating dangerous propaganda and leading a misguided movement. In reality, I was a racial bigot. Two months later, when King was assassinated, I did not express deep sorrow like many of my classmates did. At the time, our college had few black students, but after the speech, the college actively recruited African-Americans. During the following two years I became close friends with several, and in my senior year advocated in direct action on their behalf. My change was not coerced, it came about through love and truth.

John Newton in his early years captioned a slave-carrying ship, yet later became a strong abolitionist. He penned the words to beloved hymn, “Amazing Grace.” “I once was lost, but now I’m found, was blind but now I see.”

The Christian Gospel message is reconciliation with God, and then derivatively with people, and then with creation. God takes the first initiative, then calls us to witness and demonstrate this reconciliation. This reconciliation is on God’s terms, which includes justice for others, generosity to the poor, and personal moral responsibility. Those people and societies that harden their hearts against God’s way become lost on their own dead-end paths, and fall.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, speaks to us this Christmas season in her Magnificat (Luke 1).

The Mighty One has done great things for me.
His name is holy.
He shows his mercy to those who have respect for him,
from parent to child down through the years.
He has done mighty things with his powerful arm.
He has scattered those who are proud in their deepest thoughts.
He has brought down rulers from their thrones.
But He has lifted up people who are not considered important.
He has filled with good things those who are hungry.
But He has sent away empty those who are rich.
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 requires 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 financially to disasters, be on leadership teams that plan and hold conferences, and push for just, enforced regulations and policy in state and national government. Scholars, researchers, and media frequently request interviews and tours. CFTM continues to support health research in mountaintop removal communities CFTM is a sponsor of the Larry Gibson Biography project. All this on our volunteer-run, donor-supported 2018 budget of $9000!!!

Our nation is going through challenging political times. Our most important gift to movements yearning 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 financial gift to help CFTM reach others like you who understand our God-given directive to “act justly and to love each other.”

THANK YOU!!!

ONLINE DONATIONS ARE WELCOME THROUGH OUR WEBSITE  www.christiansforthemountains.org

Invitation to Join Together With Us

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Mountain Mourning Collection DVD Is Free for CFTM Members

Twelve years ago CFTM launched this DVD as its first major outreach. Although produced on an exceptionally low budget, this film collection has been widely shown across the world. Larry Gibson and Maria Gunnoe used it for their speaking engagements. And many have acclaimed this collection of films as powerfully heart-reaching. Three feature films of approximately 20 minutes each are Mountain Mourning, Look What They’ve Done, and Keeper Of The Mountains. You are welcome to request multiple copies.

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.
Holistic Holiness  by Robert Phillips Russo

Most of the church is split into two camps – either focused on personal salvation and holiness or focused on social holiness / social justice. While we can say that we all care about both individual and societal wellbeing, many fall into one of these two camps. I believe this has profoundly hindered our witness of the Good News of Jesus the Christ and His Kingdom. When we chose our camp, we, as the forgiven and redeemed people of God, often find ourselves compromising key biblical teachings as we make alliances with people and political movements whose primary interests are other than the glory of God (not that all those alliances are necessarily wrong). Christians in the personal holiness camp often are publicly in alliances with groups who cringe at biblical teachings concerning caring for the poor on a societal level, and Christians in the social gospel camp often are publicly in alliances with groups who cringe at many biblical teachings of personal holiness. While there are many exceptions, when studies have been done regarding public perceptions of Christian denominations and branches, this is the understanding. Few hold it both together well in this country. And those who do should be celebrated.

“When listening to the teaching of others, we can become like the world – picking our sides and writing off people and their thoughts if they fall on “the other side.”

On an even more dangerous note, as people our hearts can once again become hardened to God. Instead of listening to each person with dignity, trying to hear where we may agree and diligently searching the scriptures to check for truth, when listening to the teaching of others, we can become like the world – picking our sides and writing off people and their thoughts if they fall on “the other side.” As Christians, we are all brothers and sisters, and the person we may be writing off was valued enough by God to be redeemed by Him, and the teaching we may be writing off, may be coming straight from the Word of God in Scripture. Here we need to take how we hear with our ears and our hearts seriously, so we may continue to grow closer with God in the way of saving and sanctifying grace.

“A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.” (Ezekiel 26:36)

Throughout the Old and New Testament, we can see that God’s heart is for seeing both a personal holiness

and social holiness come to fruition in our lives, communities, and throughout the world. God called Abram out of his pagan community and called him to trust God, worshipping Him only in his faith and actions. God changed his identity to Abraham, as he followed after God. In Genesis 12:3, God makes a covenant with him “I will bless you, and make your name great, and you shall be a blessing, ... and in you all the nations of the world shall be blessed.” As Christians we are children of Abraham and inheritors of the promises given to him by God (See first half of Romans). We are blessed by God and those blessings have real immediate effects to us personally. But we are also blessed to be a blessing to others and to the world. God chose Abraham and Sarah and in their old age, blessed this barren couple with a child of their own and promised to give them descendants as numerous as the stars. A huge personal blessing. From them God created the Hebrew people and formed Israel as His own people. “You are to be holy to me because I, the Lord, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own.” (Leviticus 20:26).

“Throughout the Old and New Testament, we can see that God’s heart is for seeing both a personal holiness and social holiness come to fruition in our lives, communities, and throughout the world.”

He gave them instruction on how to live both in their personal lives, pertaining to their own bodies and families, and socially for their societal relations, and also in how to properly worship The LORD, God. At the center of it all was that they were to worship The LORD only. By living in this way, the surrounding nations would see their lives, hear about their God and it would be a witness for the character of who God is. This was to glorify God and help lead the other nations to worship of the one true God, in a life of faith and action, transforming the other nations and leading to the transformation of the world.

However, while the nations noticed and some leaders did come and praise The LORD, the people of Israel did not keep The LORD at the center. They instead adopted the worship of the pagan gods and goddesses of the surrounding nations, because they wanted to be like the rest of the world. As The LORD moved out of the center of their lives, their actions turned away from God’s instruction. They gave themselves over to sexual perversions, prostitution, adultery; they became dishonest in their business dealings; they murdered their babies in sacrifices; and they neglected caring for the poor and the helpless. All these things angered God. Isaiah, Amos, Micah, Jeremiah, and other prophets spoke profusely to God’s concern for and anger when the poor, the sojourner (refugee, migrant), the widow and orphan were not properly cared for by individuals and by society.

Ah, you who make iniquitous decrees, who write oppressive statutes, to turn aside the needy from justice and to rob the poor of my people of their right, that widows may be your spoil, and that you may make the orphans your prey! What will you do on the day of punishment, in the calamity that will come from far away? To whom will you flee for help, and where will you leave your wealth? (Isaiah 10:1-3)

God calls us to speak for those whose voice is minimized or don’t yet have one.

Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute. Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy.” (Proverbs 31:8-9)

Yet much of the people of Israel continued not to follow God.

Then the word of the Lord came to Zechariah, saying, “Thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘Execute true justice, Show mercy and compassion Everyone to his brother. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, The alien or the poor. Let none of you plan evil in his heart against his brother.”

But they refused to heed, shrugged their shoulders, and stopped their ears so that they could not hear. Yes, they made their hearts like flint, refusing to hear the law and the words which the Lord of hosts had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets. Thus great wrath came from the Lord of hosts. Therefore it happened, that just as He proclaimed and they would not hear, so they called out and I would not listen,” says the Lord of hosts.” (Zechariah 7:8-13)

As people, our hearts were hardened by sin, and so we never were able to fulfill the calling of God towards holiness, personal or social. We were called to be holy for God is holy and we are to be His people—separated from the paganism of the world and separated unto the one true and holy God. But we kept turning away, wanting to be like the other nations, instead of being the unique and peculiar people of God.

“We were called to be holy for God is holy and we are to be His people - separated from the paganism of the world and separated unto the one true and holy God.”

The law showed us the severity of our hard hearts and need for a savior. The promise of the new covenant is that God would take our hearts of stone and give us hearts of flesh, empowering us to overcome sin.
The New Testament makes it clear that our salvation is not just for us, but part of God’s larger story of reconciling the world to Himself, and we as the redeemed people of God have an essential role to play in God’s healing of the world from sin.

Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that, is that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

How do we reflect God’s holiness, His purity, His freedom from all sin, His Love, so that others will come close to Him, find true healing / shalom in Him, live their lives for Him and give Him the praise He alone is worthy of?

By the word we speak and by our action, our conduct.

By the way we live—Not hypocritically, but holistically. In Holistic Holiness. Keeping both personal and social holiness together.

“The New Testament makes it clear that our salvation is not just for us, and we ... have an essential role to play in God’s healing of the world from sin.”

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.”

(1 Thessalonians 5:23-24)

N ow while we are all passionate about seeing God’s good earth cared for and people treated with dignity and respect, can I ask:

Are we staying as the distinct, unique people of God? Can we honor THE LORD with our lives as living sacrifices, ready to be seen as weird, not fitting in to the world around us? Going forth as weird to some, but clothed in the beauty of Christ, His blood shed on the cross for our sins, and His Spirit living brightly in and through us, as His ambassadors to the world, proclaiming how good his ways are and pointing to His glory first, above all else? Can we pursue true holiness, holistic holiness, by receiving all his word, yielding to His Holy Spirit, so the world may see His beauty, and His light—the true source of beauty and the true Light of the World, even if they find us weird at first?

“How do we reflect God’s holiness?
By the way we live—Not hypocritically, but holistically.
In Holistic Holiness. Keeping both personal and social holiness together.”

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.”

(1 Thessalonians 5:23-24)

May we live in such a way as to truly reflect God’s character by pursuing this life of holistic holiness in love...”

You’re a hypocrite! You complain about coal, but coal keeps your lights on.”

“And you holler about global warming, but how did you get to your protest meeting? You didn’t walk, you drove your car.”

You rant about greedy corporate culture, while typing on a computer running on electricity.

Everybody working for environmental justice has heard these taunts. Moreover, we take these criticisms to heart. We use electricity, heat our homes, ride in motor vehicles that contribute greenhouse gases. Some or a lot of our food and hard goods are produced and transported through a system that we know carries a heavy environmental justice cost. We know many people in the world, especially those of poor countries, use only a fraction of the earth’s resources compared to that of even conscientious Americans.

So do we give in to guilt, raise our hands in surrender, and give up? Or do we just evade the question? Or, another approach, do we just buckle down to an ever deepening personal austerity? Or, perhaps most insidious, do we smugly compare ourselves with our neighbors and colleagues? “Look at the Jones guy over there with his gas-guzzling Hammer. Me, I drive a Prius.”

Although he did not have to struggle with environmental pressures like we have today, the Apostle Paul nevertheless struggled with a dilemma when he said, “I don’t know what I’m doing, because I don’t do what I want to do. Instead, I do the thing that I hate.” (Romans 7:15 CEB)

The prophet Isaiah apparently had similar troubles. His nation was controlled by a ruthless foreign power, Assyria, which was paid off through tribute levies. Isaiah’s fellow countrymen trampled over one another for scraps and privilege. Idolatry infected the land. Isaiah prophesied that God was sore displeased. His nation was controlled by a ruthless foreign power, Assyria, which was paid off through tribute levies.

As Isaiah sat in misery, grieving his sin, impurity, and unworthiness, one of the angelic beings came to him holding a tong with a hot coal from the altar, touched Isaiah’s lips with that coal, and spoke. “Now that this has seared your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is removed.” (v. 7)

Then Isaiah heard the Lord’s voice saying, “Whom should I send, and who will go for us?” And Isaiah responded, “I’m here; send me.” (v. 8)

The Lord’s voice then commissioned Isaiah to go. There is more to say on that, but first we need to look back on what had just happened to Isaiah. First, he had a close encounter with the Living Holy God. In that encounter, Isaiah did not justify himself as a good guy even though up to that time he was doing courageous preaching for God. Isaiah knew deep inside himself that he was unworthy and sinful. Isaiah openly admitted his sinful state. He did not bargain. He did not tell God the good deeds he had been doing.

God is merciful to a contrite attitude. The angelic being touched Isaiah’s lips with the purifying hot coal, and declared Isaiah free from guilt and sin. And then God’s question. “I need someone to do a task.” And Isaiah said, “I’ll do it.”

We who benefit, say, from our heavy environmental footprint, even though we don’t like it and try as we should to avoid it, can come before the Holy God who will forgive us, commission us, and empower us to a task. This new task is not about our being good enough, or our being unworthy and hypocritical. This commissioning is about doing God’s work, for God’s purpose, for God’s glory.

In the year that the nation’s king, Uzziah, died, Isaiah was shaken to his core by a vision of The Lord sitting on a lofty throne, the room filled with smoke from an altar, attended by angelic beings saying in thunderous voice, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.” (Isaiah 6:1-3)

Awestruck by the purity and holiness of God, Isaiah cried out, “Woe is me! I’m ruined! I’m a man with unclean lips, and I live among a people with unclean lips. Yet I’ve seen the King, the Lord of heavenly forces!” (v. 5)

The job God gave Isaiah was not an easy one. He was to tell his people a truth they would not accept. Indeed, Isaiah just talking to them would harden their hearts all the more. And the end result would be national disaster. (v. 9-12). But all would not be lost, something good would remain to revive. God’s long-term salvation purpose would continue. (v. 13).

Friends, most of us reading this live relatively comfortable lives with suitable lodging, plentiful food, and a measure of personal security, safety, and stability that many in the world lack. Yet we know we live in perilous times. The threat of nuclear war hovers, and with universal disarmament seeming unlikely, is it inevitable that on some future date a trigger will be pulled? Greenhouse gas concentrations continue to rise with resultant climate destabilization, and will this trend reverse? Burgeoning populations, ethnic strife, and resource inequity are just some of the exacerbating problems.

But God loves the world and is not One to surrender this world to defeat. God continues to ask for volunteers to help. And these volunteers don’t need to be good enough; indeed, none are. God is good, that is what matters. God commissions, anoints, sends forth. Those who are faithful to the task will somehow fulfill something of God’s purpose. Whether to our minds we succeed or fail is secondary. It’s all about God’s purpose, and God’s purpose is good for creation.

God says, “Who will I send?” “Yes, Lord, I will go. Send me.”

The Mountain Vision Winter 2017-2018
When the youth group of St. Paul's Church in Lexington, KY, wanted an experience of Appalachia, they called me. I regularly conduct pilgrimages to the holy land of Appalachia. The nine teens and two adults live within an hour’s drive of the mountains, but in their world of technology, they seldom raise their eyes from I-Phones and texting.

I had an opportunity one Saturday to drive them to a land with “no-bars-on-cellphones,” so they could appreciate a walk through God’s Garden.

A short drive outside Hazard two reclaimed strip-mined sites sit side by side, one reclaimed 30 years before, the other just 5 years before. No real difference. The discussion by the side of the cars focused on top soil, biodiversity, invasive species, orphan lands and greed.

To finish the tour, we traveled to a remote area near the Red River Gorge in Wolfe County, where my friends, Russ and Reenie have lived off the grid for over 35 years. Their rows of meticulously-tended vegetables with frisky pets running freely signaled a satisfying lifestyle of simplicity amidst God’s creation.

To the kids and chaperons the contrast acted like shock therapy: destruction on one mountain, harmony on another. The discussions evoked questions about how to live materially, what to want and at what cost.

For me that Saturday epitomized how a pilgrimage can open eyes and teach critical thinking. Who would have thought 50 years ago that rural ministry could mean having teens unplug from electronic devices to take a walk in the woods?

In 2010 two investment brokers from Wall Street asked for a tour to assess the prospects of the Affordable Care Act that would take full effect in 2014. They wanted to know about rural health needs. After three days of touring, one spoke bluntly. He originally thought we would meet with state health officials, heads of hospitals and county agents. Instead, we went to free clinics, drug counselors and homes of Medicaid recipients. We talked about bad roads and unreliable transportation to meet doctors’ appointments. We discussed the tradeoffs between getting medications versus buying food, and we discovered the lack of coordination between health professionals for a patient’s well-being.

“Meeting an elderly woman who was on 13 medicines, many of which are not appropriate for her...is ridiculous,” lamented one Wall Street broker reflecting on the uncoordinated prescriptions from her three doctors. “All the people involved still feed off her coming for visits, getting prescriptions, and staying sick.”

His A-ha! moment realized how predatory the health care system has become. My reflection? Wall Street crunches numbers; a pilgrimage occasions an encounter.

The Mountain Vision Winter 2017-2018

A Pilgrimage Can Occasion an Encounter by Fr. John S. Rausch

Encounter the World and Others

A strong theme of Pope Francis is the notion of “encounter.” He sees encounter as an ability, given by God, to appreciate the world as Christ appreciated the world, both human and non-human. It becomes a stance of inclusiveness of everything and everyone that exists.

In Laudato Si he wrote that St. Francis of Assisi “shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace” (L.S. par. #10.) St. Francis was a person who encountered the world in its totality.

As a Glenmary priest, I’ve lived over 40 years in Appalachia. I’ve found that the best way to understand social justice issues concerning the area and mountain folks demands real life experiences that can lead to an encounter. For me, a pilgrimage takes us there.

Stereotypical images of shoeless kids with dirty faces and torn tee shirts live on beyond the pages of Life magazine from a half century ago. Outsiders ask why low-income folks don’t move from an economically depressed region, or why they spend their small income on cigarettes. Others observe fewer trainloads of coal chugging out of the mountains and wonder why the Environmental Protection Agency can’t relax more rules to boost employment. The story of Appalachia defies a single photo or a quick telling. For those serious about encountering the spirit of the mountains, I simply tell them, “Get in the van and I’ll take you around.”

Two Visitors From Wall Street

In 2010 two investment brokers from Wall Street asked for a tour to assess the prospects of the Affordable Care Act that would take full effect in 2014. They wanted to know about rural health needs. After three days of touring, one spoke bluntly. He originally thought we would meet with state health officials, heads of hospitals and county agents. Instead, we went to free clinics, drug counselors and homes of Medicaid recipients. We talked about bad roads and unreliable transportation to meet doctors’ appointments. We discussed the tradeoffs between getting medications versus buying food, and we discovered the lack of coordination between health professionals for a patient’s well-being.

“Meeting an elderly woman who was on 13 medicines, many of which are not appropriate for her...is ridiculous,” lamented one Wall Street broker reflecting on the uncoordinated prescriptions from her three doctors. “All the people involved still feed off her coming for visits, getting prescriptions, and staying sick.”

His A-ha! moment realized how predatory the

Pilgrims in the Holy Land of Appalachia

Return Home Changed

I’ve been conducting pilgrimages since 1994. Nearly every participant returns home with a fuller perspective of the world, but there are exceptions. Those few exceptions bring their own ideas or straightjacket ideology for judging people and fixing things. They get on the van, but miss the encounter.

The true pilgrims unplugged from their electronic devices and preconceived notions during a pilgrimage, can listen and observe, be filled with awe and compassion, and appreciate a deeper sense of reverence for all life and creation.

Fr. John Rausch has served Appalachian communities as a Glenmary priest for almost 40 years. He is a Steering Committee member with Christians For The Mountains. Rausch was 2007 PaxChristi “Teacher of Peace.” He has led numerous Pilgrimages To The Holy Land Of Appalachia, as well as conducting a myriad of retreats, spring flower walks, tours of mountaintop removal, and speaking in churches across the region.

Rausch continues to publish articles, and has been featured in several films including a segment of the Renewal Project that focused on mountaintop removal from a faith perspective.

Interested in upcoming tours? Write Fr. John Rausch at PO Box 1398, Stanton, Kentucky 40380.
Celebrating 50 years of marriage is called a Golden Anniversary. Applause is well-deserved, because invariably such a couple has weathered storms in life, struggles, disappointments, as well as enjoyed accomplishments, joys, and love. Importantly, the couple has learned to adjust to life’s circumstances, to hold together, and to adapt to changing circumstances.

Some of that can apply to long-standing organizations. This fall the venerable West Virginia Highlands Conservancy celebrated its Golden Anniversary of 50 years of serving, protecting, and enhancing the “Wild and Wonderful” in West Virginia. A gala was held at Canaan Valley in September 2017 to mark the occasion.

The Mission of the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy (WVHC) is straightforward and visionary—“Preserving West Virginia for future generations.”

The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy promotes, encourages and works for the conservation—including both preservation and wise management—and an appreciation of the natural resources of West Virginia and the Nation. WVHC has special focus on the Highlands Region of West Virginia that lies on the eastern portion of the state. Some of this area includes state parks and forests, national forests, and a federally-designated wilderness area. WVHC works for the cultural, social, educational, physical health, spiritual and economic benefit of present and future generations of residents and visitors alike.

Advocacy is an important component as the WVHC works for government policies and actions that protect, encourage and enforce laws for the health and wellbeing of the natural world and its inhabitants. This includes preserving and protecting the mountains and streams of West Virginia with a focus on wilderness and areas with recreation, scenic, geologic, biologic and historic importance.

Outdoor nature excursions are important for enjoyment. We care for that which we love, and being outdoors develops love, respect, and knowledge of nature. WVHC sponsors field trips for education as well as opportunities to perform ecological services.

Following are excerpts from The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy website. https://wvhighlands.org

When the Highlands Conservancy was formed, the proposed Highlands Scenic Highway would have sliced a gaping wound from north to south through the heart of the highlands, the Royal Glen dam would have flooded much of the Potomac Valley including the Smoke Hole area, the Davis Power project threatened much of Canaan Valley with inundation, the proposed Rowlesburg Dam on the Cheat River threatened to flood the Cheat River Valley including the St. George area, and newly proposed strip mines threatened many of our forests and mountains and condemned many of our waterways with acid mine drainage.

From the beginning, the Highlands Conservancy has dealt with a whole array of threats to our wonder-full state. We were instrumental in the passage of the Eastern Wilderness Areas Act, which gave us our first Wilderness areas–Dolly Sods and Otter Creek. We began a campaign that lasted over 35 years to protect Canaan Valley and saw the successful establishment of a National Wildlife Refuge there. We mounted campaigns to stop numerous dams proposed around the state. We filed our first lawsuit against strip mining in 1967, which was the beginning of almost 50 years of leadership on coal mining issues in West Virginia. In 1998 we were the first organization to challenge the destructive practice of mountaintop removal and valley fills. We helped enact important environment-protecting legislation such as the Surface Mine Control and Reclamation Act (SMCRA) and the National Forest Management Act (NFMA). Protecting clean air, clean water, forests, streams, mountains, and the health and welfare of the people that live here and those who visit, is what the Highlands Conservancy is all about.

The WV Highlands Conservancy publishes the Hiking Guide to the Monongahela National Forest. Our monthly newspaper, the Highlands Voice has been in continuous monthly publication since 1967. WV Highlands Conservancy members do far more than work to protect our state from destructive forces. Together, they also enjoy the lands and waters they work to protect through Conservancy-sponsored activities. They explore woodlands, valleys, bogs and caves, canoe and fish, climb mountains, and search out birds, wildflowers and native animals. Conservancy membership means new friendships, new experiences, and new rewards.

The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy provides excellent materials for outdoor enthusiasts. Go to the online store at https://wvhighlands.org/store/

There you will find their Hiking Guide To The Mon Forest in both book and CD versions. Free trail guides are also available for download.

“Fighting To Protect The Highlands” is a history of the WVHC as it organized and developed strategies to protect scenic landscapes and rich ecology. The author, Dave Elkinton, also profiles over twenty WVHC volunteers.

Red Spruce seedlings can be purchased for replanting in suitable habitat through website ordering. At one time Red Spruce dominated the higher elevations of central Appalachia before felling to the logging axe. Restoration of Red Spruce is an ongoing WVHC project.

Various paraphernalia is also available including ball hats, T-shirts, coffee mugs, stickers, and so forth, with profits going to support WVHC efforts.

Donations are most welcome. Membership cost is modest, and includes a monthly subscription to The Highlands Voice newspaper or the online version.

What will this planet be like in another 50 years? Let’s hope that the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy continues its stellar mission for posterity to come.

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Editor’s Note: CFTM extends deep appreciation to Highlands Voice Editor John McFerrin for his helpfulness in our developing our Mountain Vision newspaper. Appreciation also to long-time friend and mentor, Beth Little, the WVHC Membership Secretary. So many others of WVHC could be gratefully mentioned, but our special appreciation has to go to Bob Marshall who is the long-time WVHC Treasurer and also CFTM co-founder and Treasurer. May God continue to bless WVHC.
PROFILE: Bob Marshall, Co-founder of Christians For The Mountains

Bob Marshall first jumped into creation care activism in 1992 when the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy (WVHC) sued the West Virginia Division of Forestry over harmful logging in Kumbrabow State Forest. “We lost at the state Supreme Court appeal, but I continued on through serving on the WVHC board and after a few years becoming treasurer, a position I continue to serve. Also around that timeframe I joined and became president of the West Virginia Citizens Action board.”

In the mid-90's Bob Marshall and Allen Johnson met up to what quickly developed into an action-oriented partnership. They participated in and became facilitators in Opening The Book Of Nature (OBN) spiritual retreats that were pioneered by Fred Krueger. During these prayerful retreats in quiet outdoor wilderness-like settings, participants gain spiritual lessons from God’s creation. Krueger was a leader at the beginning of the environmental movement renaissance in the early 70’s, focusing on the religious dimensions. Through the connection with Krueger, Bob Marshall became politically active with the Religious Campaign for Forest Conservation, and later the intercessory prayer circle, Christians Caring For Creation. These and other organizations, including Christians For The Mountains, are all projects of World Stewardship Institute. www.ecostewards.org

In 2003, Matt Watson of Appalachian Voices invited Krueger, Johnson, and Marshall to represent religion in an effort to add the Lost Cove/Harper Creek area of the Nantahala and Pisgah national forests into wilderness designation. During our camping and field expeditions into that extraordinary area, the idea hatched to developing a Christian advocacy organization to focus on environmental issues in Appalachia.

People of faith known to be environmental advocates were invited in May 2005 to a weekend gathering at Bob Marshall’s home parish, St. Luke’s Episcopal Church in Charleston, WV. About two dozen folks participated in a field trip to meet with Larry Gibson at Kayford Mountain, presentations, prayer, and worship. Christians For The Mountains (CFTM) birthed that weekend. The first designated project was to develop a toolkit to educate Christians and their congregations about the blight and injustice of mountaintop removal. Dave Cooper offered CFTM the use of his slides for us to make a DVD, which a year later became our Mountain Mourning Collection. We would develop a website presence. We made plans for a public conference in November. A hat was passed around that collected a little over $100, so our budding organization would work out of our homes on a volunteer basis. God’s mighty anointing wind was upon us as three months later Newsweek magazine featured us in a two-page color spread. Since that beginning, Bob Marshall has been the competent and cheerful CFTM treasurer.

In his vocational life, Dr. Robert Marshall practices veterinary medicine and surgery in Charleston and Elkview, West Virginia, in an eight-veterinarian practice that he co-founded in 1980. He has 37 years’ experience in a general practice involving mixed animals, with equine practice exposure comprising 30 percent of his clinical and veterinary time. Marshall has been an American Endurance Ride Conference (AERC) official veterinarian since 2010, having worked as both a line judge/veterinarian and treatment veterinarian in over 100 national endurance events. In 2017, he will have worked 30 endurance event days by the end of the ride season November 30, 2017. His wife and he own 8 horses, 5 of which have competed or are competing in national and FEI endurance events. Bob Marshall has competed at the national level, while his wife Elizabeth continues to do so. “My primary focus at present is to become an FEI EVT, thereby allowing my veterinary skills to benefit Endurance at the International level, and allow me to support and encourage the sport of Endurance, which I hold in the highest regard and affection.” This would qualify Bob Marshall as an official veterinarian at international horse endurance events.

In his personal life, Bob and his wife Beth (a retired RN), and their 8 horses, 3 dogs, 2 cats, and 11 chickens live on a 125-acre farm near Kenna, West Virginia. During the winter he travels back and forth to Florida to work as an Endurance vet. He continues to be active in his home Episcopal church, and serves on several organizational boards. “I continue to be hopeful that the faith community's tireless work to raise the issues of climate change and environmental degradation will bear fruit for the environment, earth's inhabitants, and future generations to come after..."
Extreme Energy Extraction In Appalachia: Fracking and Piping Shale Gas

Fracking is a popular term for horizontal hydraulic fracturing that in the past ten years has become a major technique for extracting oil and natural gas from shale rock.

The process typically involves vertical drilling one to two miles into the earth to reach a target shale layer. From there, drilling goes horizontally a mile or more through that shale layer like spokes on a wheel to enlarge the extraction footprint. A mixture of water, sand, and chemicals is then injected under high pressure into the bore holes that fracture the shale, consequently releasing the trapped gas and oil into the wellhead.

Just as it is easier to pick fruit from the lower branches of a tree, so have the energy industries drilled and mined coal, oil, and gas from the most abundant and most accessible fields. Such sources are either exhausted or are held in politically-challenging regions. To continue their profits as well as to feed fossil-fuel addicted consumers, industries are resorting to “extreme energy extraction.” Coal is recovered through decapitating mountains in a practice called Mountaintop Removal. Oil is drilled in rigs over thousands of feet of water, including arctic climates. Fracking recovers oil and gas in shale buried thousands of feet underground.

Fracked gas and oil is transferred through massive pipeline projects (or by railroad or ship) for processing and market. Pollution and hazard is present throughout this process. Fracking and leaking pipelines spew out methane, a potent greenhouse gas. Massive volumes of water are drawn and then tainted with trade-secret chemical mixtures. Explosions and known leaks occur at a daily rate.

In much of Appalachia, property ownership is severed between surface land and subsurface. That is, a person might own land with a house and farm, while another person or corporation owns the minerals under the ground. In practice, the mineral owner can set up a drilling rig with access roads onto the surface owner’s property and commence to extract the resource regardless of the surface owner’s objection. This is occurring on a large scale.

Even if a person owns mineral rights but decides against its extraction, Forced Pooling laws compel holdout landowners to join gas-leasing agreements with their neighbors.

The University of Maryland's School of Public Health recommends a distance of 2,000 feet from any well, citing studies that show increased hospitalization rates, decreased birth weights and increased cancer risks in those that live close to a well.

Professor Michael McCawley at West Virginia University’s School of Public Health sampled air near seven Marcellus shale gas wells in West Virginia; each sample was taken 625 feet from the well. In about one third of the samples taken, levels of benzene exceeded minimum risk levels for acute exposure established by the CDC—including one case, which was nine times higher than the risk level set by the government. Massive truck traffic servicing frack wells pose further health risks. Particulates from diesel exhaust are a known carcinogen.

Half of West Virginians live within one mile of an active well. (EHP)

Notice the house in the upper left corner and how close it is to the drilling pad. Pennsylvania setback distance is 500 feet, West Virginia (pictured here) is 625 feet. Homeowners face noise, pollution, gas flaring, and potential explosion and fire.

The Pitcock family had moved from Baltimore to retire at a bucolic, quiet country home. Their peace and quiet was shattered when their neighbor sold gas rights to Antero, and the traffic, noise, and pollution began.

ABOVE Gas Flaring at Anetero Resources’ Ruddy Pad in Doddridge County, WV, on July 3, 2013. Four days later, this operation exploded. Five workers were severely burned, two of whom died. This picture was taken from Terry and Diane Pitcock’s front porch. The Pitcock family had moved from Baltimore to retire at a bucolic, quiet country home. Their peace and quiet was shattered when their neighbor sold gas rights to Antero, and the traffic, noise, and pollution began.

LEFT This photo is of a night scene in front of the court house in Tyler County, WV. Several abstractors are camped out for the night so they can get a jump start first thing in the morning to research property deeds. People who own mineral rights are offered huge sums of money to lease for gas. Lease and royalty payments will make a few very rich, while their many neighbors will lose quality of life and suffer property devaluation.
Fracking requires a mixture of water, sand, and proprietary chemicals. A single well might use up to 9 million gallons. Some of the solution remains permanently in the ground, but most is flowback to be disposed or recycled. Small creeks such as this one in West Virginia are the sources for water, such as this hose from a water truck.

Water trucks lined up to such water from a small stream. In addition, trucks bring in sand, the most prized coming from Wisconsin. Flowback brine can be radioactive and is always contaminated with toxic chemicals. Some states use the drilling waste brine for deicing roads, saving frackers the hassle of proper disposal. Critics charge this is not environmentally safe.

This truck hauling sand for fracking slid off the road. Truck accidents are all too frequent on narrow rural roads. Truck congestion can be a nightmare. Spills from accidents and fracking sites cause serious pollution.

Streams can be impacted by chemical leaks and by stormwater washing through construction sites. This is Stone Energy 2, pad erosion.

In high-density fracking areas, most local residents suffer impaired quality of life and decreased property value. A small percentage of people estimated to be under 5% can become wealthy. Are they hearing Jesus who says that we are to love our neighbor?

Man camps, equipment laydown yards, storage units, construction staging areas, heavy traffic, and noisy compressor stations cause a hardship on neighbors. A young man with a debilitating handicap that keeps him mostly in his room has this view from his window.

This drilling operation restricts the surface owners from accessing some of their property. Of course, their bucolic view is severely degraded.

The gas has to get out, and that means pipelines. Pipeline routes are kept cleared of reforestation resulting in permanent scarring of scenery and potential for invasive species to populate.

CREDIT: All pictures on pages 10, 11 are through the courtesy and permission of Diane Pitcock.
Currently there is more than $23 billion in planned investment for more than 3,200 miles of pipelines planned or under development in the tri-state area of Pennsylvania, Ohio, and West Virginia. When built, these pipelines would move more than 17 billion cubic feet of Marcellus and Utica natural gas and 345,000 barrels of natural gas liquids (NGLs) per day.

Christians For The Mountains joins many other groups and people who opposing these pipelines for a myriad of reasons, most prominently the need to “keep fossil fuels in the ground” to avert worsening climate destabilization.

Natural gas is touted as a cleaner energy source than coal. This is misleading. Yes, coal produces more CO2 when burned, and coal emits more soot, sulphur, and mercury particulates. However, methane leakage continues to plague the gas industry. Methane is an extremely potent climate destabilizing greenhouse gas.

Furthermore, gas drilling technology has evolved into deep horizontal fracturing of shale, popularly known as fracking. This process requires millions of gallons of chemical-laden water per well, which has the eventual likelihood of entering into groundwater as well casing eventually deteriorates. This intensive process also interferes with the traditional functioning of rural communities as heavy traffic, construction and compressor noise, and pipeline corridors change the face of communities.

Transporting shale gas from the fracking fields to market typically requires large interstate pipelines that transgress private and public lands. Furthermore, these pipelines are built at huge expense. For example, the proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline (ACP) would start in central West Virginia and terminate in North Carolina, a distance of almost 600 miles. With a 42 inch pipe diameter, and a construction corridor of 125 feet (think Interstate Highway footprint), this project is expected to cost over $5 billion. Such a pipeline would convey 1.5 billion cubic feet of gas per day at pressures of 1500 lb/sq. in. High fossil fuel infrastructure investments are not readily given up, thus making the fight for clean energy more difficult.

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) has authority over pipeline construction. The historical record shows that FERC always authorizes all pipelines. This is being challenged, since some of these pipelines have not proven to be for public necessity. Furthermore, the construction of infrastructure such as pipelines typically gains shareholders profit in the range of 14%, with ratepayers taking on risk for project failure. The system is rigged and is in need of reform. State water boards and environmental agencies also have regulatory authorization under the Clean Water Act to approve or reject proposed pipelines that do not meet criteria. Many of these interstate pipelines do not measure up to established state criteria.

The risk of gas pipelines leaking with explosive impact is an everpresent danger. A 42 inch diameter pipe explosion would instantly incinerate anybody or structure within 1200 feet and demand immediate evacuation for nearby people.

“More jobs” is the propaganda mantra of the gas industry. Rural counties where pipelines cross typically have zero permanent jobs, and zero available gas to use. The higher-paying construction jobs go to experienced pipeliners and equipment operators hired by outside contractors. A small, short-duration economic bubble quickly evaporates when the one or two year construction period ends.

Many property owners refuse to sign easements for pipeline routes. Some have lawfully disallowed pipelines to survey their property. However, when FERC approves a pipeline permit, the pipeline company can initiate eminent domain proceedings in court. Generally speaking, rural people, including Appalachians, despise eminent domain. And since these pipelines are often unnecessary and are for private corporate gain, and some of the gas is likely to be exported, eminent domain is especially egregious.

The EPA lists the Ohio River, which is the source of drinking water for three million people along its route, as the most contaminated body of water in the country. Plans are underway to run several big pipelines under the Ohio River, six alongside it, barge fracking waste down it, and frack directly under it.

The earth is at a crossroads that will affect quality and perhaps even viability of life in the future. “Keeping Fossil Fuels In The Ground” is not a manipulative propagandist maneuver if climate science is taken seriously. Building massive fossil fuel infrastructure locks in a continuing greenhouse-emitting future that investors will not readily give up. Although biblical scholars debate the meaning in the third chapter of Joel, a passage on God’s judgment on exploitation, the words in verse 14 might speak to our present crossroad of decision.

Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision! For the day of The Lord is near in the valley of decision.

On November 9, 2017, West Virginia officials announced that the China Energy Investment Corp. Ltd will invest $83.7 billion in shale gas development and chemical manufacturing in West Virginia over a 20 year period. This Memorandum of Understanding was signed by WV State Commerce Secretary Woody Thrasher and China Energy President Ling Wen in Beijing as part of the US-China trade mission during President Trump’s visit. Details are not forthcoming at this point, but indications are that the focus will be on power generation, chemical manufacturing and underground storage of natural gas liquids and derivatives.

Some reports indicate that construction on two new gas-fired power plants might commence in 2018. State officials tout that this massive investment, significantly larger than West Virginia’s annual GDP, will bring a bonanza of jobs and wealth into the state. However, China seems to have a mixed record on fulfilling promises.

Environmentalists are up in arms over the deal. Mary Wildfire speaks for many when she writes on the WV Public Broadcasting blog. “The whole proposal amounts to the conversion of a quiet, beautiful, friendly rural area into an ugly, polluted, noisy industrial zone. It will do for north-western WV what the coal industry has done for southern WV--extract some wealth, employ people for awhile, and then leave behind a poverty-stricken place full of messes the public will have to pay to try to clean up.

In August 2017, the Trump administration’s Interior Department ordered the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine to halt a study of health risks for residents near mountaintop removal coal mining sites in the Appalachian Mountains. Several public hearings had already been held (see Mountain Vision, Summer Edition 2017, page 11). The Interior Department said it was trimming its budget. Not likely, as the influential National Mining Association applauded the decision. Meanwhile, numerous peer-reviewed studies, including some that Christians For The Mountains has assisted with, show strong evidence that pollutants from mountaintop removal is associated with significantly-worsened health.
"Don't take the detour. It's a scam!"

This is what was written on a sign, posted on a tree in the Tahoe National Forest in the middle of California. Two of my sons, Kirk and Chad, were hiking down a trail in that National Forest during their expedition on the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) from Mexico to Canada, hiking the 2,700 miles in one fell swoop. Kirk and Chad had seen some other detour signs on the PCT and had always dutifully taken the detours. They did not want to be a “statistic,” sliding off an icy cliff or falling into a deep ravine.

This time, however, they saw two men in United States Forest Service garb writing something on the detour sign and then hurrying away. When Kirk and Chad strode close enough to read what the USFS workers had written, they were shocked by what the words said. Their message to hikers was as I stated above: “Don’t take the detour. It’s a scam!” My sons did not take the detour that day, and that changed forever their lives and the lives of our family members.

To my sons’ horror, what they saw on the trail when they didn’t take that detour was what the Federal Government didn’t want them (and the rest of us) to see. They saw clear cuts as far as the eye could see! Not a standing tree! Not a standing tree along the trail in the Tahoe National Forest, our forest, the people’s forest. They never took a detour again and saw, to their utter dismay, an unbroken sea of clear cuts from the Tahoe National Forest through National Forests all the way to Canada. Kirk and Chad had never seen a clear cut before (all trees logged and gone) and couldn’t believe this was happening to our forests. When they returned home after completing their expedition, they spent months trying to find out who was allowing this destruction and devastation. The answers they found led everyone in our family to try to do something to end the commercial logging of our National Forests by multi-national companies, at taxpayer expense, allowed and subsidized by the Federal Government.

Kirk and Chad changed their life plans and went to law school, majoring in environmental law. Chad later founded a non-profit organization, The John Muir Project, which strives to protect and save our National Forests from commercial logging. My daughter, Amy, and I wanted to do our part, but law school was not an option for us. We prayed and asked the Lord to show us how we could aid in the struggle for our forests. After much prayer, we felt God leading us to intercessory prayer: praying for our forests, the creatures who need that habitat to survive, and for all those involved in any endeavor to protect and preserve our Lord’s precious creation.

Through our personal prayers, God then led us to found Christians Caring for Creation (CCC), a national cadre of prayer partners. CCC members now pray for the following and all requests emailed to us. We pray for peoples at risk due to climate change: creatures at risk due to habitat destruction; an end to the logging of our National Forests; an end to mountaintop removal; protection for our oceans from the ravages of acidification due to climate change; and, for the personal struggles and crucial work of all those working to protect God’s creation.

We believe and know that the Lord hears and answers prayers, and that standing together with many at the Throne of Grace in intercessory prayer is powerful and effective. Therefore, CCC members send their Prayer Requests and Praises to us and we send them by email to all the CCC Prayer Partners nationwide.

These are extremely trying times and we need to stand together in prayer more than ever. Our Lord hears and “is mighty to save.”

If you would like to be part of our prayer network, simply send us an email stating that you want to be added to the CCC Prayer Network.

You will then receive our emails, monthly or more often, and you’ll add your voice to the intercessory prayers. Also, please feel free to share any prayer requests we all can pray for with you.

In the love of Christ,

Connie Hanson, Director, Christians Caring for Creation (CCC)

Email: cccpnc@aol.com

“Let us therefore come boldly to the Throne of Grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” (Hebrews 4:16)

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” (Philippians 4:6)

“Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.” (Colossians 4:2)

“Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”” (Matthew 19:26)

Connie Hanson lives in South Pasadena, California, with her husband, David. Email Connie at cccpnc@aol.com to get on the CCC Prayer Network.
National Religious Coalition On Creation Care Meets With EPA On Climate

October 24, 2017 in Washington, DC

This is a summary of certain points made in a dialogue between NRCCC representatives and EPA Officials on key issues facing the Environmental Protection Agency. Climate issues were emphasized. This may have been a first meeting of this kind with religion and the current EPA administration.

Additional thanks to the staff of the Environmental Protection Agency for the attention, courtesy and thoughtfulness which they brought to this dialogue. Particular thanks are due to Mr. Stephen Gordon for his thoughtful hosting of our dialogue; to Ms. Doretta Reeves for her smiling helpfulness and knowledge in guiding us through the EPA labyrinth; to Mr. Lee Tanner for his attention; to Ms. Emma Daniels for her note taking; and to all of the other EPA staff members who participated or attended our meeting, and NRCCC photographer Christine Ellman for her ‘Beautifell photography.

The meeting began with Stephen Gordon introducing himself as the new Associate Director of the EPA Office of Public Engagement. He also introduced the four EPA staff persons in attendance. After a very quick introduction of the assembled religious leaders, Mr. Gordon asked Fred Krueger to begin and to provide an overview of the purpose of our coming.

Fred Krueger, who coordinates the National Religious Coalition on Creation Care (NRCCC), responded. “Every religious institution across America that has studied this issue has concluded that global climate change is the single most critical issue facing our nation. Climate change is more serious than originally thought and urgent action is required now.”

“From this background of unity across religious organizations, we urge this same response from the EPA and every level of government. This is our message to you and to Administrator Scott Pruitt. We urge you to recognize climate change as a major challenge in your work.”

Rabbi Warren Stone, Co-chair NRCCC, told a story of a visit to the Sahara Desert and buying a fossilized seashell from a Berber child. That desert once was an ocean. Land forms can change, which climate change is accelerating. “We want to be sure that children are guarded and protected against pollution… and that there is no turning back to the pollution and preventable illnesses of the past.”

“People of every faith tradition share this concern. For this reason we call upon the EPA not to deregulate years of clean air and water actions which have protected children and families. We cannot allow coal powered and pollution emitting plants to return to the past and decades of dirty air!”

Fr. Sergei Kapral, Public Affairs Officer, Orthodox Church in America, emphasized that the Orthodox bishops share the same concern. “They are saying that the way we have been degrading the environment is wrong; it is a sin. The EPA is important to us. We see that the EPA is changing under this administration. Important rules that protect citizen health are being relaxed. You are shifting the balance over in favor of industry. The health of citizens will pay for these changes.”

Stephen Gordon responded, saying that EPA is listening to all sides, and that fake news in the media is not accurately telling what they are doing.

Kapral responded, “All that we have to do is watch your actions. That is enough to tell us what you are doing. You want to roll back the Clean Power Plan. That is not fake news. You are messing with the health of the earth and the people.”

Rev. Dr. Jim Antal, President of the Massachusetts Conference of The United Church Of Christ, stated that a recent survey of the denominations 5000 churches with 1,000,000 members found that 97 percent of the delegates to the National Synod want to promote the vision that the earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it. In June of 2017 UCC members voted ... “to resist all expansion of fossil fuel infrast-structure and demand new sources of renewable energy that are accessible to all communities.”

“For the sake of our children, grandchildren and unborn generations, we ask you to hear tens of millions of people of faith, all of whom are stakeholders in the EPA and God's creation. We ask you to enforce policies and promote innovation that will allow the next generation to at least forgive us for what we and a few generations before us have already caused.”

“Our grandchildren will know the names of Donald Trump and Scott Pruitt. We
Jim Davidson is with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). He began by reviewing the commission from Congress in its originating the EPA.

* All Americans are protected from significant risks to human health and the environment....
* National efforts to reduce environmental risk are based on the best available scientific information;
* Federal laws protecting human health and the environment are enforced fairly,...
* Environmental protection is an integral consideration in U.S. policies concerning natural resources, human health, economic growth, energy, transportation, agriculture, industry, and international trade...;
* All parts of society ... have access to accurate information ...;
* Environmental protection contributes to making our communities and ecosystems diverse, sustainable and economically productive; and
* The United States plays a leadership role in working with other nations to protect the global environment.

"I decided to come here with a simple message: Thank you! Why? For stopping so many pollution issues: DDT; burning rivers; the ozone hole; acid rain; toxic urban air. The list is very long. I realized that I really liked the EPA. You have made an enormous difference. My worry that the EPA may become irrelevant. It would be a shame to watch an institution that has done so much good become irrelevant."

Dr. Richard Miller, Creighton University and Director, Planetary Emergency Institute, said, “I’m a Roman Catholic. As a church, we’ve been talking about the environment and climate change since the 1970s. Pope Francis issued his encyclical Laudato Si! The entire encyclical is about poverty and the environment.... The way we treat the environment tells how we relate to God and our neighbors.

Catholic Bishops have a strong position addressing climate change. At its core, according to the Bishops, ‘global climate change is not about economic theory or political platforms, it is about the future of God’s creation and the human family. It is about our human stewardship of God’s creation and our responsibility for those that come after us.” For perspective 23% of Americans self-identify with the Catholic Church.

Pope Francis has argued in most urgent terms that climate change and the environment needs to be dealt with. Whether it is pollution or rising levels of carbon dioxide, these are dehumanizing and violating human rights. This highlights the importance of putting people before profits,... I don’t think you are aware of the monstrous effect fossil fuels are bringing upon the health of this planet.

David Carroll, Technical Educator, Businessman and Inventor, and Baptist. “I ask the EPA to do its homework on advancing technology in order to stay relevant and on-mission.”

“Top scientists say that if we don’t stop polluting the atmosphere and ocean, the world will only support one-half to one billion people. Today, I speak for those missing six billion souls.”

“Scientists and engineers are creating new non-polluting power and advanced power storage solutions like never before. They are making great headway.

As an inventor and entrepreneur in energy technologies, Carroll urged the EPA to keep abreast of these groundbreaking technologies. Toshiba Motors will be reproducing a new material that doubles the capacity and triples the speed of recharging lithium-ion batteries. Vehicles will get 200 miles of travel from a 6-minute charge. This innovation will be commercialized by 2019. Another innovation is a new ultra-mobile, ultra-capacitor battery. Recently, Stanford University announced a large salt-based power storage solution. New 50% efficient solar photovoltaic panels incorporating the infrared spectrum were just announced by the University of Michigan and Los Alamos National Lab, a 300% increase from current standards. Wind advancements produce a 30% increase in generation efficiency. This drops the minimum wind speed needed
(Continued from p. 15) NRCCC Meeting with EPA

Rev. Dr. Owen Owens, Co chair, NRCCC, and Past chair, National Council of Churches Eco-Justice working group, talked about a lesson he learned in his childhood public school education in Wisconsin. "We saw what happened when we cut the forests, killed the wildlife and destroyed their habitats, and let soils erode. We admitted we did wrong, learned to take better care of soil, water, forests and wildlife, and found that healthy land and clean streams gave us health."

We can no longer use our resources without thinking about consequences. We are now called to change the way we live so that we protect, preserve, and restore the systems of life. The Bible is clear. Stewardship is grounded in God's providential care. The Spirit's still, small voice is speaking today to all of us: "Do justice, love kindness, walk humbly with your God."

The EPA is mandated to protect and restore our land, air, water, and the systems of life. Do what the Lord tells us to do.

Dr. Richard Miller added, "Keep in mind is that there is no opposition between economic growth and the transition to a zero carbon economy."

"Modeling from Regional Economic Models, Inc. (REMI) shows that a fee and dividend approach, which is the policy adopted by Citizens Climate Lobby, will reduce CO2 emissions 33% below 1990 levels after 10 years and 50% below 1990 levels after 20 years while saving an estimated 227,000 American lives, lead to 2.8 million more jobs than without fee and dividend, increase disposable income by $800 per person, and will increase GDP by $1.3 trillion over twenty years. It is a win-win possibility and since all monies collected from putting a fee on CO2 is returned to the

Rabbi Warren Stone added, "We have requested a meeting with the EPA because standards enacted to protect people from harmful chemicals, air pollution and the worst impacts of climate change are being rolled back at an alarming rate. Don't go back on things that work!"

"Our purpose in this meeting is to urge EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt and all of your staff to consider the moral implications of ignoring climate change science and a wide range of environmental challenges facing the nation from polluted air and drinking water to the degradation of public land and protected waterways."

"Can you please respond? We want to be heard and we want to be part of Stephen Gordon, EPA Officer, responded, "I appreciate all of this. The Administrator will want to hear this information. I will report all of this information to Mr. Scott Pruitt. He is a faith based man himself."

"My job is to get this information from you all. I appreciate you coming in and providing this information. I want you all to reach out to me, that is what I am here for, and I am open to your insights and future comments." Rev. Jim Antal led a closing prayer. Afterward, our group went outside the EPA building and held meetings with several reporters from the press.

For more details on this meeting, go to www.nrccc.org
Our thanks go to Christine Ellman of Beattile Photography for donating her photos.

EPA Hearing In WV to Repeal Clean Power Plan

Repeal the Clean Power Plan? Repeal the Obama-era policy that mandates that each state develops a plan to significantly reduce climate warming CO2 emissions from power plants? Repeal is EPA administrator Scott Pruitt's goal. That was the issue at hand when 250 citizens spoke pro and con during two days of EPA hearings held in Charleston, West Virginia on November 28-29-2017.

It is obvious why the hearing was held in West Virginia, as several dozen coal miners packed hearing rooms and posed for media photos along with coal baron Robert Murray, heads of coal associations, and their political puppets. Donald Trump won big in West Virginia on a promise of bringing back coal jobs, and getting rid of pesky environmental rulings was the game plan. Or at least, a façade of a plan, since market realities are the main cause of Appalachian coal production decline.

Environmental justice speakers far outnumbered the anti-Clean Power Plan supporters, an estimate being at least a 5 to 1 ratio. Speakers were given only five minutes to make a presentation, so many will write comments as well. Written comments will be entertained until January 16, 2018. Please comment by letter, online, or email. https://www.epa.gov/stationary-sources-air-pollution/clean-power-plan-proposed-repeal-how-comment

A number of persons spoke from a faith perspective. Allen Johnson spoke out of his affiliation with Christians For The Mountains and National Religious Coalition on Creation Care. Faith groups focused on moral dimensions, such as studies showing that the Clean Power Plan will prevent almost 100,000 attacks and 3600 premature deaths annually due to reduction in soot and smog. Of course, limiting destabilizing effects of climate change is almost incalculable. Jobs are important, a point I made by encouraging passage of the bipartisan RECLAIM Act of 2017 (H.R. 1731), that will ensure coal communities can access the Abandoned Mine Land Fund (currently at about 1 billion dollars) to employ local workers for mine reclamation.

Other speakers focused on the cost benefits of the Clean Power Plan that will save billions annually in health costs and business expenses. Jim Doyle, President of Business Forward, explained how the Clean Power Plan's additional electricity bill would mean an additional penny per $20 meal, yet the food in that meal has increased 25% over the past in part due to worsened climate-related food production. Typical increased electricity costs for U.S. manufactured products would be 3 cents per $100, while climate-related severe weather creates devastating costs in supply chain delays.

The Sierra Club hosted a well-attended "Hearing For Healthy Communities" that took testimony from commenters that will be forwarded to the EPA.

A massive outpouring of citizen comments can affect the political landscape as well as provide substantial grounds for court action to prevent the scuttling of the Clean Power Plan. The Clean Power Plan needs improvement, especially to get away from substituting natural gas for coal. Clean, renewable solar and wind, improved storage, and more efficient energy saving and conservation measures are vitally important for our future.
The first teaching of the opening chapters of the Bible is that God created the world, and created it good. The second teaching is that God placed this creation under human administration. He placed people in the garden “to till it and keep it” (Genesis 2:15). His first words to humanity were words authorizing dominion over creation: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion.” (Genesis 1:28).

It is amazing that the simple Hebrew nomads and farmers who first shared these words could believe them. These people were so vulnerable to wind storm, to drought, to fire, to predatory animals! Yet they believed that God had given them to, and to their descendents, responsibility to administer the created world.

Today, humanity has indeed filled the earth and subdued it. The problem is the reverse of that of the ancient Hebrews. We are no longer frightened by the wildness of natural forces. We are frightened by the potential of human civilization to destroy the earth while subduing it.

The modern thrust to dominate the earth began with the Renaissance and explorations of the sixteenth century. It accelerated with the Industrial Revolution and since World War II is accelerating even more rapidly with the application of the most sophisticated technologies yet devised.

In the sixteenth century, French philosopher and mathematician Rene Descartes expressed the motivating spirit:

“I perceive it to be possible to arrive at knowledge highly useful in life; and instead of the speculative philosophy usually taught in the schools, to discover a practical [method] by means of which, knowing the force and action of fire, water, air, the stars, the heavens, and all the other bodies that surround us, as distinctively as we know the various crafts of our artisans, we might also apply them in the same way to all the uses to which they are adapted, and thus render ourselves the lords and possessors of nature.”

More to this desire to become “lords and possessors of nature” then strict scientific curiosity, more even than a desire to serve human needs, is a passion to control, to dominate that fueled both the scientific enterprise and the physical conquest of new continents.

The results of human knowledge and ability are paradoxical. Although we can do almost anything on earth or in nearby space, we cannot always control the results. This is the environmental crisis: what humans are doing to the earth is so massive, and the results so largely uncontrolled, that the ability of the earth, the air, the oceans to sustain life is dangerously threatened. “Contrary to what is generally claimed,” argues the eminent microbiologist Rene Dubos, “increased knowledge of natural forces and the growth of technology have not improved man's control over the environment.”

We claim to live in a scientific era, but the truth is that, as presently managed, the scientific enterprise is too lopsided to allow science to be of much use in the conduct of human affairs. We have accumulated an immense body of knowledge about matter, and powerful techniques to control and exploit the external world. However, we are grossly ignorant of the effects likely to result from these manipulations; we behave often as if we were the last generation to inhabit the earth.

So severe is this crisis that many look to the roots of western civilization to find flaws in the beliefs and social structures that have led to this crisis. Environmentalists blame Biblical Judeo-Christian tradition for encouraging humanity to dominate delicate natural processes—a dominion which now threatens the survival of the earth. Ian McHarg, a distinguished landscape architect and environmentalist, argues that “the emergence of monotheism had as its corollary the rejection of nature; the affirmation of Jehovah, the God in whose image man was made, was also a declaration of war on nature.”

But it may be poor reading of human history to suggest that the exercise of human creative and aggression were inspired solely by the particular doctrines of Judaism and Christianity. And it is a poor prescription for the present crisis to suggest that persons can prevent environmental disaster through passivity and refusing to exercise responsibility for the fate of creation.

The real problem is not that Christian civilization has over-emphasized human dominion over nature, but that Christianity has not given sufficient attention to the responsibility inherent in this dominion. While formally supporting the belief that persons had responsibility for the natural world, we have been surprised by the reality that humanity now does have enormous power over that world. For centuries, Christians have pondered personal morality, family morality, and aspects of social morality, but few have thought seriously about the morality of our relationship to the natural world. Suddenly this is a critical issue for the survival of the world and all life. We are caught largely unprepared.

Strip mining for coal is one specific example of human relationship to the natural environment that lends itself to study as a moral issue. The effects of this process upon land and people are clear and visible and it illustrates the broad context of related issues faced by humanity responsibly. As such, strip mining and related issues call Christians to a unique responsibility.

The Bible tells us not only that we are responsible for the earth from its beginnings, but also that we are responsible for its redemption in the end. Saint Paul, believing humans to be fallen people in a fallen world, argued that Christians are responsible not simply for bringing a message of salvation to humanity, but also for redeeming salvation of the natural world. As Isaiah and Ezekiel before him, Paul believed that even the natural environment would benefit from the sensitive and loving care of a redeemed people—that nature would be incomplete without this loving, human care.

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. (Romans 8:19-21)
Dianne Bady, 67, succumbed to cancer on October 23, 2017 at Emogene Dolin Jones Hospice House in Huntington, WV. Her husband Rick, her son Aaron, her sister Monica McFarland, and OVEC staff members were with her in her final hours.

Dianne grew up on a Wisconsin dairy farm where she developed her respect for creation and cut her teeth on environmental activism. While studying for a doctorate at Rutgers, she met her husband-to-be, Rick.

Dianne was the founder of Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition (OVEC). Her creativity, courage, and indefatigable spirit continues to live on in the lives of those many people whose lives she inspired, mentored, and stood shoulder to shoulder with.

Below are excerpts from the eulogy written by Dianne's son, Rick Bady, and published in the OVEC website at www.ohvec.org/Memorial donations are received at OVEC.

When she moved to West Virginia with her family, Dianne struggled at first to adapt to the mountains that she would spend the rest of her life fighting to protect. She felt smothered by the hills and lost in the hollows and she was homesick for the great flat of Wisconsin. And then, one day, the mountains began to sing to her, as did the birds and the streams; she began to fill her life with flowers, and, since then, there has never been a day, in season, when she couldn't see daffodils, hostas, and daylilies from her home, or the ground where she would plant them.

Dianne was always been a gentle soul, with her flowers, her family, and her kittens. But when BASF announced plans to build a hazardous waste incinerator and landfill near Huntington, WV, in Haverhill, Ohio—facilities that would bring toxic waste to the Tri-State region from across the country—Dianne became a warrior. Along with a group of like-minded "living room" activists, she refused to believe that what the region needed was industrial poison, or that the best thing Appalachians could hope for was to be the nation's trash can. They won, and when the facility was never built, their struggle caught the attention of residents of Kenova, WV, who were suffering from industrial fallout from an Ashland Oil refinery. When she joined them in their effort, and as she traveled the region and listened and learned and studied, she began to see the region as a mosaic of struggles.

In 1987, she formed OVEC, the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition, a group of volunteers and weekend warriors that, over three decades, has grown to a fully-staffed, internationally recognized force for environmental justice, with Dianne at its center: founder, visionary, and leader.

Over the last three decades, OVEC has made it easier to breathe the air in the region, and safer to drink the water. A planned pulp-and-paper mill was never constructed in Apple Grove, WV, and never filled the Ohio River with dioxin and other carcinogens. But OVEC has worked on a host of connected issues, from election reform to clean energy technologies, like solar and wind. In particular, OVEC has worked to slow and control the plague of mountaintop removal coal mining, forcing rogue operations into compliance with the law and helping citizens empower themselves to speak up on the fates of their communities.

In her last years with the organization, Dianne turned her energies to the next fossil fuel frontier, the spider-web of natural gas pipelines slated to crisscross the state. It was her final obsession, and she has bequeathed it to us. Though Dianne suffered from three bouts with cancer in her life, even in her final days, she insisted on seeing a mirror of the struggle of other people. "If the Appalachian Storage Hub is built," she demanded—with what breath she had left—"how much cancer will be caused by contaminated drinking water?"

Dianne McFarland Bady died after a short illness, but a long struggle. Her final days came much too soon, and we are bereft. But she departed with her friends and family at her side, and her soul was at peace. Although it took an incurable cancer to force her to finally retire, OVEC will continue and nothing can kill Dianne's vision.
Religious faith leaders gathered at all seven Virginia offices of the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) offices on September 13 to express concern that two proposed major interstate pipeline projects could significantly risk state water quality. The Mountain Valley Pipeline and the Atlantic Coast Pipeline would run 42 inch diameter pipelines carrying billions of cubic feet of natural gas through hundreds of miles of vulnerable watersheds. Water quality would be at risk from hundreds of water body crossings, intricately-connected karst topography, and landslide and sediment-prone steep mountainsides.

Allen Johnson of Christians For The Mountains spoke at the Harrisonburg DEQ office using as a Bible text 1 Kings 21 to illustrate the power of wealthy, influential corporations to manipulate government to seize property through eminent domain for private gain.

In the story, Israel’s King Ahab covets land next to his palace so to grow a garden. He offers the owner, Naboth, a good price. However, Naboth refuses to sell it on an ancestral covenant to keep the property in the family. Seeing Ahab sulking at the refusal, Queen Jezebel hatches a plot to have Naboth falsely accused of sedition and blasphemy. Naboth is killed, and Ahab seizes the land. This injustice displeases God, who sends the prophet Elijah to pronounce God’s judgment upon Ahab, Jezebel, and their lineage.

Other participants representing several religious expressions gave short talks, prayed, and led songs. The gathering closed with a ceremony in which water gathered from various places in the area were poured into a large container symbolizing our common need for clean water.

Other actions at the same DEQ offices were held the following day.

The future of the nation’s public lands, purchased with taxpayer dollars, is uncertain. Powerful special interest groups are pressuring Congress to give away or sell off vast tracts of national forests and lands, shrink national monuments, and lease out wildlife refuges. These lands are held in common by each American citizen and held in trust for future generations. These are lands that hikers, fishermen, hunters, and nature lovers can access. Mining, grazing, and timber interests covet these lands for their own special benefit.

Bills in Congress include some of the following: Dissolve the Antiquities Act that preserves valuable archeological sites; Defund community conservation programs; open our forests and watersheds to development; and dispose of our shared public lands to the states so they can be sold off for mining, logging, or oil and gas drilling.

As this is being written, Congress is heavily contesting policy that would open the pristine National Arctic Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling. The pretense is this oil is needed for energy security even though some of our nation’s oil is already being exported.

These attempts to sell off the nation’s patrimony is a blatant and corrupt giveaway to the fossil fuel industry and its government puppets. Those in cahoots should be exposed as national traitors and thieves. The biblical prophets’ thundering edicts echo loudly at these injustices. “Hear this, you rulers of the house of Jacob and chiefs of the house of Israel,who abhor justice and pervert all equity, who build Zion with blood and Jerusalem with wrong! Its rulers give judgement for a bribe, its priests teach for a price, its prophets give oracles for money...” (Micah 3:9-11).

Christians For The Mountains (CFTM) has always been a strong supporter of public lands. Currently CFTM is involved with a new group, West Virginians For Public Lands. About ten years ago CFTM, The National Religious Campaign for Wilderness, and other groups published a booklet and a DVD, “God’s Gift of a Wild and Wonderful Land,” to highlight special qualities of the Monongahela National Forest in West Virginia. These free materials are at https://christiansforthemountains.org/site/Topics/Issues/Wilderness/Wilderness_Main.html Our spring edition of the Mountain Vision newspaper will carry articles on spiritual values that can be gained through experiencing God’s creation.


Tour of Kayford Mountain for Bradlee, who is Affiliate Services Director for Interfaith Power & Light. (IPL). West Virginia has just formed its first IPL. Go to http://www.wvipl.org/ to help.

The EcoAmerica Climate Leadership Summit in Washington, DC. Leaders from government, faith, health, business, and nonprofits participated.
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Upcoming for The Mountain Vision
CFTM is planning its eleventh edition for spring, 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" life 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).

For My Eyes Have Seen Your Salvation
---Simeon, in Luke 2:30

I heard the bells on Christmas Day
Their old, familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet
The words repeat
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!
And thought how, as the day had come,
The belfries of all Christendom
Had rolled along
The unbroken song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!
Till, ringing, singing on its way,
The world revolved from night to day,
A voice, a chime,
A chant sublime
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

O holy night! The stars are brightly shining,
It is the night of our dear Saviour's birth.
Long lay the world in sin and error pining,
Till He appeared and the soul felt its worth.
A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.

O world, I cannot hold thee close enough!
Thy winds, thy wide grey skies!
Thy mists, that roll and rise!
Thy woods, this autumn day, that ache and sag
And all but cry with colour! 'That gaunt crag
To crush! To lift the lean of that black bluff!
World, World, I cannot get thee close enough!

Long have I known a glory in it all,
But never knew I this;
Here such a passion is
As stretcheth me apart,—Lord, I do fear
Thou'st made the world too beautiful this year;
My soul is all but out of me,—let fall
No burning leaf; prithee, let no bird call.

May your Christmas be joyous, and your new year be fulfilling. May God's blessings flow to you and through you to bring good news of exceedingly great joy, for our Savior is born and lives and reigns.

—With love and hope,
Christians For The Mountains.