Let The Mountains Sing

“And heaven and nature sing...” This refrain will be sung millions of times this coming Christmas. In 1719 Isaac Watts penned the words to the popular Christmas carol, “Joy To The World.” Watts wrote the lyrics in anticipation of Christ’s triumphant return rather than as a celebration of His birth.

Like so many traditional hymns and contemporary Christian songs, Joy To The World displays nature praising God, and we as humans joining in creation’s song of worship. To join with nature in praise of God is to appreciate the variety and beauty of the innumerable voices in the choir. And who would then willfully snuff out voices in God's choir?

Joy to the world! the Saviour reigns;
Let men their songs employ;
While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains, Repeat the sounding joy...

Some of our observant readers may have noticed that it has been a long while since the last quarterly Mountain Vision newspaper. And yes, alas this issue is overdue about a half year. I won’t go into a long litany of excuses, other than say that about half this issue was written and formatted by the end of February. What happened was that the busyness of our health studies along with the day-to-day “things that come up and need attention” interfered (in a good way) with the concentrated blocks of time needed to put out this paper. The Mountain Vision is an outreach ministry, which means that many folks get this paper as a free gift. Those of you who are Christians For The Mountains members will get this newspaper, along with the satisfaction that you are our partner.

No firm promises, but I think we should have the next edition out by mid-November. We have loads of material backed up that is ready to share with you. As for this current issue, we allot the first pages reporting on the ACHSP health research that was so much of our focus this year. Then we turn to the values inherent in “wild and beautiful spaces” (pp. 6, 7).

News on the government front includes an update on our ACHE campaign to address the health impacts of mountaintop removal. We also touch upon carbon fee and distribution, which we will cover extensively in our next issue. The importance of clean water is highlighted in three articles covering prevalent fish consumption advisories, the chemical spill that contaminated the potable water of 300,000 West Virginians, and volunteer stream monitors.

Fred Krueger reports on the annual NRCCC National Prayer Breakfast, including the Steward of Creation Award presented to Rev. Tom Carr. We pay homage to hero friends of our anti-MTR movement who died this year, Pauline Canterberry and Sid Moye. Just before going to press we learned of Jimmy Weekly’s passing, God bless him. And our hero friends Roland Micklem and Mike Roselle completed an 18 day fast in witness to climate and MTR threats. Another hero, Ken Hechler, turns 100 on September 20.

Pope John Paul II (now Saint John Paul) is a hero of environmental justice, documented by author Marybeth Lorbiecki in her new book, Following Francis: John Paul II’s Call For Ecological Action, which we review and highly recommend. Welcome!
Let’s Join Creation’s Song  
by Allen Johnson, Editor

You will live in joy and peace. The mountains and hills will burst into song, and the trees of the field will clap their hands! (Isaiah 55:12 NLT)

Creation sings, applauses, and dances, according to numerous Bible passages. Many of you readers can attest to this in your own metaphorical experience. Spring bursts forth with greening life, choirs of woodland song, and freshened warm air. Summer storms clap with thunder and pelt the earth with life-giving rain. By Fall the land is heavy with its bounty. Winter, too, has its song and dance as the land rests.

Listen! Do you hear the song? Watch! Do you see the dance? Is your heart in rhythm with the pulsing vibrancy of life?

The Apostle John experiences a vision of the Throne of God, where every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is them is singing, “To the One seated on the throne and to the Lamb [jesus] be blessing and honor and glory and might forever.” (Revelation 5:13)

Is your spirit, is mine, in harmony with all of creation as it worships God? That, sisters and brothers, is what our existence is about, to bring praise in our words, deeds, and beings to our Creator and Savior.

As we are well aware, each of us falls short of our calling. Our individual sins collectively throw creation into disarray. The land and its creatures suffer.

The earth reels under the impact of collective human self-idolatry, ignorance, and violence. Over 2700 years ago God revealed to the prophet Hosea the reason the land was “mourning,” just wasting away, even wild animals, birds, and fish disappearing.

There is no faithfulness or loyalty, and no knowledge of God in the land. Swearing, lying, and murder, and stealing and adultery break out; bloodshed follows bloodshed. (Hosea 4:1-3) (see also Isaiah 24)

We humans are fellow living creatures along with animals and plants. The Bible says God created the human from the earth (adamah) and the breath of life (Genesis 2:7). God did the same for the animals (Gen. 1:30; 2:19). We have deep kinship with all life. Yet God has specially created us humans in God’s likeness (Gen. 1:27). God sets humans amongst the animals and plants into an ecosystem to oversee, nurture, and protect as God’s priestly agent. Along with this awesome responsibility comes a corresponding privilege to gain sustenance from the creation, albeit with a warning not to usurp God. (Gen. 1:28-30; 2:15-17; 3:1-4).

The Bible describes the course of human experience and history. Humans self-deify ourselves, that is, we presume ourselves to be gods, even making idols for our own independent self-aggrandizement, and God’s good creation begins to unravel. But the Bible also shows God loving us and all creation to such an extent that God The Son [Jesus] enters into our human race to deliver us.

Francis of Assisi shows the way to harmonize with creation’s praise in his Canticle Of The Sun. Francis begins by giving praise to God. “Most High, all powerful, good Lord, Yours are the praises, the glory, the honor, and all blessing. To You alone, Most High, do they belong.” Having established that God is solel the focus of worship, Francis summons creation to praise. Be praised, my Lord, through all your creatures, especially through my Brother Sun, who brings the day; and You give light through him. And he is beautiful and radiant in all his splendor! Of You, Most High, he bears the likeness.”

The song continues, as Francis lauds the praise given to God by Sister Moon, the stars, Brother Wind, Sister Water, Brother Fire, Sister Mother Earth, and finally Sister Bodily Death. Francis sees the interconnection of all life and death within the beneficient encompassing God, and rejoices in our opportunity to praise and bless God in humble service.

The key to healing the planet ultimately is not through science, politics, or clever economics, valuable as they might be. The key is when we join creation in praise to God!

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises. (Psalm 98:4)
THANK YOU for your support of the APPALACHIAN COMMUNITY HEALTH PROJECT! Your Contribution was very much needed! God bless each and all of you!

With Appreciation...

The 2014 ACHSP has been our most extensive and ambitious project since we started four years ago. Our core has been the three weeks in which students volunteer over their college spring breaks to gather family health information and data for research on the impact of mountaintop removal on human health. Students, thank you for giving your precious spring break time, spending some of your own sparse financial resources, and engaging in this challenging work! Many of you have had heart-opening experiences with our Appalachian people and the work we are engaged in that will affect your future lives in positive ways! Be blessed that you may bless others!

Thank you, professors Karen Pritchard and Martha Doyle, who volunteered your time, expertise, and fabulous personalities! Thank you, also, Eric Autenreith for pitching in.

Due to the extensive nature of this study, we recruited temporary staff persons to conduct further research during late May and into mid-June. Several had previous ACHSP experience. You performed marvelously. Thank you!

CFTM’s Jessi Russo provided critical help in organizing the March spring breaks, and then with the everyday cooking and chore routines. Her husband, Robert “Sage” Russo, slipped up a few days to help, too. Thank you!

The ACHSP is due to the continuing vision and efforts of researcher Dr. Michael Hendryx and Restoring Eden’s Peter Illyn. Our grateful thanks can never be overstated.

Thank you to OVEC’s Janet Keating and Dustin White who provided direct critical financial and valuable hands-on involvement throughout the project. Southern Appalachian Labor School (SALS) was a very helpful partner with special thanks to John David and Vicky Smith.

---Allen Johnson

---

Invitation to Join Together With Us

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Circle if you would like your gift to be considered a membership as well.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Circle if you would like your gift to be considered a membership as well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address</td>
<td>Individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Senior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Regular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Associate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Patron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sponsor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City</td>
<td>State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone</td>
<td>Email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization/School(s)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

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

CFTM has 501(c)3 nonprofit tax exempt status through a partnership with World Stewardship Institute. 887 Sebastopol Rd Ste A, Santa Rosa, California 95407-6828. Contact Person is Fred Krueger. Telephone 707-573-3161.

Your donations are tax deductible.
Thank you for prayer support.

Our Mountain Mourning Collection DVD is available free if you agree to show it. Circle “Yes” for a copy.
After months of preparation, we launched our first round of community health research, this year in West Virginia, the weekend of March 1st with orientation and training. Our teams were comprised of student volunteers offering their one-week spring breaks over a span of three weeks.

This first week we had a small team with 6 students from Eastern Mennonite University and Houghton College, along with local volunteer Eric Autenreith. While initially the small size was a disappointment, we discovered advantages in that we needed to learn how to record our data utilizing Garmin Rino 655T units that recorded photos, GPS locations, and served as walkie-talkies for communication between teams and coordinators. Peter Illyn had received 15 units from a special grant through Garmin and a funder (each unit retails for over $500) just before coming out to West Virginia. This initial group helped us learn how to use the units and record the data. Even with the smaller crew, a nice number of family health surveys was gathered, even though the first Monday we could not get in the field due to inclement weather.

The second week we had 14 student volunteers from Wheaton, Gordon, Covenant, Indiana Wesleyan, and Lee colleges. Karen Pritchard, a lecturer at Pensacola State College in Florida, assisted all week. As planned, we relocated to another area of West Virginia for our third week, with 15 students from the University of Wisconsin and nursing students from Mercy College (Iowa). Martha Doyle, a psychology professor from Mercy College, participated with her students.

Our staff included Peter Illyn, Jessica Illyn, and Allen Johnson. Sage Russo, Dustin White, and Eric Autenreith also participated. Jessica Russo did an outstanding job handling registrations, cooking and cleanup, database entry, and group cohesion. Peter Illyn’s leadership, coordination of activities, teaching, and personal charisma were exemplary. Allen Johnson assisted with surveys, transportation, database entry, planning and coordination, training, and mapping. The research is under the auspices of Dr. Michael Hendryx (now of Indiana University).

ACHSP Report for March 2014

All our team members obtained IRB certification which entails integrity of data gathering. Locations were in Fayette, Raleigh, Kanawah, and Mingo counties of West Virginia. Although gathering family health histories in impacted communities adjacent to mountaintop removal operations is our primary goal, a secondary goal is that the students have powerful experiences of their own during their volunteer week. We let our volunteers have a day during the midweek as a break from the surveys and as a time for some sightseeing, hiking, and refreshing. Building team cohesion was successful during these weeks.

During these first three weeks we conducted about 450 surveys in the impacted communities. Our follow up teams in May/June would gather up several hundred more in these communities as well as similar numbers in our control populations.

The Garmin Rino GPS units were excellent helps as we began to learn how to use them. Each team had a unit with a specific name. The units could operate as a voice walkie talkie, and also to pinpoint paired-team’s locations, which helped considerably when the drivers needed to pick up a team to transport to another location. Furthermore, the photo capacity helped us locate houses in which no one was home, so a follow-up team can come by later, perhaps in the evening when folks might be home. Each team also carried paper tracking forms.

This study, overseen by researcher Dr. Michael Hendryx, is focusing particularly on populations adjacent to mountaintop removal operations. The GPS coordinates show home proximity, which we try to keep within 2 to 3 miles maximum. The completed study will safeguard personal privacy location. Each surveyor went through several hours of IRB training with certification on subject rights, confidentiality, and proper gathering of data. Each surveyor also learned proper administration of oximeters, spirometers, survey protocol, along with an orientation to Appalachian culture.

The second round of data gathering began the weekend of May 25 and continued for four weeks utilizing both temporary stipend staff as well as short term volunteers. These teams conducted surveys in control populations otherwise similar in socio-economic, lifestyle, and cultural traits, without being nearby mountaintop removal operations or other extraneous environmental pollution sources. After completing the control area surveys, the teams then would revisit the neighborhoods previously surveyed in March to gather data from people who had not been home on our earlier round, such as people who work day jobs.

This study builds upon three years of previous studies held in West Virginia, Kentucky, and Virginia, with increased sophistication and detail. Collected data will take a number of months to tabulate and analyze prior to dissemination. Some of our previous studies have been published in peer-reviewed journals.

These studies incur considerable expense. Thus we thank those who have contributed toward the ACHSP. All contributions toward CFTM from the first of 2014 through June went toward the ACHSP.
The 2014 ACHSP research is our most extensive since we began in 2011. Researcher Dr. Michael Hendryx uses analysis of previous studies to probe deeper into the hypothesis of a correlation between mountaintop mining pollution and increased rates of sickness in adjacent populations.

Our student volunteers are trained to objectively gather family health histories and conduct simple respiratory tests. However, each team of volunteers is available for only four days of service during a spring break. Home visits are during the shortened daylight hours during the month of March. They miss some of the people who work day jobs. This discrepancy raises the valid concern that people home during the day during weekdays are statistically more likely to be older or sicker while younger and healthier people are away at work. Studies in our previous years accounted for this by using the same methodology in our control populations with similar lifestyles, the variable being proximity to mountaintop removal activity.

However, this year’s study used GPS coordinates for GIS mapping to correlate proximity to mountaintop mining operations. Second, in late spring we went back to the same communities in the evening hours when working people were home. Our control population data was gathered in a parallel way.

In order to do this second round, the ACHSP contracted several young people to conduct the studies over a four week period in late May and into mid-June. Several of these folks have been student volunteers in the past. Each was certified through the protocol of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and trained to our research method. We stayed two weeks at Cedar Lakes near Ripley, WV, another week at Babcock State Park, and a fourth week in Mingo County. The team did much of its own cooking and housekeeping, planned routing for the next day’s surveys, and inputted into our database.

Our diligent, hard-working, productive team members included Sarah Yonts, Joel Miner, Shayna Balting, Jessie Daniels, Deborah Wigton, Calvin Wetzel, and Jenny Howland. OVEC loaned us the fulltime services of an employee, Dustin White. Civil Society Institutes and The One Foundation gave us a very generous financial support that helped immensely in covering expenses. And a number of Christians For The Mountains supporters contributed much appreciated monetary help. Thank you, each and all. And our grateful thanks for those who offered their prayers. And thanks be to God for an anointing, for success, and for safety!

Studies of this level can take a year to analyze, write up, and publish. In the meantime, those many previous studies, including those that the ACHSP helped on, need to be brought to the attention of our fellow citizens and to public policymakers.

Dr. Michael Hendryx, formerly at West Virginia University, took a professorship at Indiana University a year ago to be with his wife who had landed a position there. Hendryx continues to be committed to further research in Appalachia, including some blood tests to gauge air-borne particulates possibly associated with surface mining, a project we are also helped with.

However, unless this year’s study reveals startling information that begs for further investigation, next year’s student spring break might be in another region in the country where suspected environmental toxins might be impacting human health. Research here is strongly pointing to causality between mountaintop mining pollution and seriously impaired community health.

The Precautionary Principle suggests that if evidence points to an action, procedure, or practice that is causing harm, then those practices should be curtailed until remedied. The ACHP Act (HR 526) is a bill in Congress to address the research by freezing new or expanded Mountaintop Removal permits until a major federal study is conducted in communities adjacent to Mountaintop Removal operations. See www.acheact.org for further information on how you can be actively involved.
"Even if most of a community would like to protect the natural landscape, when they are told that doing so would mean job loss and foreclosed homes, only a few self-sacrificing environmental heroes are likely to support protection measures." (Thomas Power)

This book argues with empirical analysis to conclusively show that protection of landscapes portends greater economic vigor than economies that sacrifice environmental quality for extraction-based resources. According to the author, "If we could lay to rest the fear that environmental protection will cause the imminent economic collapse of communities, the acrimony would subside and it would be much easier to engage in civil discourse over the real choices communities face." This book distinguishes the role played by extractive industries in local communities in contrast to the role of natural landscapes.

Dr. Thomas Power has been associated with the Economics Department at the University of Montana since 1968, where he continues active as a Research Professor. According to the university's website,

"His teaching, research, and publications have focused on Natural Resource Economics and the intersection between natural resources and regional economic vitality and well-being. Over the last half-century, Natural Resource Economics has broadened its focus to include not only the commercially valuable resources that can be obtained from our natural landscapes but also the valuable non-commercial environmental services that flow from those landscapes and support environmental stability and a high quality of life. Similarly, Regional Economics that originally focused almost exclusively on commercial export-oriented economic activities now recognizes that the attractiveness of regions and communities as places to live, work, and do business is central to attracting and holding economic activity."

I had known about Professor Power for decades, however this volume was my first attempt at delving deeply into his thought. One reason is that a Birthplace of Rivers National Monument is proposed for my local area, and with that proposal has come local controversy. Second, Christians For The Mountains advocates for clean environment in the teeth of polluting coal and gas extractive industries in Appalachia. Our premise is that God's creation will supply human needs without a corresponding requirement to abuse the earth. While Dr. Power's book has no direct theological teaching, implications correspond. Power demonstrates that healthy, clean, attractive, unsullied environments lay the framework for a vigorous rural economy, while the converse of polluted, degraded landscapes trends toward "boom" economic flush to subsequent "bust" community decay.

That Lost Landscapes and Failed Economies was published in 1996 almost deterred me from purchasing the volume. After all, a lot of water has flowed under the bridge, so to speak, in the intermittently several decades. While economics might have time-honored principles, modern context can and does change rapidly. Yet while many of Power's anecdotes, data, graphs, and tables are antiquated, his thesis is solid and timely. To my knowledge the book is not in digital format. I feel this work is so important that I have purchased several used books for a few bucks each to pass around.

Extraction-based economies are export oriented. That is, the money generated comes from selling raw materials to a processor outside the area. A key to rural economic vitality is retaining money that circulates as a multiplier within a local economy. The adage, "Buy locally," applies. Yet extractive-based mono-economies typically have excessive leakage. That is, much of the money earned by miners, farmers, and mill workers is spent outside the local communities importing goods and services. For one thing, extraction-based communities tend to have wide up-and-down swings that discourage local business investment seeking stability. For example, a rural car dealer might do well during a boom cycle, but have few sales during a bust cycle. Less local multiplier money means fewer businesses and related jobs. Shoppers simply drive an hour or two to cities for their shopping. The small timber, mining, or farming community stores are bereft.

According to Dr. Power, “Leakage from the local economy to finance outside goods and services limits the [positive] impact of export earnings. Local economic activities that slow or stop leakage generate jobs and income.” Along this line, Power goes on to say about extractive economies that “more of the same” does nothing to develop the economy, but continues dependence and instability.

Power goes into extensive detail on the negative economic implications for rural communities heavily dependent upon mono-economies of export-oriented mining, timber, agriculture, and tourism. However, any or all of these within an otherwise mixed healthy economy can contribute moderately yet positively if the ecosystem and attractiveness of the landscape are carefully protected.

Power contends that the value of protected scenic, biodiverse, vibrant landscapes is in the people attracted to settle nearby. Such people are willing to forgo higher wages and other amenities found elsewhere for the recreational and aesthetic values found in pristine places. Some of these people, such as retired folks, bring their fixed incomes that mingle into the local economy. Others are social and business entrepreneurs whose talents spur the economy. Some businesses, too, are attracted to these landscapes as wage costs can be lower due to employee trade-offs for desirable living places and overall improved quality of life.

Since attractive, intact ecosystems are in short supply especially in the East, such rural communities that indeed still have these unscathed natural landscapes nearby will find their best economic future in protecting these special places. Such scarce special places will draw nature-loving people to settle in those communities, to roll up their sleeves to figure out how to make a decent livelihood, and integrate their lives into their communities.

Appalachian communities with extractive mono-economies are typically impoverished and land/water degraded, with much of their talented young people moving away. Refurbishing and protecting landscapes and their ecosystems will do much to reverse this trend.

Thomas Power says, “Once the preservation of natural landscapes is seen as the local economic base rather than only an ethical or aesthetic act, the polemics of extraction versus environment should change.”
Birthplace of Rivers National Monument is proposed for the headwaters of several rivers that birth in the high mountains of the Monongahela National Forest in West Virginia.

Christians For The Mountains (CFTM) joins with a number of other organizations, businesses, and towns to endorse the process toward establishing a Birthplace of Rivers National Monument.

National monuments and national parks have both similarities and differences. Either will have valuable scenic, historical, or natural phenomena value. Any new national park must be established by an act of Congress, and be large enough to justify effective administration costs. A national monument is not restricted by size, and can be established either by an act of Congress or by presidential proclamation. National monuments can be administered by either the National Park Service (Dept. of Interior), or the National Forest Service (Dept. of Agriculture). National monuments such as the proposed Birthplace of Rivers would permit hunting, fishing, camping, red spruce reforestation, and could entail carefully monitored logging and other extraction that would not degrade the monument.

CFTM has worked closely on Appalachia wilderness advocacy. CFTM is also a project of the World Stewardship Institute, which has projects on wilderness, such as the Religious Campaign for Wilderness (RCW).

CFTM and RCW strongly support the belief that the earth and all that it contains are sacred because God created it and called it “good.” (Genesis 1). God created plants and creatures to have space as well as humans to have our space, within an overarching symbiotic relationship. Humans are to nurture and protect creation, and in doing so, the creation will care for us, within God’s law (Genesis 2:15-17).

Modern society has moved far from direct contact and interrelationship with nature. To return to our God-created rootedness in nature, and in order to better perform our God-given task to nurture and protect creation, we need to spend quality, prayer-driven time in nature. Therefore, CFTM and RCW advocate wild, pristine spaces for spiritual reasons.

The Birthplace of Rivers is a tightly-packaged complex of West Virginia’s most iconic and ecologically significant features, home to some of West Virginia’s most dramatic vistas, tallest waterfalls, cleanest waterways, and a series of sphagnum bogs forgotten by time. The most stunning feature of the Birthplace of Rivers, though, is its sheer wilderness. The area stands as one of the largest expanses of contiguous wild forest in the Eastern United States. At its core is the Cranberry Wilderness, the largest federally-designated wilderness area in the east. The Cranberry features wild rivers, dense forests of red spruce and rugged valleys that glister with trout streams and provide habitat for black bears and other native creatures.

This rare and incredibly diverse landscape provides a haven for rare species and has been designated by the scientific community as an important stronghold against climate change. The wild, largely roadless terrain serves as an important corridor to link populations of animals from the Southern to mid-Appalachian region. Six regionally-important rivers—the Cranberry, Cherry, Gauley, Elk, Williams and Greenbrier—are birthed in the potential monument boundaries, ensuring water quality for many communities located downstream.

National monument status can allow land managers to maintain flexibility to continue -- even promote -- activities which enhance the recreational experience and further existing restoration goals emphasized in much of the area under consideration. Existing national monuments, especially U.S. Forest Service-managed monuments, provide clear precedent for active restoration, fish and wildlife management, and continued access for a variety of activities which may not be allowed in designated Wilderness.

Generally, the areas under consideration for national monument designation are already managed for backcountry recreation, preservation, or ecological restoration -- purposes fully compatible with this special designation. However, these special features are protected under temporary guidelines, which are always subject to future administrative changes. Such changes could drastically alter the way these areas are managed, and could compromise some of West Virginia’s most popular scenic areas and most visited outdoor recreation destinations. Monument advocates simply hope to keep these unique areas safeguarded from potential threats by solidifying the intent of most of the area’s current management, giving the region greater recognition as the Mountain State’s first-ever wildlands national monument. Although final boundaries to be included in the citizen proposal are still to be decided upon, monument advocates have identified approximately 72,000 acres surrounding the existing Cranberry Wilderness for potential national monument status.

Downstream Strategies, a company that has recently done an economic analysis of the proposed Birthplace of Rivers National Monument, concludes that increased tourism would add over $1.5 million annually and add 42 more jobs. Dr. Thomas Power (see article page 6) contends the greatest economic value of such national monuments is they attract talented, creative, community-minded people to live in the vicinity, therefore adding social capital.

You can help build momentum for a Birthplace of Rivers National Monument by visiting the area, telling your friends about the importance of wild places, and by contacting your congressional representatives.

www.birthplaceofrivers.org/ Some of this article contains information from this website.

Several years ago, CFTM produced a video, “God’s Gift of a Wild and Wonderful Land.” Although out-of-print, please contact us if you would like for us to duplicate a copy.

Holy Holy Holy, is the Lord God Almighty. The whole Earth is filled with the glory of God! (Isaiah 6:3)
ACHE ACT Addresses the Moral Issue of Health

The ACHE ACT (HR 526) is the most important and only bill in Congress to directly address mountaintop removal coal extraction! The ACHE ACT addresses the community health impacts of mountaintop removal. This is a fundamentally a moral issue. Please spread the word around to your friends, co-workers, and congressional representatives.

The ACHE ACT was introduced February 6, 2013 by Kentucky Congressman John Yarmuth and New York Congressman Louise Slaughter (who was born in eastern Kentucky), along with 22 other original co-sponsors, and now with over 40 cosponsors.

In early 2012 a small group met to form the Appalachian Community Health Emergency (ACHE) coalition. Christians For The Mountains was an original founding member. Working alongside the Washington, DC organization, Earthjustice, the ACHE Act was first introduced that year, and then the following year in the 113th Congress.

The ACHE Act calls for (1) a freeze on new mountaintop removal permits, or expansions; and (2) requires air and water monitoring at existing permitted MTR operations, to be reported to the federal Department of Health and Human Services (HHS); and (3) requires that HHS conducts a comprehensive health study in Appalachian MTR communities on health disparities and report to Congress. (4) The study would be paid for by an assessment on the coal industry. Miners on existing mountaintop removal operations therefore can continue their jobs under the ACHE ACT provisions. [www.acheact.org]

Progress is being made toward a bipartisan bill to be introduced into the Senate. We will send out updates when we are ready for our readers to contact their senators.

The Precautionary Principle holds that if an activity has plausible risk of causing harm to the public or to the environment, without established scientific consensus of safety, then those performing the activity must be held responsible to cease that activity or modify it to an acceptable safe standard.

Government has the ultimate responsibility to ensure the safety and health of its citizenry and the integrity of the environment. Since two dozen studies are pointing to significant and serious correlations between mountain removal and increased levels of heart disease, cancer, respiratory illness, birth defects, and higher morbidity, without countervailing research, the Precautionary Principle should be engaged as a moral imperative. The ACHE ACT embodies the Precautionary Principle.

Mystery: Why Is USGS Research on Mountaintop Removal Stymied?

In 2012 The United States Geological Survey (USGS) conducted extensive research in communities adjacent to mountaintop removal in West Virginia. Bill Orem, a chemist, led the team of researchers, focusing especially on air pollution. A few months later, without notice, the project was shut down and Orem was reassigned to Unconventional Gas (“fracking”) research. Orem nevertheless completed his report on mountaintop removal and turned it in for internal USGS review. A year later, the report has not yet been approved.

Numerous studies continue to provide evidence that mountaintop removal communities have higher levels of pollutants that point to dust stirred up from blasting mountains, which might contribute to the higher levels of respiratory, cardiovascular, and cancer levels in these communities.

Carbon Fee & Dividend As Climate Response

The scientific consensus is clear and emphatic that rapidly rising levels of CO2 are leading toward a massive disruption of the earth’s climate. The disruption is already occurring, the die has been cast. The disruptive effects of climate change will be of stupendously greater severity unless human behavior and activity greatly reduces our carbon load.

The problem, of course, is that modern societies are addicted to carbon. Developing nations aspire to become like developed nations with their affluent carbon-based lifestyles. So how can the global societies together significantly reduce greenhouse gasses to an earth-safe level while meeting standards of lifestyle quality that are just and fair?

A number of organizations and prominent individuals are proposing a carbon fee and dividend approach, including Christians For The Mountains, National Religious Coalition on Creation Care, Citizens Climate Lobby, Dr. James Hansen, Peter Barnes, and Congressman Chris Van Hollen (D-Md). While various permutations of a carbon fee/dividend exist, the basic premise is that carbon is levied with all proceeds to be refunded equitably to the U.S. citizenry. While carbon fees would be passed on to consumers through higher costs of transportation, home heating, food, and consumer goods, most citizens would incur a net gain as collected revenue is redistributed. Importantly, people would be highly incentivized to energy efficiency and prudence, thus leading to significant carbon emissions’ reductions. Finally, with rules firmly established, market mechanisms would take over, with new enterprises, innovations, and strategies emerging.

A “Cap and Trade” policy, such as promoted by President Obama, is based upon capped allowable greenhouse gas emission permits that are traded amongst polluters. One of the criticisms of Cap and Trade is that consumers are likely to have rising prices without any corresponding compensation. Rep. Chris Van Hollen has recently introduced a hybrid “Cap and Dividend” approach, the “Healthy Climate and Family Security Act” which rebates 100% of emission capped permit fees to U.S. residents.

All fee/dividend proposals take into account carbon-based foreign imports so that U.S. goods are not at a disadvantage. Furthermore, a fee/dividend approach will ultimately help rebuild the American middle class, as Peter Barnes so persuasively argues in his recent book, With Liberty and Dividends for All. As James Hansen says, “A person with several large cars and a large house will have a fee greatly exceeding the dividend. A family reducing its carbon footprint to less than average will make money. Everyone will have an incentive to reduce their carbon footprint. The dividend will stimulate the economy, spur innovation, and provide money that allows people to purchase low carbon products.”

“The data is pretty startling for some of these things,” Orem said [recently]. “To me, it’s compelling enough that a more targeted health study needs to be conducted in these areas.” (interview by Ken Ward, Charleston Gazette, July 26, 2014).

“I personally believe they [Orem’s project] were shut off for political purposes,” said Michael Hendryx, a former West Virginia University researcher whose more than two-dozen papers on mountaintop removal’s impact prompted the USGS investigation in the first place. (Ibid)

“Everything that is hidden will become clear, and every secret thing will be made known.” …Jesus [Luke 8:17]
St. Teresa of Avila, a 16th century Christian mystic, had an affinity for the potential sacredness of water. “I know by frequent experience that there is nothing which puts the devils to flight like Holy water.” Maybe the inverse also holds, that devils can take hold of unconsecrated water to put people to flight.

On January 9 in the Year of our Lord 2014, the waters of West Virginia's Elk River received an unholy infusion of over 10,000 gallons of a nasty, licorice-smelling chemical with the tongue fumbling name of 4-methylcyclohexanemethanol (“call me MCHM for short”).

This chemical spill, of course, was an unintended accident. To add to the misfortune, the tank that spilled its guts just happened to be a tad over a mile upstream from the drinking water source for 300,000 West Virginians. And golly gee willikers, to learn that the tank and its crumbling container wall had not been inspected since 1991 by the West Virginia Department of Environmental, uh, Protection (“call me WVDEP”)?

Now introduce yourself, MCHM, just what do you have not been inspected crumbling tank? And golly gee willikers, to 300,000 West Virginians. And golly gee willikers, to learn that the tank and its crumbling container wall had not been inspected since 1991 by the West Virginia Department of Environmental, uh, Protection (“call me WVDEP”)?

“Now introduce yourself, MCHM, just what do you do?” Answer: “I help give freshly-mined coal a bath. I make a froth that binds to small coal chunks to float them above the heavier slate and clay. Our job is to separate the ‘black diamonds’ from the debris.”

Come to find out, MCHM does its job incognito. The chemical and coal industries know MCHM can do a good job washing coal. Never mind MCHM's effect on humans, that's an unknown. Rats do know the effect; a brief test determined they die if they imbibe too much. But a little bitty of MCHM mixed in with the water, hmm, good question to extrapolate from rats to human populations, to babies growing inside their pregnant mothers, to the 300,000 other guinea pigs? No researcher knew an answer before the spill, now here's an inconvenient test population. Without further evidence, a few days after the spill Governor Earl Ray Tomblin gives the ok to drink, cook, and bathe in the water with the caveat that “it’s your decision… if you do not feel comfortable drinking or cooking in this water, then use bottled water.”

The inadvertent donor of MCHM into the Elk River and the 300,000 is a company named Freedom Industries. It's logo features a Bald Eagle over an American Flag backdrop. The chemical spill shut down restaurants and schools, and created major expenses for bottled water for nursing homes, hospitals, and anyone with precautionary sense. Quickly realizing it was in deep doodoo, Freedom Industries filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy and clammed up. Reminds me of a deadbeat guy who knocks up a woman and then abandons her and the baby to figure out their survival.

Plotting against Jesus, Caiaphas said that it is better that one man die for the people than for the entire nation to be destroyed (John 11:50). The policymakers who guard the industrial colony of West Virginia swiftly scapegoated Freedom Industries, with a side smack at the West Virginia American Water Company. Better to sacrifice one chemical company than that the entire pollution-spewing coal industry and its consorts are dismantled. The West Virginia legislature dallied about a new requirement for above ground chemical tank inspections. Meanwhile, according to each of the past several years of Gallup/Healthways Well-being Index, West Virginia has held last place (that’s #50, friend) in Overall Rank, as well as #50 in subcategories of Life Evaluation (how hopeful); Emotional Health (how happy), and Physical Health. A government can either represent “we the people” or it can represent “those with mooha.” West Virginia government might be in the top tier in that latter category, a proverbial warning to patriots everywhere that “when the canary in the mineshaft ain’t singin’, boys, let’s scramble.”

For our time.

“Long Lines for Water, day after day”

“What goes up must come down,” is true in baseball, but whether a fly ball that goes up comes down into an outfielder's mitt or comes down into the outfield bleachers can make all the difference in who wins the game. Meager regulations and enforcement on pollution and environmental degradation might strengthen the profit line for the coal industry. After all, King Coal rants that EPA has a War On Coal that is killing their industry. On the other hand, tighter regulations and enforcement on pollution save lives otherwise crippled or lost to cancer, cardiovascular disease, COPD, Asthma, and birth defects. And human suffering aside, healthy people pay taxes and strengthen their communities, sick people often cost public funds.

Meanwhile, 300,000 West Virginians have lost confidence in the water that is piped to their homes, businesses, and schools. The fear of uncertainty stalks the land. Bottled water became a hot commodity. The national media and its equally “news promiscuous” audience soon turned away to chasing after fresher news hotties like the 700 sick passengers on a 4000 occupant Royal Caribbean cruise ship. But then, if stereotypes hold water, West Virginia’s destiny is to be a “National Energy Sacrifice Zone” whose hillbilly residents’ need for potable water is nil since they don’t bathe anyway and only swill moonshine. 300,000 folks without potable water is 1/6th the state’s population. Applying that same ratio to California would mean 6 million Californians without water, which come to think about it, might come to pass if droughts continue. Even 1/6th of West Virginia's neighboring Ohio or Pennsylvania populations would mean 2 million of their citizens without water, presumably bringing more than a smidgeon of attention from the politicos who eyeball these pivotal electoral swing states. One can imagine the outcry if Al Qaeda terrorists sabotaged the drinking water of 300,000 U.S. citizens! Homeland Security would get a huge expansion of funds, the military would mobilize, and all citizen hands would be on deck. Contrast that to when favored industries are given lax regulatory favors which result in water, air, and toxic chemical pollution. 300,000 West Virginians are still terrified of their water. Nuff said.

I’ve been to the famed Jordan River. Up by Lake Galilee the Jordan delights the tourists, many who seek baptism in its clean water. Yet as the renowned stream flows southward its waters are damned (and damned) and sucked down to a remaining sewage-polluted trickle as it empties into the Dead Sea. In a surreal time-machine moment my mind’s eye pictures John the Baptist dunking/sprinkling/pouring (quibbling at tradition is not my point here) Jesus in the dried-up sewage ditch that is now the Jordan River. That image is a metaphor for our time.

Faithfulness to one’s baptismal covenant with Christ calls forth purity of living, and love of God, neighbor, and the creation God has gifted us to nurture and protect.
What!!! Don’t Eat The Fish We Catch??  by Allen Johnson

“No! I'm not eating fish. It's unsafe for my baby.”

Thus spaketh my daughter-in-law, Naomi, pregnant with her first child. Naomi grew up in Japan, daughter and granddaughter of Norwegian missionaries. Both Japan and Norway are major fish-eating cultures. Naomi enjoys eating fish. Her brother, Paul, is accomplished at preparing sushi. Fish is engrained in Naomi's lifestyle.

Naomi and her husband and our son, Joel, were visiting my wife and I here in West Virginia. We had advised Naomi about the mercury-related fish consumption advisories for most of the eastern United States, with special emphasis on pregnant women and females of child-bearing age. Conscientious and self-disciplined, Naomi gave up eating fish. Even fish from our backyard pond. Their healthy son (our grandson) is now 7 years old.

Fish had always been touted at the top of the list of healthy “good for you” foods. Fish are generally low in fat and high in protein. Fish contain a number of vitamins and minerals, and are the primary food source for long-chain omega-3 fatty acids. Studies suggest that omega-3 fatty acids are important during fetal brain and eye development and may help to prevent heart disease in adults.

Tragically, human-derived pollutants have caused fish to become among the more dangerous foods to eat in quantity, most especially for a pregnant woman during her baby’s fetal development. Mercury toxicity is most pervasive globally, with PCB, Dioxin, and Selenium toxicities dangerously concentrated in certain regional waters. Mercury, Dioxin, and Selenium occur at background levels in nature with minimal health impact unless unleashed exponentially through human technologies including mining, chlorine-based paper manufacture, waste burning, and coal-fired power plant emissions. Impacts upon human health are startling.

Mercury Threatens Unborn Children

A recent report by the US National Academy of Sciences concluded that there is strong evidence for the neurotoxicity of mercury to the unborn child, even at low levels of exposure. (High levels of exposure are rare, but can result in blindness, deafness, seizures and mental retardation.) Mercury in the organic compound of methylmercury poses the greatest risk for the unborn child.

How is the unborn child exposed? Consumption of fish that has become contaminated by mercury is the main route of human exposure. The main source of mercury pollution is dirty air released by coal-burning power plants. (Coal produces over 50% of the nation's electricity.) The mercury drops from the air into the water system, where it is eventually taken up by fish we eat.

Mercury is extremely toxic to the brain and nervous system, especially to the rapidly developing brain of the unborn child. When a pregnant woman eats mercury-contaminated fish, the mercury in the fish enters the mother’s bloodstream. Once in the mother’s bloodstream mercury can move directly across the placenta to enter the body of her unborn child. One of the body’s protective shields against damage to the brain, called “the blood-brain barrier,” is not fully developed until the first year of life. Thus, in the unborn child mercury can cross this incomplete barrier and accumulate in the brain, causing brain damage.

Studies examining low levels of exposure consistent with what the average unborn child currently faces in the womb provide evidence of brain damage. Such brain damage can result in learning problems including decreased performance on a wide range of tests that assess memory, attention, language and visual-spatial perception. Lower IQ scores in children and adults means lower productivity at school and work.

While a few IQ point loss per child may not seem like much, it collectively causes a major societal problem. IQ points are worth money. Economists suggest that an IQ point is worth $10,000 over the course of a lifetime. Dr. Philip Landrigan, one of the world’s leading experts on children’s health, says about U.S. birth risks, “If each of the 4 million babies born each year loses a few IQ points due to lead, mercury, or certain pesticides, very quickly your economic losses go into the billions.”

So Do We Give Up Fish…and Fishing?

Catching and eating fish has always been a traditional pastime and source of food in Appalachia and, well, just about anywhere there is a body of water larger than a puddle. Small children thrill at catching their first bluegill, and learn the important connection between the food on their dinner plates and the natural world. Grownups enjoy a variety of angling techniques for numerous species of finny creatures. Many of the world’s poor catch fish as their most readily obtainable meat.

Most fish consumption advisories give room for occasional fish meals with limiting stipulations. (1) Certain waters are more contaminated than others; (2) Fish species high on the food chain, and bottom feeders, typically have more toxin concentrations; (3) Larger fish bioaccumulate higher toxin concentrations than smaller or younger ones of the same species; (4) Children, pregnant women, and those who might later become pregnant should consume less.

States all issue advisories. For example, The Ohio Department of Health advises everyone to limit consumption of sport fish caught from all water bodies in Ohio to one meal per week, unless there is a more or less restrictive advisory. Tennessee, Virginia, Kentucky, West Virginia, and all other regional states issue similar advisories. Furthermore, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) jointly issued a national mercury-related advisory for store-bought fish and fish served in restaurants for women of child-bearing age and young children. This advice first suggests checking local and state advisories, and if no advice is available, eat no more than six ounces (one average meal) per week of fish you catch from local waters, however don’t consume any other...
Getting Involved in Stream Monitoring  

by Allen Johnson

“What a perfect day to be outside along the river!” A phrase like that sounded from the mouths of 18 of us gathered along the Greenbrier River just outside Marlinton, West Virginia on a clear, crisp August morning for a “Save Our Streams” workshop.

During the course of the day our class learned introductory basics of stream ecology and stream monitoring technique. Glen Nelson, Coordinator of the West Virginia Save Our Stream Program (WVOS), provided understandable, fun learning activities that fueled our motivation while imparting important skills. And we all got our feet wet in the clear flowing waters of the Greenbrier.

The WVOS program evaluates streams based upon physical, chemical, and biological properties. Utilizing water testing field equipment, our class gained firsthand experience conducting tests in pH, alkalinity, and oxygen levels. Later we netted, counted, and classified aquatic invertebrates such as the immature stages of Mayflies, Stoneflies, and Caddisflies. The presence or absence of certain species can be a strong indicator of water quality, which chemical analysis can corroborate.

According to its website, “The mission of WV Save Our Streams is to promote the preservation and restoration of our state’s waters by providing an understanding of their ecological integrity. This mission is accomplished by conducting workshops, training volunteers on how to monitor their local wadeable streams and rivers.” The WVOS is a project of the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection, providing training and technical support to stream monitoring volunteers. WVOS also conducts education programs for schools and community groups. Contact information is at www.dep.wv.gov/sos.

The Izaak Walton League of America is a pioneer in Save Our Streams water education and advocacy. Contact this stellar organization at www.iwla.org for information on connecting with a water monitoring group in your state.

Seven years ago, facing the possibility of Marcellus Shale gas exploitation, some interested citizens where I live in Pocahontas County organized a Water Resources Task Force (WRTF). Eight pristine rivers head up in our county, the Greenbrier, Tygart, Williams, Cherry, Cranberry, Gauley, Elk, and Cheat. Protecting these valuable waters includes mapping topography above and below ground (including karst), and developing water quality baseline data. Our county commission is providing funding. Community education and involvement is imperative for effective advocacy. Grazia Apolinares, Coordinator for the Pocahontas WRTF, organized the Save Our Streams workshop.

By midafternoon we had completed our day’s work. “I could have talked on for hours, there are so many exciting and useful things to learn about stream ecology,” said Glen Nelson, who is visibly exuberant about his work.

Spread out upon a picnic table, pushpins dotted a large map of Pocahontas County, signifying particular streams that my fellow classmates were interested in embracing for their volunteer monitoring. I had pushed a pin into the map, too.

Stream monitoring is not only important, it is fun. Wade in, my friends.
NRCCC 2014 National Prayer Breakfast Report by Fred Krueger, notes by Diana Van Vleet

“In the face of an absolutely unprecedented climate emergency, society has no choice but to take dramatic action to avert a collapse of civilization,” declared keynote speaker Dr. Richard Miller, from Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska.

“Either we change our ways and build an entirely new kind of global society, or circumstances will change our world for us.”

During this 16th annual NRCCC national prayer breakfast celebrating religious concern for God’s creation, people of faith from across America gathered at the Capitol Hill Lutheran Church in Washington, DC, on Monday, May 12, 2014 to pray for peace for earth. Over twenty speakers highlighted cutting edge issues that religious groups are emphasizing.

Dr. Tom English, representing the Presbyterian Church USA from San Diego California, said that Presbyterians are making climate change their number one issue. “Climate change,” he reported, “will cause a massive extinction of species. Food shortages will result. People will die from heat and starvation. Even the United States Military reports that this will cause clashes between nations and so it is primary national security threat.”

As a sign that the religious ecology movement is gaining more widespread acceptance, for the first time participation came from Hindu and Islamic leaders. Swami Arjun Bhargava spoke of how Hindus are beginning to teach ecological awareness in their temples and making lifestyle changes. Imam Seyyed Mohammed, director of the Islamic Society of North America, spoke of the intensity of prejudice against Muslims in America and how glad he was to meet hospitality. He spoke of how Muslims are forming a Green Deen organization, which will teach the importance of addressing climate change in the mosques of America.

Other speakers included Teresa Eickel who explained the strategy employed by the Connecticut campaign.

Rick Velleu represented the Our Voices interfaith climate movement from London, UK and their goal of reaching out internationally on climate change.

Dr. Eric Gopelrud from Alexandria, Virginia will mobilize religious groups from across the State of Virginia in a campaign on climate change.

Dave Carroll from Wisconsin has just invented a new LED light bulb, called the Forever Bulb. It uses less energy, costs less and provides brighter light. What makes this bulb unique, he says, is that it lessens atmospheric pollution and reduces human impact on climate change. This will help us all to live an environmentally caring lifestyle. Dave also announced that he will coordinate a 2015 Minnesota NRCCC faith based conference on climate change.

The musical highlight of the program occurred when international opera star Teresa Eickel sang For the Beauty of the Earth and then led the gathering in America, the Beautiful. —Cont. p. 13
“Either we change our ways and build an entirely new kind of global society, or circumstances will change our world for us.”

---Dr. Richard Miller

**Dancing in God’s Eternal Joy and Peace**

Sid Moye of Matoaka, WV, spent his last years working to save mountains and communities from mountaintop removal mining. He was a speaker for Keepers Of The Mountains Foundation and a member of Mountain Justice. He is survived by a loving family and the many friends who he inspired.

Pauline Canterbury of Sylvester, WV, paired with her close friend, Mary Miller, as the “Dustbusters” who successfully advocated for improved air quality in their community. She is survived by a loving family and the many friends who she inspired.

**An 18 Day Fast For The Mountains Held at WV Capitol**

Roland Micklem and Mike Roselle completed an 18 day fast at the entrance to the Capitol Building office of West Virginia Governor Earl Ray Tomblin this past July. Taking only juice, water, vitamins, and medical checkups, the two stayed the course as they talked to many passersby, supporters, and media about the seriousness of climate change and its causes including the devastating practice of mountaintop removal.

A number of people joined the pair for day-long periods of fasting and witness. Vincent Eirene joined in for much of the fast. A press conference was held, as well as a Sunday service. As Roselle explains, “We’ve gotten to know practically everybody who works there.” The entire vigil was marked with cordiality, respect, and calmness. Governor Tomblin never came out to meet with the witnesses, even though the vigil was outside his office, and he lives in the governor’s mansion about 100 yards away.

Roland Micklem and Mike Roselle on 18 Day Fast

Roselle is a lifelong activist noted for leading direct actions, and is a co-founder of Earth First!, Rainforest Action Network, the Ruckus Society, and West Virginia-based Climate Ground Zero fighting against mountaintop removal mining. Roselle lives in West Virginia.

Roland Micklem

Micklem is an 85 year old retired science teacher and committed Christian. Speaking of his motivation for the fast, Micklem explains, “I don’t like to call it ‘protest’. But it is a witness and an expression of my genuine grief for the loss of creation. I’m quite willing to fast here until I can’t do it anymore...or until I die.” [Interview by Roxie Todd, West Virginia Public Broadcasting, July 8, 2014].

It’s not a protest, it’s not a hunger strike. It’s a witness, a witness that I’m making by being there every day and not eating. The campaign needs love and respect for one’s adversaries, as well as one’s friends.” [Todd, WVPB, July 16, 2014]

Just prior to beginning the fast, Micklem wrote a July 4th message to readers of his blog, Scrap Paper. Excerpts of his prophetic message follow:

“Any thinking person can see that we are standing on the threshold of a period of extremely disruptive civil unrest. What with climate change and other serious environmental issues, economic slowdown, unemployment, widening gap between haves and have-nots, a dysfunctional congress, and a Supreme Court that has removed the underpinnings of our democracy by granting corporations the status of persons, more of us will be inclined to take to the streets in defiance of laws. We must be careful, however, not to allow a vacuum of leadership to be taken over by the advocates of violence—however similar their objectives are to ours. The revolution, if you will, must be a non-violent one, conducted with equal measures of love and determination whether we engage In unlawful acts or not. Non-violence is more a way of life than a strategy, and however worthy the cause, victory is meaningless if accompanied by dehumanizing the opposition.”

“Less I be portrayed as a soothsayer of doom, however, I need to acknowledge the good things that are happening and are a genuine cause for hope. The solar panel industry is taking off by leaps and bounds. The panels have become less expensive, more improved, and the industry itself has created jobs and stimulated economies wherever it’s set up shop and commenced operations.”
Following St. Francis: John Paul II’s Call For Ecological Action by Marybeth Lorbiecki
forward by Bill McKibben (Rizzoli Ex Libris: NY, NY. 2014, 383 pp.) Book Review by Allen Johnson

Everyone remembers the stories of St. Francis joyfully speaking with the animals urging them to respect others and to praise the Creator. This example is particularly urgent for our times when, without the slightest concern, man is slowly destroying the environment that the Creator had prepared for him. ---Post-Angelus, National Day Of Ecology And Zoology, March 28, 1982 (Pope John Paul II)

Pope Saint John Paul II was a leading figure in the last quarter of the 20th Century through his extraordinary influence upon the Catholic Church, numerous other religious groups, and in the geopolitical sphere. Karol Józef Wojtyła (1920-2005) served as pope for over 26 years until his death, the second longest papacy in modern times. He traveled to 129 countries during his pontificate.

In her introductory notes to Following St. Francis, author Marybeth Lorbiecki writes,

“Of all the dozens of books published on Pope John Paul II, not one has focused on his persistent call to radically change our orientation toward the earth in the name of our Creator and to take action to protect the systems and species upon which life depends—in other words, to follow St. Francis. This book is the only synthesis of John Paul II’s writings, speeches, and encyclicals on the subject.” (p. 13)

Lorbiecki’s encompassing book conclusively demonstrates that John Paul II was astute about the modern human-related ecological crisis and passionate to teach human responsibility to God’s creation. His numerous direct addresses on ecological issues as well as his frequent interweaving of ecological themes into his writings and talks on family, justice, and the Christian life have been gathered and organized by Lorbiecki into five major sections. Part I: In the Footsteps of Francis is an introduction to the life of St. Francis of Assisi as well as a treatise on John Paul II’s own growth in his love and advocacy for creation. Part II: The Ecological Emergency and Moral Crisis lays out the Pope’s belief framework. Part III: Ecological Violence: The Key Issues brings out the his teachings on twelve current ecological issues. Part IV: Ecological Conversion and Restoration are stories of John Paul II’s direct influence on positive action for creation. Part V: Resources and Speeches include resources for the reader as well as four ecological speeches by the pope.

Papal quotations on eco-justice themes flood almost every page providing ample grist for meditation, conversation, and faith-filled action. Lorbiecki weaves an artistic tapestry with the papal teachings, placing them in context and drawing forth implications. As a personal practice, I underline and make notes with red ink in book pages as I read, and I found myself marking up many of Lorbiecki’s own illuminating insights. Lorbiecki has fashioned an approachable, lively, challenging, and inspiring treatise that deserves wide readership.

For example, when John Paul II says, “Technology that pollutes can also cleanse,” Lorbiecki explains that this “sums up his continuing optimism about human intelligence and potential and hope in God; we can’t say, ‘No, it isn’t possible to create better, more harmonious technologies because environmental standards will cost jobs.’ He believed that we have the ingenuity to do both and more” (p. 118). Pope Benedict, who followed John Paul II, installed 2700 solar panels on the Paul VI Audience Hall.

Following St. Francis contains an illuminating and challenging section of twelve key ecological issues that Pope John Paul II deals with: (1) Greenhouse effect, climate, nuclear technology; (2) Deforestation; (3) Oceans; (4) Fresh water; (5) Poverty; (6) Oppression of women and children; (7) Population growth and limited resources; (8) Farming; (9) Indigenous people and environmental racism; (10) Loss of biodiversity; (11) Chemical and industrial pollution; (12) War and Peace

Besides extensively covering John Paul II’s ecological thinking, the author has worked in comments of Pope Benedict and Pope Francis. All quotations are annotated for further reference. Along with the many papal snippets of speeches and writings, the book includes the full text of John Paul II’s best known talk on ecological responsibility, Peace with God the Creator: Peace with All of Creation (January 1, 1990).

I’ll conclude this review with a sampling of papal quotes that hopefully will encourage folks to obtain this extraordinary “spiritual gold mine” volume.

Pope John Paul II on Moral Responsibility

“I wish to repeat: The ecological crisis is a moral crisis.” (p. 27)

The world’s present and future depend on the safeguarding of creation, because of the endless interdependence between human beings and their environment.” (p. 71)

“When man habitually loves and respects lower creatures, he will also learn to be more human with his equals. I am therefore happy to encourage and bless those who work to assure that, in the Franciscan spirit, animals, plants, and minerals be considered and treated as ‘brothers and sisters.’” (p. 50)

Exploitation and Impoverishment of Humanity and Creation

“The environment has often fallen prey to the interests of a few strong industrial groups, to the detriment of humanity as a whole, with the ensuing damage to the balance of the ecosystem, the health of the inhabitants and of future generations to come.” (p. 34)

“The earth belongs to God! It must therefore be treated according to his law.” And a related quote. “The land is a gift of God for the benefits of all...It is not admissible to use this gift in such a manner that the benefits it produces serve only a limited number of people, while the others—the vast majority—are excluded from the benefits which the land yields. A...challenge is, therefore, presented to those that own or control the land.” (p. 59)

“Modern society will find no solution to the ecological problem unless it takes a serious look at its lifestyle. In many parts of the world, society is given to instant gratification and consumerism while remaining indifferent to the damage that these cause.” (p. 77)

“Blatant disrespect for the environment will continue as long as the earth and its potential are seen merely as objects of immediate use and consumption, to be manipulated by an unbridled desire for profit.” (p. 95)
Following Francis [Continued from page 14]

The legitimate development to which every country aspires cannot be pursued irresponsibly, at the cost of the natural environment. (p. 284)

It is a serious abuse and an offense against human solidarity when industrial enterprises in richer countries profit from the economic and legislative weakness in poorer countries by locating production plants or accumulating waste that will have a degrading effect on the environment and on people's health. (p. 286)

Tell the truth, the whole truth, about the costs of war on every level, from the human to the wildlife, to the systems of land, water, and air, and to the future generations. (p. 293)

Hope

"God has not abandoned the world. It is His will that His design and our hope for it will be realized through our cooperation in restoring its original harmony. (p. 100)

Aware of the value of prayer, we must implore God the Creator to enlighten people everywhere regarding the duty to respect and carefully guard creation… it is love for our children that will show us the path that we must follow into the future. (p. 103)

Only those who till the land can really testify that barren earth does not produce fruit, but when cared for lovingly, it is a generous provider. (p. 249)

It is not too late; God's world has incredible healing powers. Within a single generation, we could steer the earth toward our children's future. Let that generation start now, with God's help and blessing. (p. 313)

What is required is an act of repentance on our part and a renewed attempt to view ourselves, one another, and the world around us within the perspective of the divine design for creation. (Joint statement with Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, p. 315)

Men and women must learn to conquer fear. We must learn not to be afraid, we must rediscover a spirit of hope and a spirit of trust. (p. 332)

If you look at the science about what is happening on earth and aren't pessimistic, you don't understand the data. But if you meet the people who are working to restore this earth and the lives of the poor, and you aren't optimistic, you haven't got a pulse… What I see everywhere are ordinary people willing to confront despair, power, and incalculable odds in order to restore some semblance of grace, justice, and beauty to this world. (p. 340)

A Message to Youth

In this situation, you young people can rightly ask the preceding generations: How have we come to this point? Why have we reached such a degree of peril for humanity all over the world? You young people can ask all these questions, indeed you must! For this is the world you are living in today, and in which you will have to live tomorrow, when the older generation has passed on. (p. 330)

Meet the Author

Marybeth Lorbiecki is the Director of the Interfaith Ocean Ethics Campaign (IOEC), a joint program of the National Religious Coalition on Creation Care (NRCCC) and the Franciscan Action Network. Lorbiecki graduated from St. Catherine University with a background in theology, and earned an M.A. in literature and writing at the University of Minnesota—Mankato. She also served as a Catholic volunteer in Appalachia and in a disadvantaged Hispanic community in southern Colorado. Later, she taught theology at a Catholic high school for girls in Denver.

Lorbiecki loves to help introduce young people to the wonder of nature all around them. She has written over 25 award-winning books for children including Sister Anne's Hands; Jackie's Bat; The Wild Prairie That Nature Built; John Muir and Stickeen: An Icy Adventure With A No Good Dog; Planet Patrol: A Kid's Guide To Earth Care; Things Natural, Wild, and Free: The Life of Aldo Leopold. In addition, Lorbiecki has written acclaimed adult non-fiction books including the powerful volume, A Fierce Green Fire: The Life And Legacy Of Aldo Leopold.

Research on the conservationist Aldo Leopold and his land ethic led Lorbiecki to examine the Bible for its teachings. She discovered a faith mandate to care for the land, animals, the poor, and all of God's creation that was woven like a golden thread through the Old and New Testaments. Inspired, she became a key member and adviser of the NRCCC and began her decade's long study of Pope John Paul II's writings on ecology.

Marybeth Lorbiecki along with her husband, David Mataya, have raised their three children, Nadja, Mirjana, and Dmitri, in Hudson, Wisconsin, where they enjoy the nearby rivers and woods.

www.marybethlorbiecki.com

Happy 100 Years, Ken Hechler!

Ken Hechler turns 100 on September 20. Over the span of a century, Hechler has compiled an awesome legacy of service: Ph.D from Columbia; professorships at Columbia, Princeton, Barnard, Marshall; major in the U.S. Army and combat historian; interrogator of Nazi war criminals in preparation for the Nuremberg Trials; author of numerous scholarly and popular books; White House assistant and speech writer for President Harry Truman; West Virginia Congressman for 18 years; WV Secretary of State for 12 years. Hechler is the oldest living member of Congress.

Hechler has always stood up for justice, for workers, the environment, and integrity in public office. He was the only congressman to march with Martin Luther King, Jr. at Selma. Hechler was key in gaining federal legislation to address Black Lung disease. Hechler is an outspoken, active opponent of mountaintop removal.

Ken Hechler and his wife, Carol, live in Hampshire County, West Virginia. He continues an active life with regular exercise, a radio program, and frequent talks at schools and special events. His intellect is sharp, his wit is quick, his smile is warm, and his citizenship is engaged. Happy birthday, Ken Hechler! Our hero!

Larry Gibson and Ken Hechler at Labor Day Gospel Festival on Kayford Mountain September 1, 2012. Gibson died suddenly 8 days later. Hechler was a close friend to Gibson, and continues fervent opposition to mountaintop removal.

For further information on the Interfaith Ocean Ethics Campaign that Marybeth Lorbiecki directs, and how you can offer much-needed involvement, visit the website.

www.oceanethicscampaign.org

This is what the Lord says: Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of the oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no wrong or violence to the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place. (Jeremiah 22:3)
Upcoming for the Next Edition of The Mountain Vision

The fifth edition is scheduled for November. Please let us know if your friends would like a sample copy.

The upcoming issue will discuss economics, money, property, and covenant within a Kingdom of God framework. The issue will also delve into why people hold ideological positions and what factors influence transformation and change. **We invite you to send your own personal stories of your conversions to Kingdom of God ethical behavior with emphasis on environmental justice.**

We invite and welcome your comments and suggestions.

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).