

Item: 09-23*

Commissioners' Resolution. On Abandoning Mountaintop Removal of Coal.

From: Unassigned

Type: For Plenary Action

Item URL: <http://les-pcusa.org/Item.aspx?IID=504&>

Assembly Action

The Assembly adopted the Committee's recommendation to approve
On this Item by Assembly acted by way of the Committee's consent agenda

Committee Recommendation

On Item 09-23, the Social Justice Issues Committee voted as follows: Motion was carried by a Counted vote.

- Affirmative:54
- Negative:5
- Abstention:2

The committee hereby recommends approval...

Recommendation

That the 217th General Assembly (2006) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) urge state and federal agencies that regulate mining practices, as well as coal companies themselves, to abandon the practice of mountaintop removal coal mining and work to meet our nation's energy needs in a manner that is just, sustainable, and consistent with Christian values.

Rationale

Jesus instructed Christians in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7:12, "In everything do to others what you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets."

Mountaintop removal is a mining technique that involves demolishing up to 700 feet of elevation of mountain to reach seams of coal and then dumping mining waste in valleys below. This mining practice drastically alters the landscape in and around homes and communities in Appalachia. This altered landscape has dramatically increased flooding in communities near these mining sites. For instance, the town of McRoberts, Kentucky, flooded five times in eighteen months after mountaintop mining began operation above their town.

Hundreds of lives have been lost and thousands of families have lost homes and property in recent floods and many of these families still live in emotional exile to their roots in temporary residence from which there seems to be no end in sight. The quality of life for families near mining sites is decreased due to the threat of floods, continual blasting, dust, and falling rock and this situation has forced families to live in fear for their lives and property or to abandon their family home place and leave a lifetime of memories. Mountaintop removal coal mining contributes to a cycle of poverty that has created high unemployment, high illiteracy rates, record numbers of school closings, and a lack of opportunity in areas where coal is produced by mountaintop removal.

Mountaintop removal coal mining destroys both the beauty and productive capacity of the land thus eliminating future or alternative economic opportunities for the families of Appalachia. God instructs us to "... not defile the land in which you live, in which I also dwell ..." (Num. 35:34). We are instructed in James 4:17 to turn away from sin.

Mountaintop removal coal mining has buried 724 miles of streams and destroyed up to a million acres of forested mountains in Appalachia. Streams, mountains, and forests damaged by mountaintop removal coal mining can never be restored to support the community of life that God created.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the United Methodist Church, the Episcopal Church, the Catholic Conference of Eastern Kentucky, and the Presbytery of Salem of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) have passed resolutions concerning mountaintop mining.

Ray Mims, Presbytery of Salem

Charles Norris, Presbytery of Salem

Two Major National Religious Denominations Pass Resolutions Against Mountaintop Removal Coal Mining

Within a week of one another, two major national faith groups passed resolutions at their general assemblies opposing the widespread practice of mountaintop removal coal mining in central Appalachia. Mountaintop removal involves blasting off the top of mountains and dumping the waste into valleys below in order to access multiple seams of coal.

One resolution, passed on June 22 in Birmingham, Alabama by the Presbyterian Church/USA stated that, "Mountaintop removal coal mining contributes to a cycle of poverty that has created high unemployment, high illiteracy rates, record numbers of school closings and a lack of opportunity in areas where coal is produced." The Presbyterian Church/USA has over 2.5 million members nationwide.

The effort to pass the resolution was spearheaded by West Virginia native Melissa Gee. "Someone once told me that Presbyterians don't go alone. I now realize the similarity of that belief to the way I was raised in West Virginia. The need for this resolution was clear; the people of our nation's coalfields should not be sent out alone in the fight to protect their homes and families," commented Gee.

The resolution cited a decreasing quality of life for nearby families and communities due to flooding, blasting, dust and fallen rock, loss of home and property, and destruction of "both the beauty and productive capacity of the land" caused by mountaintop removal as a basis for their opposition. The resolution passed almost unanimously.

On June 26 the Unitarian Universalist Association, representing more than 1000 congregations nationwide, passed an action of immediate witness concerning mountaintop removal at their general assembly in St. Louis, Missouri. The action stated that the "Passage of H.R. 2719, the Clean Water Protection Act, would amend the Clean Water Act to eliminate mountaintop removal coal mining because coal companies would no longer be permitted to dump waste into nearby streams and valleys."

Sarah Berel-Harrop, the sponsor of the resolution, said, "I was overwhelmed with the support from delegates around the country. I am hopeful that this action of immediate witness will spur members from their congregations to learn more about and become active on this issue."

The two denominations have now joined several other national faith groups who have outwardly expressed their opposition to mountaintop removal, including the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Episcopal Church, the United Methodist Church and the Catholic Conference of Kentucky.