

A CONGREGATIONAL COVENANT FOR EARTH COMMUNITY

Earth Covenant made by Las Placitas Presbyterian Church Placitas, New Mexico

January 1998

Preamble

In each generation churches are called upon to assume responsibility for shaping the ethical foundations for the whole of society. Today that responsibility is heard as the cry of creation – the tragic breakdown of our local Regional and global ecosystems.

Hearing the cry, churches are clearly identifying the consequences of this crisis: in human death, disease, and injury from environmental conflict; in rising seas and flooded settlements from global warming; in blindness and melanoma from ultraviolet rays stream- in through a thinning ozone layer; in starvation from depleted fisheries and eroded cropland in deadly, exotic viruses released through human interference with natural systems and in other ways that are even now being revealed in the cities, towns, and country sides of the world.

Trusting in the unfolding promise of the New Creation, churches are thus called upon to repudiate all forms of oppression on the Earth Community, the actions that give rise to such affliction and anguish, and to cease all transgressions against God's intention in creating the earth and finding it good. Moreover, they are called upon to confess their participation in those very forms and systems that destroy what God has made, and to work to heal and defend the earth.

It is through such actions in their deeds and in their corporate life that churches can pioneer, on behalf of society, new ethical foundations for the care of the earth and for its true enjoyment as the gift of God. The responsibility for such moral formation is at the very heart of being church. And because we accept this responsibility, we do now, as a congregation of people of faith, commit to the following principles and do make a covenant based upon them.

The Principles

- We profess that we have been given two overarching commandments: to love God with our entire being and to love our neighbors as ourselves. We are prepared to expand our understanding of this neighbor love to include all forms of life, indeed to include the whole of our earth home.
- We accept the term **community** to be the key for understanding our moral responsibility to the creation. It reminds us that life is relational, that we are all part of the earth, and that we must extend respect to all members of it.
- We seek to live by an ethic of care within the Earth Community. Because we live within relational patterns of mutual influence, we understand that we are a part of the whole and not separated from the whole. Therefore we seek the flourishing of all creation.
- We acknowledge how easily we revert to treating members of the Earth Community as objects, not as beings or constituents of the earth with which

we live in mutual reciprocity. We confess that we put ourselves at the center of creation and assume that all around us is for our own use and benefit. In making this confession, we look for the transforming power of God's spirit to make these affirmations in behalf of the Earth Community grow within us and to help us imagine our way into a larger love of the creation.

- We affirm from our faith tradition the continuing call to be in solidarity with the oppressed, whether humankind or otherkind. We shall strive to be open to correction, to confession, and to the formation of new possibilities in carrying out this affirmation.
- We assert the sacramental quality of the Earth Community. We will endeavor to learn not only how to see "God in the tree," but also how to see "the tree in God."
- We believe in working toward the arrival of God's "new heaven and new earth," and in directing our work for the whole Earth Community as well as for humankind. When we pray the Jubilee Prayer, which includes "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," we wish to devote ourselves in our bodies, minds, and hearts to the whole of God's creation.

To advance these affirmations and professions, and out of love and care for the Earth Community, as a congregation...

We will, through *Proclamation*, tell the stories of God's self-disclosure and self-giving in creation, including the biblical vocation of stewardship handed over to humankind to care for the creation, and including the promise of The New Heaven and The New Earth made by the one who says, "Behold, I make all things new."

We will, through *Worship*, enter into a profound gratitude for all life, allowing the power of faith to be expressed in images, rituals, and movements which reveal the sacramental quality of life and a fuller engagement with the suffering of creation.

We will, through *Fellowship*, continue to learn how to express responsibility in all our relations, now including the whole Earth Community; continue to learn how to make and keep promises based on the duties of mutual reciprocity; and continue to use our imagination for examining our present modes of living in light of God's promised future.

We will, through *Service*, allow God's spirit to invite us into uncomfortable places where we expand our love of our neighbor and of God's creation, practicing the enlargement of our caring.

We will, through *Formation*, give shape and structure to our moral and faith development by teaching the disciplines and skills for living responsibly within the Earth Community, by practicing the economy of sustainability, and by learning the vocabulary and grammar for healing and defending God's creation.

The Covenant

Heeding the tragic breakdown
of local, regional, and global ecosystems,
seeking justice for all creation
and in solidarity with the poor
who suffer from environmental oppression

In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior
this congregation has affirmed and professed
that
through proclamation, worship, fellowship,
service and formation
it will now, and in the future, dedicate itself
to the love, care, healing and defense
of God's earth, our home.

By action of the Session of Las Placitas Presbyterian Church

Rev. Jane Harmes, Moderator, Dorothy B., Clerk of Session

January 13, 1998