



STEWARDS OF OUR EARTH All of God's Creation

Restoring Our Earth Through Legislation and a Laying on of Hands

The Earth is calling to its people, and sometimes we are answering.

On March 2, the UN Environment Assembly, with more than 150 countries represented, unanimously agreed to develop a legally binding **treaty to end plastic pollution**. “This is one of the world's most ambitious environmental efforts in recent decades. The adopted resolution will set up a treaty that would address the full life cycle of plastic—holding countries, businesses, and communities accountable in eliminating plastic pollution from all environments” (World Wildlife Fund Action Team, 3/2/22). It calls for the creation of an intergovernmental negotiating committee to hash out details of a treaty by the end of 2024.

“Companies whose operations kill or injure migratory birds will once again be held accountable. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is restoring protections under the **Migratory Bird Treaty Act**,” **Solutions**, Environmental Defense Fund (EDF), Winter 2022 (53)1.

“The Department of Labor has issued a proposed rule making it clear that **retirement plan managers can integrate risks posed by climate change** alongside other risks in 401(k) investment decisions.” (EDF, Winter 2022)

“For the first time, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) proposes **regulating methane pollution** from 800,000 existing oil and gas wells across the country.” On a global level, “in an agreement initiated by the EU and U.S., more than 100 nations pledge to work together to cut methane by at least 30% by 2030.” In Pennsylvania, which is poised to join the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, “**carbon pollution** will be reduced by some 188 million tons over the next 10 years – equal to taking four million cars off the road.” (EDF, Winter 2022)

In his book *Ladder to the Light*, Steven Charleston, a member of the Choctaw Nation and an Episcopal bishop, offers practices drawn from the meeting point of his Christian faith and Native American spirituality. Here he adapts a practice known as “**laying on of hands**.”

“...we must put down the idea that the earth is nothing more than a vast accumulation of natural resources. Instead, we must see the earth as a living presence. We must recognize the interrelatedness of all life and begin to actively engage in protecting and learning from all our relations. . . They call it a laying on of hands. In many faith traditions, when prayers of healing are offered, people place their hands on the patient. I have decided to do that for someone, and I am inviting you to join me. The patient is our Mother Earth. She is struggling to recover from the effects of toxic poisoning and exhaustion. I am going to intentionally lay my hand on her and say, ‘Thank you, Mother, for all you have given us. Be healed of all that harms you.’ It is only a symbol, but symbols have power. Please share my invitation. If every person on our planet went outside to lay hands on the earth and ask for healing, it might inspire us all to act, to work, to give for the sake of our Mother.” (Steven Charleston, *Ladder to the Light: An Indigenous Elder's Meditations on Hope and Courage*, Broadleaf Books, 2021, 140-141)

These efforts are surely positive, but we must also accept that the recent report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) makes clear that averting the worst-case scenarios will require nothing less than transformational change on a global scale. **We must hold our policy makers accountable and be responsible in choosing new ones.**