

My name is Kathleen Huddleston. I'm a ruling Elder at Southminster Presbyterian Church in Beaverton OR which is within the Presbytery of the Cascades. I'm speaking in support of Overture 14-02 - Regarding Endorsing the Clergy Letter Project. 14-02 also received concurrences from Eastern Virginia and Upper Ohio Valley Presbyteries.

We are asking the General Assembly to endorse the Clergy Letter Project's Christian Clergy Letter. The eloquent text of the letter is presented in full in the Overture. Endorsing it is an opportunity for us to join other faith leaders and witness that religious belief and practice, as we understand it, is not inconsistent with science – specifically with the study and teaching of evolution. In a time when scientific reasoning is under attack in our country regarding evolution, but also climate science and other issues, this is an important way to amplify our voice and make our position clear when that is needed.

Since the beginning of the Clergy Letter Project in 2004, this letter has been endorsed by: The General Conference of the United Methodist Church (who just renewed their endorsement in 2016), The Southeast Florida Diocese of the Episcopal Church, The Southwestern Washington Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and over 13,000 individual members of Christian clergy.

As part of the project, similar letters were also endorsed by over 500 rabbis, 400 Unitarian Universalist Clergy, and 25 Buddhist clergy.

Affirming this theological position is not new for PCUSA.

In 1969 the Presbyterian Church in the United States affirmed “Evolution and the Bible,” the statement on evolution that continues to guide the PC(USA) to this day: It states that (quote) “Neither Scripture, our Confession of Faith, nor our Catechisms, teach the Creation of man by the direct and immediate acts of God so as to exclude the possibility of evolution as a scientific theory”.

In 2002, the 214th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) stated that it: (quote)

1. Reaffirms that God is Creator, in accord with the witness of Scripture and the Reformed Confessions.

2. Reaffirms that there is no contradiction between an evolutionary theory of human origins and the doctrine of God as Creator.
3. Encourages State Boards of Education across the nation to establish standards for science education in public schools based on the most reliable content of scientific knowledge as determined by the scientific community.
4. Calls upon Presbyterian scientists and science educators to assist congregations, presbyteries, communities, and the public to understand what constitutes reliable scientific knowledge.”

Thus, in asking the General Assembly to endorse the Clergy Letter, we are not requesting a new theological understanding by this body. I will add that having the General Assembly endorse this letter does not bind individual clergy or congregations. They are still free to endorse The Clergy Letter individually or not at all.

Why is this timely and important? In many US school districts, science education is under attack from those who believe the Bible literally. They argue that Creationism is an equally valid theory to Evolution for understanding the diversity of life on Earth. Furthermore, Fundamentalists may say that the Biblical and Scientific versions of life are incompatible — that teaching evolution as accepted theory is even an attack on religious freedom. These protests unanswered have a chilling effect. In response, some schools and teachers retreat from teaching evolution just to avoid conflict, and leave their students with an incomplete or confusing education.

School districts and the public at large need to hear from moderate religious leaders to counter these protests by a very vocal minority of Christian spokespersons. They need to hear that not all – or even most – Christians hold extreme anti-science views. Endorsing The Clergy Letter Project is an effective way for us to provide a strong, united voice of religious authority - one that supports science and shows how it is compatible with faith.

The need is urgent. We can't solve many of our most pressing world problems without the best scientific research. Evolution is at the core of much medical and environmental research. We also need to apply our faith to understand and make good moral decisions regarding what we learn from

science. Science and faith must work together.

Furthermore, the future of our faith community is threatened. In a recent study of why young people are leaving the church, 29 percent of the youth reported being discouraged by the church's antagonistic view of science. Many young people are "turned off by the creation-versus-evolution debate." The research also shows that many science-minded young Christians struggle to find ways of staying faithful to their beliefs and to their professional calling in science-related industries."

We need to show our young people and all scientists that it's possible to embrace the church's teachings on the beauty of creation and our moral responsibilities – and also to study science to learn more about the complexity of God's creation and to guide us rationally in our human endeavors. Both science and scripture are part of God's plan and creation.

The Clergy Letter was written in 2004 and is still equally valid today. The general language has not required revision, even as science continues to advance. It will remain relevant and useful.

Later today, you will also consider Overture 14-13, On Approving an Affirmation of Creation. I'd like to call attention to a comment from the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) on that overture, where they said 14-13 should be answered by "14-02 "Regarding Endorsing the Clergy Letter Project" and by earlier affirmations such as that at the 214th General Assembly (2002) "that there is no contradiction between an evolutionary theory of human origins and the doctrine of God as Creator" (Minutes, 2002, Part I, p. 495)."

ACSWP continued in their comment, "More general statements of compatibility between evolutionary theory and Christian doctrine already exist from earlier General Assemblies, and (I emphasize) would be reinforced if this General Assembly decides to approve Item 14-02 and thus sign on to the Clergy Letter Project that affirms "that the timeless truths of the Bible and the discoveries of modern science may comfortably coexist."

I'd like to thank the Committee for your consideration this matter.