

For Immediate Release
August 29, 2007

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Press Release: Scientist-Evangelical Alaska Expedition

Portage Glacier, AK – The historic collaboration between leading scientists and Evangelicals to protect the environment, spearheaded by the Center for Health and the Global Environment at Harvard Medical School (HMS) and the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) continues this week with a trip to Alaska. A group of five scientists and five evangelical leaders began traveling together on August 25th to observe first-hand the dramatic effects of climate change on local people and on the land, ocean, plants, and wildlife of the nation's northernmost state.

“The goal of our trip is to witness together what human-caused climate change is doing to our world,” said co-leader of the trip Eric Chivian, who shared the 1985 Nobel Peace Prize and is Director of the HMS Center. “While this collaboration may come as a surprise to some, it makes perfect sense. Both scientists and Evangelicals see life on earth as sacred and share the same deep sense of responsibility about protecting it.”

“The idea is for all of us to experience what human activity is doing to God’s Creation so that we can understand the urgent importance of caring for it,” added expedition co-leader Rev. Richard Cizik, Vice President for Governmental Affairs of the NAE. “We dare to imagine a world in which science and religion cooperate, minimizing our differences about how Creation got started, to work together to reverse its degradation.”

Led by a naturalist from Homer, Carmen Field, the group began its journey with a two-day stop in Shishmaref, a traditional Inupiaq Eskimo village in the Bering Strait with a population of about 500 people. The Inupiats have inhabited this village, located on Sarichef Island in the Chukchi Sea, for over 400 years. Because of melting sea ice and permafrost, however, the village is at high risk from storm surge erosion, and already 14 houses have fallen into the sea in recent years, raising concern that the village will soon need to be relocated to the mainland.

“People in the Arctic are among the most vulnerable on Earth due to the impacts of climate change,” said James McCarthy, Professor of Biological Oceanography at Harvard University, an expert on climate change and the Arctic, and President-elect of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the world’s largest scientific society. “They depend on intact sea ice and permafrost, both of which are rapidly disappearing, for their hunting and fishing, indeed for their very lives.”

The group will also stop at Portage and Exit glaciers to witness the rapid, unprecedented melting of glacial ice, and at the Kenai Peninsula, where more than three million acres of spruce forests have been killed by exploding populations of Spruce Bark Beetles, brought on by warming temperatures.

During the week-long expedition the group will meet with scientists, physicians, local church leaders, and evangelical pastors in Shishmaref, Anchorage, and Homer to learn directly from Alaskans about how they are coping with the effects of climate change. Leith Anderson, Senior Pastor of Wooddale Church and President of the NAE said, "It is very important to involve Alaskan pastors in our work, for they are central in helping to spread the message about the importance of Creation Care."

The Scientists-Evangelical Alaska Expedition grew out of a collaboration that began at a two-day private retreat in December 2006 attended by 30 leaders from the scientific and evangelical communities. The retreat led to close relationships of mutual trust and understanding among the participants and to the release in January 2007 of an "Urgent Call to Action," a pledge that these leaders would speak with one voice in their shared commitment to protect life on Earth.

PRESS EVENTS:

Wednesday, August 29, 2007, 10:45AM AKDT, Begich, Boggs Visitor Center, Portage Glacier

WHO:

Organized by the **Center for Health and the Global Environment at Harvard Medical School** (<http://chge.med.harvard.edu>) and the **National Association of Evangelicals** (<http://www.nae.net/>).

Trip Participants:

Leith Anderson D.Min, M.Div., President, National Association of Evangelicals; Senior Pastor, Wooddale Church

Eric Chivian M.D., Director, Center for Health and the Global Environment, Harvard Medical School; Shared 1985 Nobel Peace Prize

Richard Cizik M.Div, M.A., Vice President for Governmental Affairs, National Association of Evangelicals

Deborah Fikes M.A., Advisor, Ministerial Alliance of Midland, Texas; Special Advisor to Governor Kim Moon-soo, Republic of Korea; Advisory Committee, Senator Sam Brownback; President; D.H. Fikes International Inc.

Peter Heltzel Ph.D., M.Div., Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology, New York Theological Seminary

Harry Jackson D.Div, M.B.A., Bishop and Senior Pastor, Hope Christian Church

James McCarthy Ph.D., Alexander Agassiz Professor of Biological Oceanography, Harvard University

Camille Parmesan Ph.D., Associate Professor, Section of Integrative Biology, University of Texas

Peter Raven Ph.D., President, Missouri Botanical Garden; George Engelmann Professor of Botany, Washington University

Carl Safina Ph.D., President, Blue Ocean Institute; Adjunct Professor, School of Marine and Atmospheric Sciences, Stony Brook University

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