

Wilderness areas evoke powerful memories for me—hiking with my Dad in the stark power of high desert country, walking sandy coastlines with my Mom, standing by towering Redwood trees with my children. However, being outside and connected to the earth remains just as powerful to this city girl when I'm in the midst of a work day in an urban center. I have found I can draw strength and healing from the earth in the city, on a regular basis, rather than waiting for the mountain-top experiences of vacationing in the outdoors. During a recent rough spell in my life, I was given a spiritual practice of laying flat on the earth (finding any possible patch of grass) for 15 minutes a day. In these moments of embodied prayer and letting go, I felt God's presence as the earth strengthened my spine, absorbed my sadness into the soil below, and awakened my senses to the beauty around me. There is power in both the vast swatches of wilderness and in small outcrops in city spaces, and I am thankful for the ways these spaces can connect me to myself, to other people, to all the earth and to God.

*Rebecca Barnes is the Associate for Environmental Ministries for the Presbyterian Church (USA). She oversees the national PC(USA) certification program for Earth Care Congregations, coordinates the volunteer local leadership network called the Environmental Ministries Action Network, and works to help Presbyterians connect their Christian discipleship to ecological, economic and global justice concerns.*

