

Expressing the Mind of the House on Climate and Our Vocation in Christ

God is the source of all creation, and we, humankind - made in God's image - have been given the gift of life and responsibility to care for creation. We depend on God's creation to sustain our life together, and, by serving as good stewards of creation, we reflect God's tender love for all that has been made. In caring for our earth, we return our love to God. This is our first vocation, made explicit in the first chapter of the first book of the Bible: together with God, together with one another, we care for God's world.

We are only fully human and fully alive when we are in right relationship with the whole created order. Apart from each other and nature, we are not our whole selves. It is no surprise that once Adam and Eve surrendered to temptation and sought to grasp divine knowledge, to idolize and center the self over all else, that the whole creation began to suffer, and humanity along with it. Sin flowed forth in estrangement, exile, and eventually violence and death.

This ancient pattern of separation and sin is ours today. We crave and hoard what we do not need. We take and grasp what does not belong to us. We burden and dominate what was meant to be free. As a result, the planet and our most vulnerable neighbors suffer. This flows from our failure as human beings to live as the people made in image of God, bearing the sacred responsibility entrusted to us.

Climate change and environmental degradation are manifestations of our turning away from God. The effects of this willful separation from God resonate across our collective lives: All areas of justice are either worsened or made better depending on the health of the planet. A changing climate and degraded environment worsen conflict, forces human migration, and causes food insecurity. These related crises increase the rate of violence, cause more natural disasters and humanitarian crises, and deepen the wounds of those already suffering from racism. People living in poverty are plunged further into poverty by the deteriorating condition of the planet.

As people of faith, we are not without hope, but the sustainability of God's creation demands our action. Confronting climate change and environmental degradation has never been more urgent. As members of The Episcopal Church, we are committed in baptism to resist evil, seek God's will, treat all people with dignity, and strive for justice and peace. Living into these promises, we must face the climate crisis for the sake of love of God and neighbor:

If we hope to treat all human beings with dignity, we must address climate change so droughts, floods, and extreme weather patterns don't force people into exile and desperate, life-threatening migration.

If we hope to build peace, we must address climate change so that competition for scarce resources does not drive further violence.

If we hope to ensure that every child of God has enough to eat, we must address climate change so that our bountiful earth can continue to support and sustain food systems that nourish people and the soil.

We are a people of hope. Where do we find the hope that sustains, that dispels fear, that gives us the courage to love and to persevere? We find hope in the power and reality of the Resurrection. After Jesus had been buried, in the dark before dawn, Mary was in despair and utterly without hope. But as she was

drawn from the tomb to the garden, she met the living Christ. Mary's mourning turned to brilliant resurrection hope. From the garden, she ran to proclaim good news to Jesus' confused and terrified followers.

And so it is for many of us today. We, God's faithful, are called to share the hope that will empower change. Many of God's people - especially our children - are in despair as they observe the frightening shifts in our environmental narrative. The risen Christ continues to send us out to proclaim the Gospel to the whole of Creation (Mark 16:15). Like Mary, we go out to all proclaiming God's love in deed and word. It is our work to lead the way for change, to model good stewardship, and to move forward with courage and purpose.

We are already at work spreading hope and effecting change: We are creating "Good News Gardens"; installing solar panels on church properties; hosting transition programs for coal miners who need help adapting to a changing economy; cleaning up toxic hot spots, like the Salton Sea in southern California; helping to eliminate the terror of food insecurity; setting aside land for the restoration of damaged ecosystems; planting trees, mangrove stands, and prairie grasses; advocating for policy change; fundamentally transforming our way of life from one centered on self to one centered on the flourishing of the whole creation - in these ways and so many more, we can follow Jesus' call to "preach good news to the creation." (Mark 16: 15) In these ways and so many more, we embrace the original vocation God gave us, to care together for the world God made.

*Dear God, Creator of the earth, this sacred home we share;
Give us new eyes to see the beauty all around and to protect the wonders of creation.
Give us new arms to embrace the strangers among us and to know them as family.
Give us new ears to hear and understand those who live off the land and sea, and to hear and understand those who extract its resources.
Give us new hearts to recognize the brokenness in our communities and to heal the wounds we have inflicted.
Give us new hands to serve the earth and its people and to shape beloved community.
For you are the One who seeks the lost, binds our wounds and sets us free,
And it is in the name of Jesus the Christ we pray. Amen.*

(prayer from the 2019 meeting of the House of Bishops, Fairbanks, Alaska)