

Accepting Our Duty of Care for God's Creation

A resolution to be submitted by the Committee on Stewardship of Creation for consideration in the 220th Annual Council of the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia

Resolution Text

Whereas, we are beings endowed by God with insight and reasoning and, therefore, are obligated to a greater level of accountability;

Whereas, scientific research of integrity is in overwhelming agreement that human activity, specifically emissions of greenhouse gasses associated with burning of fossil fuels, is causing global average temperatures to increase to levels that are now causing significant harm to forests, cropland, the oceans and their shorelines with impacts including extreme weather, wildfires, famines, disease, and species extinctions, impacts that are harmful to humanity generally and particularly to the most vulnerable in our Diocese and globally;

Whereas, recent research has concluded that an average global temperature increase of 2.7 degrees, (1.5° C.) before 2050 is nearly inevitable;

Whereas, there is a large body of research concluding that a rise in average global temperature beyond 3.6 (2° C.) degrees will cause the world to pass a tipping point at which the world will be locked into a near-term future of drought, food and water shortages, melting ice sheets, shrinking glaciers, rising sea levels and widespread flooding;

Whereas, the window of opportunity to prevent an average global temperature increase greater than 3.6° (2° C.) is narrow and closing;

Whereas, production of electrical power by burning fossil and other fuels to power steam generators contributes to further concentrations of greenhouse gasses and, in addition, threatens water supply and water quality, particularly in areas where water supply is at risk, including Virginia's Coastal Plain;

Whereas, a projected global doubling of the world's middle class by 2030, from 3 billion to 6.00 billion, will impose unsustainable demands on resources of all kinds, absent changes in lifestyle and technologies for energy production;

Whereas, economically feasible and technologically viable means are available as alternatives to continued reliance on fossil fuels that can enable charting of a sustainable future course consistent with alleviation of poverty and hunger in poor nations and continued enjoyment of the benefits of a modern economy in the developed world;

Whereas, continuation on humanity's present course is a path that will lead to incalculable suffering and harm to creation;

Whereas, our accountability to God's creation must encompass whether the whole of creation continues to flourish;

Resolved, this Council, accepting the call to exercise our distinctive power and freedom and to take responsibility as innovative stewards of creation, calls for churches in this Diocese and their members (i) to educate themselves regarding means to avert and mitigate global warming and its impacts, (ii) to incorporate ministry to those affected by climate-caused disasters into church mission, (iii) to celebrate creation in liturgy, (iv) to prayerfully consider changes to make in church operations and lifestyles, and (v) to advocate with relevant decision makers for changes in course to avert and mitigate the effects of global warming.

Narrative for Resolution:

The Church is both a resource and a context for discerning and protecting the integrity of creation. Through Holy Baptism, we are received into Christ's body, the Church. Within the Church, through the gifts of the Holy Spirit we may discern our place in God's mission. Through the General Confession, we may acknowledge our collective limitations. Through the Holy Eucharist, we may receive grace and gain strength, courage and capacity for hope. As a Church in the Anglican Communion, we are called "to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and renew the life of the earth."

Human activity threatens the integrity of creation, and human creativity holds the promise for its renewal. As the Presiding Bishop's recent Pastoral Message on Climate Change teaches, "[t]he present moment is a critical one, filled with both challenge and opportunity to act as faithful individuals and churches in solidarity with God's good creation."

Since the Industrial Revolution in the 18th Century, the scale and character of human activity has transformed the global environment, both by design and by neglect. Geologists are now considering whether the period since then should be considered a new geologic epoch, the *Anthropocene*, because the environmental effects of human activity have no geological precedent.

Just as humanity's power to transform the earth on a geologically evident scale is unprecedented, our duty as Stewards of Creation is unprecedented as well. As Willis Jenkins has observed, the Anthropocene is the first geological epoch to be dominated by a moral species.

As an ethical matter, our greatest challenge is to manage ourselves, individually, collectively, and politically. In contrast to past epochs, when humanity and our evolutionary predecessors faced and experienced extinctions, ours is an epoch where we have scientific knowledge and capabilities for judgment to weigh and act upon risks. With faith and courage, our challenge is to halt and to reverse the social and technological inertia that is propelling creation toward disaster and desolation.

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