

The Episcopal Public Policy Network

The Church in the World: Looking to the Future

Becoming Healers of Our Suffering Earth

"Our ultimate purpose is to honor God as Creator in such a way that Christian environmental stewardship is part and parcel of everything we do. Our goal is to make tending the garden of creation, in all its aspects, an unquestioned and all pervasive part of our service to each other, to our community, to God's world."

-- Calvin B. DeWitt, Reading the Bible Through a Green Lens

The world's natural environment is under duress. It has become clear that Earth's natural beauty and fruitfulness are increasingly tarnished by the exploitation of its atmosphere, soil, rivers and seas, causing widespread damage to God's creation. Unfortunately, those living in poverty have contributed least to the problem of climate change yet stand to suffer the most.

A panel of more than 2500 scientists who compose the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has determined that, as a result of human activities, the Earth's climate has been warming. Human consumption of fossil fuels in the form of oil, coal and natural gas to satisfy our increasing demands for energy and electricity is contributing to the buildup of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases that get trapped in the Earth's atmosphere, increasing the Earth's temperature.

We know that those living in poverty, particularly minorities, in the United States will suffer a disproportionate share of the physical effects of climate change, and it is likely that unless we act they will bear a disproportionate share of the economic cost to correct it.

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In 2006, Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori testified before the United States Senate's Environment and Public Works Committee on the urgent need for climate change legislation that is compassionate:

This cycle – poverty that begets climate change, and vice versa – threatens the future of all people, rich and poor alike, and of all things in the world that God so loves.

We are called to a loving, caring, sustaining relationship with God's creation. As people of faith, we have an opportunity to assume prophetic vision of peace and reconciliation with all living things. We can begin the journey of healing our suffering Earth by becoming aware of the sacredness of creation, appreciating its beauty and goodness, and restoring and preserving its fruitfulness.

The Episcopal Church has passed a number of resolutions on this topic, both through General Convention and Executive Council, urging the Church to take action on climate change in a variety of ways. You can find these resolutions the Episcopal Church Archives: <http://www.episcopalarchives.org>. If your Parish is looking for resources about how it can be a better steward of both Creation and its financial resources visit the National Council of Church Eco-Justice Carbon Reduction Program for congregations at <http://www.nccecojustice.org/crc.php>

Lenten Discipline: Practicing Stewardship

This week commit to one simple change in your routine that will conserve or reduce your impact on the environment every day. Replace one regular light bulb with a fluorescent compact light bulb and save up to 300lbs of carbon per year. Turn off electronic devices when you are not using them and save up to 1,000lbs of carbon per year. Take along reusable shopping bags and containers when shopping and save up to 1,200lbs of carbon per year.

There are some long-term changes you can make. If you are able, choose carpooling, taking mass transit, or riding a bike to work or to your next destination. If possible, develop an electricity use plan with your family and identify ways that each of you can save energy. Install a programmable thermostat to control home heating. Plant a tree.

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