

Anglican Communion Environmental Network (ACEN) Report to ACC-15, Auckland, October 2012

Grace, justice and peace to all as you gather to review the mission and ministry of the Anglican Communion. We are pleased to provide a summary of the work of ACEN since ACC-14. We do so with the full knowledge that creation is in crisis, in fact increasingly in crisis. Extreme weather events in North America, rising waters in the Indian Ocean and Polynesia, melting polar ice caps, the increasing acidification of the oceans, drought in sub-Saharan Africa and the continental United States, rampant de-forestation in South America, loss of global biodiversity, and threats to agricultural due to groundwater depletion are only some of the devastating effects fuelled by the human induced climate change which surround us. The fifth report of the United Nations Environment Programme published on 6 June 2012 is forthright in its assessment:

'If current trends continue, if current patterns of production and consumption of natural resources prevail and cannot be reversed and 'decoupled', then governments will preside over unprecedented levels of damage and degradation . . . Under current models, greenhouse gas emissions could double over the next 50 years, leading to rise in global temperature of 3°C or more by the end of the century . . . Four independent analyses show that 2000-2009 was the warmest decade on record and in 2010, the rate of emissions from fossil fuel burning and cement production was the highest ever recorded'

Such concerns echo those expressed by Anglican provincial representatives who attended the ACEN Meeting in Lima, Peru, 4 to 10 August 2011.

In his introduction to the report, former ACEN chair, Bishop George Browning wrote:

'The relentless drive for exponential growth will prove undeliverable this century; the beginnings of its impossibility are already clear, in the meantime, its consequences for human and non-human life alike are becoming unbearable. Participants vividly described 'various forms of environmental degradation on all continents of the globe: too much water, too little water, loss of bio-diversity, loss of agricultural land to desertification, and to non-productive forms of human activity; pollution of the air, pollution of the land, acidification of the sea, loss of ice and frozen landscapes at both poles, sickness in human life as food becomes scarce and diseases once thought to be confined to the tropics now spread north and south.'

Bishop George continued: 'The twenty-first century calls the whole global community to a level of collaboration, not competition, that we have never previously attained. Because what is called for is at the heart of what it means to be Christian, then the Church as an institution, as well as individuals, must find the courage to move out of the private world of personal faith, gender and morality into which we have increasingly retreated since the Reformation and Enlightenment and reclaim a voice in the public world of human endeavour.'

In such words lies the essence of an Anglican global witness to care for the environment which sustains all life including that of the church. The church is in a unique position to manage its

own facilities and affairs within a sound ecological stewardship. Through its global presence it is able to view creation and our use/abuse of it globally. We join in communal discussions with an understanding of creation as gift to be nurtured well beyond the commercial view where resources are to be exploited for profit alone. Economics intersect with the environment at all times. Creation care is less a technical strategy as a moral imperative. Additionally we celebrate legitimate sustainable development and the right of developing nations to develop their own economies without repeating the historical and contemporary errors of many in the global north.

ACEN acknowledges with gratitude the welcome extended to us by Bishop Bill Godfrey of the Diocese of Peru. We were offered wonderful hospitality and a profound immersion into the life of this vibrant church. We were introduced to many local and national activists and to this end enjoyed the company of Dr Andrew Leake, a leading authority on the effects of deforestation and indigenous community disempowerment in Northern Argentina. We were moved by the stories of struggle for justice in the high Andes and of challenges affecting the poor of Lima and rural parts of the diocese.

Arising out of our time together is The Lima Statement and Action Plan which states concerns and specific actions around Environmental Justice, Deforestation, Mining, Water, Agriculture and Food, Environmental Refugees, Corporate and Consumer Responsibility, Theological Education and Liturgical Resources. Discussion included strategy around global meetings such as the United Nations Conference of Parties (COP) meeting held in Durban, South Africa in December of 2012. We were delighted to include the Interfaith Statement of African Faith Leaders within our report as evidence of a strong interfaith voice in Africa and elsewhere in the Communion.

Our conference theme was Sabbath, for which Bishop Browning prepared a special theological paper. We will publish at ACC-15 seven Sabbath Studies prepared by Bishop Browning which we hope will be used in Colleges, Seminaries, and in parishes. We sense that sabbath is only minimally understood, appreciated and practised in our churches and communities. Sabbath is a prime theological concept and practice which restores order to communities under stress. Sabbath is the confident assertion that all life is not striving for but resting in God. Sabbath both requires faith and stimulates faith simultaneously. Implementation of sabbath principles will change the way we relate to each other, to creation and to God.

If the above themes suggest some of ACEN's priorities and direction, you may rightly ask 'how do we function?' Regardless of size, each province is asked to provide one representative. Sadly, many provinces remain unrepresented. We communicate primarily electronically through a listserv hosted by the Anglican Communion Office in London. Usually the conversation is brief and quiet, but recently when a question around genetic modification was posed, the conversation immediately livened up, and the varied expertise of our members was immediately evident.

The network currently provides support and encouragement for 20 provincial representatives and over 100 Anglican activists, scholars, and parish and diocesan ministers worldwide. Almost without exception, provincial representatives are volunteers who combine ACEN work with

other duties. There are few if any salaried positions devoted to environmental stewardship or advocacy within the Churches of the Communion, which continues to puzzle us given the priority of creation care.

ACEN is blessed with the resources and support of the Anglican United Nations Office and specially its Program Associate for Environment and Sustainable Development, Canon Jeffrey Gollhofer, PhD. Dr Gollhofer provides stimulus to the network through research, presentations and information about UN related initiatives and dialogues. He regularly responds to requests from ACEN members and other global Anglican leaders. Through the Anglican Alliance he recently produced a briefing pack in preparation for the Rio+20 Conference held in Brazil in June 2012. Dr Gollhofer also leads a number of initiatives around the practice of fracking. He will be a featured presenter in an ACEN webinar about fracking to be launched in early 2013.

From time to time ACEN supports the witness of Primates such as Archbishop Fred Hiltz (Canada) who gave a video interview specifically on ecological justice challenges from his own Canadian perspective. Speaking of Primates, and upon the retirement of Bishop George Browning as our first ACEN chair, we are thrilled to welcome Archbishop Thabo Makgoba as our second chair and spokesperson. Archbishop Thabo's willingness to engage in environmental conversations, his intellectual and social abilities, his good connections with environmental groups in Africa and elsewhere, bode well for the leadership of ACEN in the years to come.

In conclusion we invite ACC members to consider the status of their own provincial representation. With respect to our forthcoming resolution, please consider what language will best support and encourage practical and discernible action at provincial levels. How might the church in your respective provinces advocate for climate justice and support sustainable agriculture and the protection of water? Finally, let us all be diligent in prayer and expressive in our worship. Let us pray that the blessing of creation will remain life-giving for all and a testimony to the Glory of God, proclaimed in Christ.

Canon Kenneth Gray, ACEN Secretary
Archbishop Thabo Makgoba, ACEN Chair