

The Crisis We Face

Where Do We Go From Here? What Would the Good Shepherd Do?

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Introduction

If there was ever a time when the world needed hope and help, that time is now. The environmental problems we face are huge; their magnitude, almost unthinkable. They actually are unthinkable in the sense that we must depend on computer simulations to help us discern what the consequences might eventually be. Yet more and more people are seeing evidence of the unthinkable accumulating before their eyes. Everyone at this meeting is aware of the bad news; and the good news, which we also know, is that substantial parts of the world are living more sustainably. Many national and local governments, financial institutions, and corporations are playing positive roles, as the churches have been for many years, including the Anglican Communion. The good news is good, but it's not enough, and it's not happening fast enough.

So where in the grand scheme of things are we now, and where do we go from here? What we didn't want, twenty, thirty, maybe forty years ago -- when the environmental movement began to take root -- was to reach a point now where we could plainly see environmental destruction on this scale. When we can see evidence like this writ large -- when I can see it where I live, and you can see it where you live, across the world from me -- we know that we've crossed a threshold of interwoven changes from which we may not be able to turn back. Many environmental scientists believe that we will not be able to return to the way things were, let's say, two hundred years ago. But that's not to suggest that a final catastrophe is written into the script. Hopefully, we can still change course enough to avert the worst scenarios. Nevertheless, carbon levels have been too high and increasing for too long; and now, we're living in a world radically different from the one that any of us (or our ancestors) have ever known.

I'm thinking of climate change and more than that: tremendous losses in biodiversity, forests, farmland, available freshwater, ocean and river life, and, as a result, swelling numbers of environmental refugees. All these tragedies are so tightly interwoven that we can't solve the problems behind one without solving the others too. Any one of them would be huge without climate change. With climate change, on top of predicted population increases over the next 50 to 100 years, the consequences of all other environmental problems are magnified greatly.

Strategically, none of these issues can be ignored, played down, or postponed while we focus on one or two, including climate change. Our crisis is systemic. All the issues must be addressed, all at once. In this regard, the UN needs to renew its vision for sustainable development by addressing how we can reduce greenhouse emissions, provide adequate, healthy food, and increase water security in an integrated way.

Here, I want to discuss my concerns as a person, as a priest who works locally and globally, and as someone who is involved in eco-justice ministry. I think about these things whenever I speak with someone at the UN or in my congregation. I ask myself about the outlook on the world that we're offering, projecting unconsciously, and expressing openly – in addition to our Christian vision. I wonder how they perceive the work of the church, at home and internationally, and what they really feel about it in their hearts and souls. That's a lot to think about, but all of it centers on two questions, the first relating to the United Nations:

What can we expect from the UN with regard to life and death environmental issues like climate change, food, and water? What kind of solutions can it reasonably offer?

The second question involves us, the Anglican Communion Environmental Network (ACEN) and the Anglican Communion that we represent:

What kinds of eco-justice ministry should we be doing and encouraging within the Anglican Communion? What kind of help can we, in the ACEN, give to the Anglican Communion?

It goes without saying that our ministry should be rooted in sound Christian teachings. Here, I'm thinking in a more strategic way: Given the condition of the global environment and where it might lead, *what must we do now? What would the Good Shepherd want us to do?*

I'll begin with the United Nations, and then offer some reflections and suggestions on our collective ministry in the ACEN, when my tone and concerns will shift a bit, given my work at the Anglican UN Office and as a parish priest. But first, a few words on my background: My early upbringing was in a relatively poor region of exploited factory workers, small farmers, and miners in the United States. That part of the US, called "southern Appalachia," has a great deal in common with developing nations everywhere, and I can't help but see environmental issues through those eyes. Before becoming an Episcopal priest many years later, I worked

as a cultural anthropologist, both in the field and as a teacher, which is another perspective that I bring to this work. When I was in seminary, I was fortunate to begin my ministry at the Anglican UN Office. After seminary, I continued at the UN as one part of a larger ministry as Canon for Environmental Justice and Community Development at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in Manhattan. There I was part of a team of priests, scientists, and philosophers who were trying to understand spiritual teachings from the standpoint of the Living Earth – a third perspective that I hold dear to my heart. For the last eight years, I've been a parish priest in a rural area of the Diocese of New York, while continuing the work at the UN. The connection between our ministry for the Anglican Communion, on the one hand, and the local congregation, on the other, has been a concern of mine for some time.

The United Nations and the Environment

The UN first adopted the environment as a serious part of its work in the 1970's. At that time, religious NGOs (like the World Council of Churches) were concerned about this otherwise positive development. Why? The reason was not because the churches failed to perceive how serious the issue was, even back then. Rather, the reason was the church's concern that the UN would interpret the environment primarily from a scientific or economic point of view (as a collection of extractable resources for the benefit of developed nations), and not as a sacred trust involving serious moral questions about spirituality, justice, stewardship, and respect. It turns out that this kind of critique underlies most serious discussions about the environmental crisis today.

Twenty years or so of deliberation and debate culminated in the early 1990's with the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. That conference, which linked together environmental conservation, poverty eradication, and sustainable development, significantly transformed the UN's vision of and strategy for development programs. Holistic, integrated, ethical thinking was the way it was done. Poverty was the key. Among NGOs, the name of Leonardo Boff, to name one notable example, was often mentioned, and he occasionally spoke there. Because the UN recognized that some economic systems create poverty, their overall strategy was to transform economic development by moving it in a sustainable direction. For similar reasons, grass-roots environmental groups in the 1990's began to understand their work not so much as "environmental," but in terms of environmental justice and eco-justice. Personally, I've never considered myself to be an environmentalist. That's all a long story rolled into a few sentences. The strategy of the UN was and still is (at least officially) to eliminate poverty and save the environment at the same time. In effect, eliminating poverty would save the environment. This strategy is the best and most ethical one that we have, and it could still work. Along these lines, the Millennium Development Goals initiative, which was meant to rescue people and the sustainable development strategy (once it was realized that some Member States were not particularly committed to it), is showing some progress, despite startling shortfalls in reaching specific goals.

The Earth Summit was the beginning of a series of large international conferences on different aspects of the UN's overall strategy (known as "Agenda 21"): women, population, social development, biodiversity, small island states, and human settlements. I attended most of those conferences. In addition, special pressing issues, like climate change, biodiversity, and deforestation, were brought to the forefront, and parallel tracks of deliberation and policy-making were created for them. All this was good; all the processes were exceedingly helpful in bringing together the points of view of NGOs, civil society, and governments.

Now I should make a few comments about the Anglican UN Office. We represent the Anglican Consultative Council and the Archbishop of Canterbury at the UN. Our mandate for advocacy is established in the content of ACC resolutions and other related declarations and official documents, including those from the ACEN. We use those statements frequently. Although we agree with the overall vision of the UN and its work (founded, as it is, on documents like the "Universal Declaration on Human Rights"), we don't work for the UN, nor do we agree with everything the UN does.

It's important to remember that the UN, as an organization, is inseparable from the nations that make up its membership and pay for its work. For that reason, criticisms of the UN itself and its decisions are often misdirected. On the whole, the UN is perceived as considerably more significant and more effective (even essential) by developing nations, than by developed nations, especially the United States. Developing nations tend to see the UN as a lifesaver, since they receive desperately needed development assistance and humanitarian relief from the UN. Developed nations – here I'm referring to some politically powerful constituencies in the United States – might see the UN as a waste of time, money, and resources, if not a threat to the sovereignty of Member States. It should also be pointed out that developing nations sometimes have similar objections, but for very different reasons; specifically, they may feel that the UN could become a threat to their national interest when developed nations control its decisions and policies.

The point of view of the Anglican UN Office is that we need the UN because there's no other organization like it. The UN is vital to global peacemaking and the promotion of justice. Its agenda is largely the world's agenda, as the first Anglican Observer, The Most Rev. Sir Paul Reeves from New Zealand, put it years ago, and the UN is where we sort it out. For example, the UN's commitment to peacekeeping and human rights is singular and essential. Specific programs like the UN Environment Program, the UN Development Program, and the Food and Agriculture Organization (to name only a few) do vital work, much of it focused on local communities, renewable energy, the empowerment of women, environmental protection, and sustainable development. These are all priorities of the Anglican UN Office in keeping with the meaning and intent of innumerable ACC resolutions.

The UN, the Role of NGOs, and Corporate Influence

There are persistent problems with the implementation of the UN's sustainable development strategy, which, for the most part, reflect the same economic and political dynamics that we see operating everywhere in the world today. These dynamics have two dimensions. First, the role and importance of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), like the churches, have decreased at the UN since the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio. Second, the role and importance of global corporations and financial institutions (the IMF and the World Bank) have considerably increased (the emphasis here is on corporate influence). Likewise, in many countries the interests of ordinary citizens have decreased as a result of corporate influence in the halls of government, even democratic ones. Power relations of this kind have always been intrinsic to the political process, but the tightening grip of corporate interests at the UN to such an extent is a remarkable development at this point in time. Not every staff person at the UN would agree, at least publicly, with this assessment. But staff people at the UN come and go, and many of the newer staff are unaware of the gradual changes that have taken place in the last twenty years. Changes along these lines have happened and continue to happen, in part, as a result of pressure, mostly behind the scenes, applied by the more powerful developed nations who contribute relatively large amounts of yearly dues to the UN. Corporate interests often shape the priorities of those nations. This is nowhere close to the whole story, but it is an important part of it. If those nations and the financial interests they represent don't get what they want, the threat is that they will withhold their funds and dues. It's effective.

This suggests that, with regard to political advocacy, we (the ACEN and its members) should focus our attention as much on corporate boardrooms and shareholder activism as on government policies and legislation – perhaps even more on the former insofar as that's where large decisions affecting the global economy and the environment are actually made.

The reasons for the inability of the UN to deal effectively with environmental issues on the scale that is necessary today are a direct result of these political and economic dynamics. In other words, the UN itself is not the problem as much as the complex forces that Member States bring to its deliberations. Let me explain this a bit more with regard to environment issues. My purpose is to help us understand better how decisions are made there, and how they relate to the work we do.

In the early 1990's, developed nations understood that the growing activism of NGOs, which was effective in those years, would challenge their influence at the UN. That's when the UN began to relate to NGOs differently. I'll give some examples. The UN's "Forum on Forests" (its purpose is to implement the Convention on Forests (a legally binding agreement mandated by the Rio Summit) reformulated their definition of what qualifies as a "forest" in line with corporate interests. For the most part, tree plantations now qualify as forests. In some ways, the same corrupting influences fell upon the Rio Summit's Convention on Biodiversity. The

first set of guidelines and principles for this Convention were stated in primarily economic and financial terms. In other words, how much is that forest or this desert worth financially? I'm making a point here, but not overstating the implications. Enough pressure was put on the UN at high levels to force them to convene another group to write an alternative policy-making document called "Spiritual and Cultural Values of Biodiversity." Because I was a member of the team who wrote it, I am well aware of the political dynamics involved. The interesting point here is that the UN Environment Program did not, at that time, have the resources and organizational capacity to produce the alternative set of guidelines. Instead, the UN Development Program commissioned the work and organized its completion. Similar forces have played upon UN deliberations on water. Now the privatization of water is less of a contentious issue (not so at the UN Office) than it was ten years ago, which is unfortunate.

I don't want to make negative comments about particular agencies or departments of the UN. They all do good work. I only want to point out that when we're thinking about or participating in any given UN project in our home countries or internationally, we need to look closely at what the goals, strategies, and capacities actually are. This is especially true of programs involving human rights, food, agriculture, and water, and where issues of privatization, genetic modification, and land ownership and control come into play. In practice, it's very difficult to know the differences among corporate interests, government interests, and UN interests, much less to discern where the peoples' interests or the web of life's interests are in the midst of the rapid and vast changes that are taking place everywhere – the UN included.

The UN and Climate Change

The same patterns discussed above also apply to climate change. On the whole, the failure of the Kyoto process and the last major UN Climate Change Conference (in Copenhagen) can be attributed to the efforts of some Member States to maintain their status as superpowers through economic influence. Those interests include more than oil, but also land, forests, food, water, and military power. This is what you would expect. They're calculating how to preserve economic and political power, not in denial of climate change (even the Pentagon has long recognized that climate change presents a security threat and increases the likelihood of armed conflict), but as a strategy for managing a gradual transition from fossil to renewable fuels. They want to control this process within limits that they consider "reasonable." According to their free market-based strategy, catastrophe (within certain limits) can be an economic opportunity. I'm not against markets or making an honest living, and public/private partnerships have a crucial role to play in sustainable development. Nor am I suggesting that every global corporation has rejected social and environmental justice. This is definitely not the case, but the ones that try to operate according to the ethical standards of economic, social, and environmental justice play a small part in the larger picture. What I am

saying is that the operating strategy, at this point in time, is to manage the limits of catastrophe, while exploiting the opportunity that large corporations and some developed nations believe it offers. Obviously, climate justice is not their primary concern. It is a concern to the extent that a popular uprising might interfere with their overall goal. So far, this hasn't been tested, except at World Trade Organization meetings several years ago, which were quelled. In the meantime, substantial parts of the world are considered to be acceptable losses: small island states, coastal regions, and whole countries, not to mention the polar and circumpolar regions.

I realize that this might sound cynical. But when we look at the reality on the ground and witness the lack of transparency in public negotiations, it's an accurate description of the positioning that's taking place. Climate change denial plays a smaller part than we might think, except in outright propaganda for the public where it looms large. I'll give one last example, relating to the climate change summit in Copenhagen. The one outcome that was adopted was an apparent greenhouse gas-reducing program called "Reducing Emissions from Deforestation in Developing Countries" (REDD). There was no discussion of this program on the floor of the negotiations. One of the many purposes of REDD is to encourage forest management, rather than deforestation, by putting a price on the ability of forests to absorb carbon -- which is a thorny and contentious subject. Carbon trading and carbon offset projects may have an important role to play in curbing greenhouse gas emissions. Nevertheless, some studies of the actual practice of carbon trading show that it is managed in much the same way that financial derivatives have been managed in mortgage lending. Regulation and oversight of these programs are often non-existent. In addition, carbon trading and offsets give the impression (usually false) that emissions are being reduced, when, in fact, they are not. REDD significantly expands the carbon credit market into forest management under an agreement that involves public funds as well as corporate investments. It presumes that forests are commodities whose value is determined by the marketplace, rather than by the people who care for them and live within their bounds. One consequence is that traditional and indigenous peoples will no longer have access to them or the right to manage them sustainably.

This example, like the others, points to a chain of doubtful, if not unethical and unjust assumptions that drive large environmental programs and policies. The assumption that governs them all is that resources can be managed and profits made more sustainably by a globalized free market, than by local communities, businesses, and municipalities. Reasons given for this are based on truly ominous trends, e.g., the urgency of the environmental crisis, population growth, and so on, which evoke legitimate fear, while manipulating consent. To make matters worse, these same strategies disempower (if not destroy) local communities and local governments, forcing them into deeper cycles of dependence on the corporatist global economy.

It still seems likely that Member States of the UN will reach an agreement on reducing greenhouse emissions within the next few years, perhaps sooner. It also seems likely that the agreement will be subsequently modified as environmental conditions change and political thinking becomes hopefully clearer. What we must understand is that as much as we desperately need an agreement, it will not alter the consequences of harmful environmental changes that we've already set in motion --- and those consequences are serious. With an agreement, the kind of world that we are creating now, for better or worse, will remain a pressing question. That world will very likely be more sustainable than now, but sustainable for whom? And after what level of damage is done, and with what kinds of supposedly "acceptable" losses? By that, I mean whole ecosystems, thousands of communities, some nations, and millions of people whose livelihoods and possibly lives will be, in effect, stolen.

Sustainable Development and Sustainable Communities

If we continue to move in the direction that we're currently headed -- pursuing a model of corporate-driven sustainable development at the expense of sustainable communities -- then massive programs in humanitarian relief as a result of environmental destruction will become commonplace. This is already beginning to happen in some parts of Africa as a result of prolonged drought. Given how the global economy operates, we might expect humanitarian relief to become a "growth industry" in the years ahead, which will strengthen dominant power structures, at least for a while, seeming to justify their rationale. According to the "logic" of this system, almost anything that involves significant costs and represents security threats can be transformed into an economic opportunity for large investors.

I would not want to overlook the fact that substantial parts of UN programs are dedicated to nurturing sustainable communities. These programs are often focused on food and agricultural systems, water security, and the empowerment of local communities and women -- all areas identified as critical by the early conferences on sustainable development. I'm thinking especially of the Women's Conference in Beijing and the Conference on Social Development in Copenhagen, where the input of NGOs was more direct; and the controlling influence of global corporations, less dominant. It was then that major UN programs and large segments of civil society, including the church (largely through the ecumenical presence of the World Council of Churches), agreed that sustainable local communities are the absolutely essential ingredient in sustainable economic development. This should be of serious concern to the church. Communities (whether they are found in villages, towns, or urban neighborhoods) represent the very places where the ministry of the church is lived out everyday. Our congregations are communities, and we are our congregations.

Development that ignores, undermines, or destroys community life amounts to an indirect assault on human existence in large parts of the world, sometimes under the corporate guise of "greening" or "saving" the earth. In rural areas, this

colonizing process has the impact of “clearing” the countryside, a tragic fact of history that the church has witnessed many times before. One relatively recent outcome of this kind of exploitation is that half of the world’s people now live in cities. By 2030 that figure will rise to nearly 70%. These environmental and economic refugees will be seeking a life that has been lost, any kind of livelihood to ensure survival, and a semblance of community. As people of faith, we must confront the forces that drive this process and actively resist them, while meeting the humanitarian and spiritual needs of the people who are the victims of those forces.

What Would the Good Shepherd Do?

Based on the successes and failures of the environmental work of the UN and its Member States, it appears that we in the ACEN (or any similar church-based environmental group) have three broad areas where our efforts should go. I’ve identified them on the basis of experience with the UN, but I’m also thinking of Jesus’ high priestly prayer in John (17:11b), “Father, protect them ... that they may be one, as we are one.” Here, my purpose is to explore what it means ‘to protect’ at a time when the struggle to survive has become commonplace among so many people worldwide.

The first area goes without saying: we must do everything we can to reduce greenhouse emissions to safe levels and to conserve arable farmland and drinkable water. Here I’m pointing to four urgent concerns that are interrelated and immediately identifiable by members of our congregations: air pollution, renewable energy, food, and water.

The second area involves a shift in our perception about the way things are. Specifically, we must adapt to deteriorating ecological systems in order to survive (e.g. conserving precious resources like food and water), while learning to repair local ecosystems (e.g., wetlands and forests) at the same time. Put another way, the facts on the ground and in the atmosphere indicate that we will not be able to return to the ecological conditions of a generation or two ago. This will require serious reflection on life’s meaning and, in that light, on the purpose and effectiveness of local and global environmental ministries. For example, what really needs to happen where we live, and what can we do to make it happen? In order to accomplish this, we will need to learn how to perceive the consequences of our actions (in the church and elsewhere) from the perspective of the Living Earth.

I’ll give an example. In Matthew 15, Jesus says, “Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach, and goes out into the sewer? But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from heart, and this is what defiles.” This teaching involves the deeper spiritual significance of dietary laws, but ultimately the message points to the grace of God and the Spirit’s presence in the human heart. Nothing can separate us from the love of God, even the environmental crisis, terrible as it is.

Yet, this is not to say that whatever enters the mouth and goes into the sewer has no ecological and spiritual significance – a question that parishioners will inevitably (and hopefully) raise. If they don't ask about it openly, they will think about it privately, perhaps wondering what their personal questions mean. From the standpoint of the Living Earth, this teaching has great meaning. I'm thinking of recent studies of freshwater in the United States that reveal, among other things, measurable amounts of hormone disrupting chemicals (used in industrial agriculture and harmful to human reproduction) and therapeutic anti-depressants (evidence of an unacknowledged epidemic in the United States). Does the presence of these chemicals separate us from God's love? Of course it doesn't. But it indicates serious issues relating to mental and emotional health, compromised food systems, poor stewardship, a lack of ecological awareness, and serious problems with the love of neighbor, not to mention water pollution generally. To suggest or imply that this is somehow okay with God, as if it's an acceptable cost of doing business or of a way of life, grossly distorts the meaning of love and stewardship in Christian teachings.

The third area follows from the first and the second: we must build, rebuild, and renew actual, face-to-face human communities – including our congregations -- in a sustainable way. This is necessary not only because environmental destruction rips our communities (and congregations) apart, but also because programs for sustainable development that primarily serve corporate interests have the same negative impact. Ecological relationships, of which we are all a part, consist of "communities within communities," each dependent on the others. Our congregations (and the communities of which they are a part) must be grounded in this basic ecological fact and in the spiritual teachings of the church. The extent to which they (ecology and spirituality) seem to be incompatible is a measure of unsustainable practices and/or religious teachings that must be prayerfully revised.

Last winter, at an Anglican UN Office Advisory Council meeting, I asked Archbishop Rowan a general question about environmental ministry. I had in mind strategy, advocacy, and organizing. His response was that we must get our own house in order for all kinds of reasons, one reason being the need to become more effective advocates internationally. He wasn't saying that we can't or shouldn't speak out in the meantime, especially about climate justice, as he has done and as Bishop George Browning has done for many years. What I heard him say was that, given where we are now and given the powers-at-be in this world, the effectiveness of the church depends on the witness of the church as a whole -- that is to say, leadership by the example of everyone in all parts of the church, clergy and laity.

In that moment, I believe Archbishop Rowan was thinking of the many environmental initiatives in the Church of England. I would imagine he wants to see every congregation in the Church of England involved in some kind of environmental program. It seems to me that something along those lines, but applied globally, should be our goal too, as farfetched as that might sound. We, in the ACEN, should be thinking in farfetched ways – according the level of scale that's

appropriate to our work and to the crisis we face. That might mean reorganizing the environmental network in the light of a thought out, long-term strategic vision for mobilizing the entire Anglican Communion, not so much around “issues” as such, but by the way we live in our congregations and homes. It would take years to accomplish this, but it can be done and it has to be done. The facts of the environmental crisis suggest that it’s our only realistic goal. We need to let the ACC know what we believe to be happening environmentally and what we should be doing in response. The time frame that we have to accomplish this goal is probably one generation (30 years), which is the amount of time that I’ve been doing working in this ministry. In the grand scheme of things, that’s a blink of an eye.

Rene Dubos, one of the early visionaries in ecology who consulted for the UN, said ‘think globally, act locally.’ We have 80 million plus members in the Anglican Communion, organized in 38 Provinces, in 44 regional and national churches, and in more than 160 countries. That’s the global dimension. They’re all members of the Anglican Communion by virtue of being members of local congregations. That’s the local dimension. Think globally; act locally. That’s a lot of potential leadership by example, a lot of Christian witness, a lot of environmentally sustainable congregations, and a lot of troops on the ground (a military metaphor that’s wrong for the church, but makes the point).

We also have about 150 theology schools in the Anglican Communion. This is where a great deal of spiritual formation takes place and where many leaders of the church are trained. They need to know, if they don’t already, what sustainable communities are and how Anglican congregations can be models of them.

From the standpoint of Anglican educators, clergy, and parishioners, the local congregation plays the most important of all roles in the life of the church. From the standpoint of the Living Earth, the local congregation plays the most important of all possible roles in the church’s relationship to life itself. It is there that the church has the greatest impact on the web of life, for better or worse – hopefully, for the better. Given the opportunity and presented in the right way, congregations would want to know not only how the work of the ACEN relates to them and benefits them, but also how they can be more involved. The question that many of my parishioners ask is *How can I help?* It’s a good question, and the right one, given the severity of the environmental crisis. That’s why I would like us to work in a more strategic, organizing way to mobilize the whole Anglican Communion.

I’ll state my point again: the destructive impact of corporate states has been directed at local communities – on work and livelihoods, social ties, heritage, basic necessities like food and water, habitation, the environment generally, and on our congregations. That is why the most basic and important contribution that the ACEN can make is to create, renew, support, and protect sustainable congregations. Good stewardship and good eco-justice depend on congregations rooted in a genuinely spiritual and ecological vision of community (communities existing within the larger community of life). Dietrich Bonhoeffer spoke of community as our “life

together” during the devastation of World War II. Today, we face another kind of devastation, and the depth of reconciliation that we need among the world’s peoples and with the Living Earth goes farther than he (or anyone else) would have thought possible sixty years ago.

The transformation of local congregations into living examples of sustainable communities lies at the heart of the gospel message. It will demonstrate what the “good news” can be like in our era. This transformation may depend less on programmatic, issue-oriented or argument-oriented programs than on a fluid, creative, ecologically inclusive, community building invitation to the ministry itself.

If I understand the work of the Anglican Alliance correctly – and if I’m hearing between the words that I hear correctly – this strategy is in keeping with their purpose and goals. Humanitarian relief in response to environmental crises, including climate change, is one part of their vision. Increasingly, this will be humanitarian relief in response to environmental crises that have undermined and destroyed the capacity of human communities to survive. Regional consultations are an important part of the Alliance’s work. Bioregional thinking has always played a prominent part in environmental organizing. The whole world must organize in creative ways to meet the challenges ahead. And another Lambeth Conference is coming up in 2018. The opportunity that we have to do what needs to be done begins now, but we should set our sights on that Conference as a crucial and timely step along the way.

For the purpose of organizing, we might think in terms of regions, more effective communication, and finding the skills we need to create and mobilize sustainable congregations.

How we, in the Anglican Communion, respond to the crisis we face now can be a delicate and difficult matter to discuss. Our many congregations live in very different environmental, political, and economic circumstances. Yet, we all share in the responsibility to care for God’s creation, and the globalized nature of the environmental crisis calls us to act together as never before. In different degrees, this ministry offers opportunities for people of every age, every walk of life, and with all interests and skills. For some people and in some situations, it can also be a dangerous pursuit, as corporations, working in concert with governments, defend their interests militarily and through the emerging global security state. I was once arrested, with many friends and colleagues in the church, while engaged in civil disobedience against police brutality in Manhattan. At the very least, I would rather not have my phones calls and emails monitored to the end of my days, which is, in recent years, a minimal consequence of civil disobedience.

Nevertheless, if present trends continue politically and economically, many of our brothers and sisters will need legal and spiritual support, as well as solidarity. We should be prepared to give it.

In the years ahead, it is likely that the severity of the environmental crisis will challenge the confidence that people have in traditional structures, including the structures of the church.

That is why the highest priority must be given to strengthening our parishioners' confidence in the structures and teachings of the church, especially with regard to the most basic concerns. For example, will the church help my family and me to survive in this world? I hope the answer will be yes; but based on the world that's unfolding now, this is a reasonable question that anyone might ask about any church, any denomination, anywhere.

Many of our members, perhaps the vast majority, need to reflect upon and talk with each other about the ecological and spiritual foundation of community life, as well as the many contributions that congregations and communities can make to our mutual survival. In other words, what environmental and spiritual roles do congregations play in meeting survival needs? What purposes do they serve when ecological systems (communities within communities) are being destroyed? A working assumption behind my ministry has been that the "first church," the church in its most basic form, is God's creation in a process of renewal. In my view, this understanding of the church relates to the "sole ark of salvation" that St. Cyprian wrote about centuries ago, interpreting it in a different way for a different time. The ark (the Living Earth) is in desperate need of restoration and repair; that is to say, if we expect to survive. Otherwise, the Living Earth will survive without us. The difficult reality in which we find ourselves today forces us to confront a spiritual and scientific truth that we tragically resist: we are part of the Living Earth, and without it there would be no people and no church. The work of the church that we routinely call "the church" begins with God's "first commandment" in Genesis --- to care for the Living Earth in order to thrive in our lives everyday. Jesus shows us how deep this teaching goes and how much we still have to learn about our faith.

Caring for creation must be more than an idealistic moral teaching that's learned in school. It already is a matter of day-to-day survival. Assuming that we begin to understand what survival means in the years ahead (what does "surviving" really mean from a Christian point of view?), we might gain some insight into what a thriving web of life and a thriving humankind actually look like. The last few generations have not had the opportunity to see that kind of thriving first-hand. The role of the church must be to help the present generation to survive and future generations to receive the possibility of thriving as a sacred gift.