

Stewardship of Creation

Declaration to the Anglican Communion
The Good Shepherd Retreat Centre
South Africa, August 18-23, 2002

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, we greet you and speak to you in the name of our Trinitarian God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Creator, Redeemer, and Life Giver.

We write as representatives of the provinces of the Anglican Communion gathered in response to the planetary crisis and immediately prior to the World Summit on Sustainable Development. With the blessing of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the General Secretary of the Anglican Consultative Council, and the chair of the Anglican Consultative Council, our purpose is to consider the Communion's responsibilities to God and God's creation at this critical time. At the last Lambeth Conference in 1998 our Bishops again identified the environment as one of the key moral and religious issues of our time and their principles have been part of our reflection.

We have come together as a community of faith. Creation calls us, our vocation as God's redeemed drives us, the Spirit in our midst enlivens us, scripture compels us.

Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell me if you have understanding. Job 38:4

All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. John 1:3

We know the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now. Romans 8:22

Our planetary crisis is environmental, but it is more than that. It is a crisis of the Spirit and the Body, which runs to the core of all that we hold sacred. It is characterized by deep poverty: impoverished people, an impoverished Earth. As people of faith, Christ draws us together to share responsibility for this crisis with all humanity.

In the twentieth century, the human impact on the earth increased enormously. In the last thirty years alone, human activity has destroyed many of the planet's natural resources. Climate change, flooding, habitat destruction, desertification, pollution, urban expansion, and famine have all played their part. A third of all fish species and a quarter of all mammal species are in danger of extinction. One billion people now suffer from a shortage of fresh water. Scientists have said the web of life is unraveling.

People must be willing to face change and participate actively in the decisions before us all. Unjust economic structures have taken from people and the land without giving in return, putting at risk all life that is sustained by the planet. Greed and over-

consumption, which have dictated so much of economic development in the past, must be transformed into generosity and compassion. Transformation is, at its heart, a spiritual matter; it includes every aspect of our lives. As members of the Anglican Communion, at all levels of its life, we must play our part in bringing about this transformation toward a just, sustainable future. Now is the time for prayerful action based on the foundation of our faith.

In 1998, the Bishops of the Anglican Communion resolved to face these challenges and provided the scriptural and theological justification for the involvement of the Church in caring for creation. We recognize this and other ongoing work of people in the communion. Such work needs our support. However, it is not enough.

We urge you to acknowledge the gravity of our call to prayer and action. Both individuals and decision-making bodies of the Church at all levels need to be actively involved in addressing these problems. As brothers and sisters in Christ's Body and as fellow Anglicans seeking to fulfill our baptismal covenant and witness to the power of the Holy Spirit in Christ, we ask you, in your parishes, dioceses, or provinces, acting at the most appropriate level, and in cooperation with ecumenical and interfaith partners wherever possible to undertake the following:

- To acknowledge that the Church's mission must now take place in the context of a life and death planetary crisis whose impact affects all aspects of the Church's life and mission.
- To bring prayers and actions concerning ecology, environmental justice, human rights, and sustainable development to the forefront of public worship as well as private and corporate reflections on the Holy Scriptures.
- To support the struggle of indigenous peoples to maintain their cultural heritage, natural heritage, and human rights.
- To encourage all members of our congregations to understand that God calls us to care for the creation by making our communities and environments better places for the next generation than they were in our lifetime.
- To actively support initiatives in all Churches and communities that are concerned with the planetary crisis.
- To help publicize and network information, developments, events, publications and all sources of knowledge among our friends, neighbours, congregation members, Church leaders, and government officials.
- To encourage links among our provinces, dioceses, and parishes worldwide to increase understanding of the many issues involved and how they are interrelated.
- To support opportunities for younger people to experience first-hand how people in their own and other congregations and communities are affected by the planetary crisis and how they can work to change the world in which they live.

- To promote training and educational programs in all aspects of the planetary crisis even as they relate to our worship and community life.
- To encourage diligently our secular and Church leaders, lay and ordained, in all parts of the Anglican Communion to place the planetary crisis at the highest level of their concerns.
- To encourage and support public policies that reflect the principles of sustainable community.
- To request all bodies within the communion to undertake an environmental audit and take appropriate action on the basis of the results. To commit ourselves both to energy conservation and the use of sustainable energy sources.
- To demonstrate simplicity of lifestyle in our patterns of consumption to counteract greed and over-consumption. Such greed dictates so much of our economic past that it must be transformed into generosity and compassion.

Christ has no hands but ours, and he calls us to offer ourselves to share in his work of healing and reconciliation so that all creation may know that, "The truth shall set you free."