

For Advocacy and Education on the
Environmental Crisis and the
Transition to Renewable Energy

What it Means for the Church

We, as Anglicans, must respond to our own challenges within the Communion in the years ahead. Yet we are resilient enough, as people of faith, to meet those challenges together, while engaging the urgent and dangerous problems facing the world. Severe shortages of food and water, deforestation, desertification, countries positioning and fighting for limited supplies of oil and other resources -- these are the forces that shape the lives of everyone, whether we live in so-called "developed" or "developing" or "least developed" countries. Setting aside differences in political and ideological points of view, abundant scientific evidence strongly suggests that rapidly accumulating greenhouse gases are in the process of irreversibly changing the earth's atmosphere. Unless we make the transition from fossil fuels to renewable, clean energy quickly, the web of life, as we know it now, will profoundly change, and the majority of people on God's green earth will either struggle to adapt or they will not survive. It's a horrific thought, but it's a very real possibility.

The issue is not whether these changes will happen; they have already begun. The questions we must ask ourselves, as people of faith, are these: What will these changes mean? What kind of witness to the love of God in Jesus Christ must we make in light of these changes? First, consider the transition from fossil fuels. History suggests that when the techno-economic base of a culture crumbles or no longer offers a sustainable way of life, then those societies either go to war in an attempt to maintain the way things are, they collapse and die, or they renew themselves on the basis of a more realistic, adaptive, and spiritually sound foundation. Those, in a nutshell, are our choices.

Whether we make this transition successfully depends not only on practical expertise, economic investment and political will, but also on spiritual vision and faith. We need leadership -- lay and ordained -- on every level of the church and in every part of the world to usher in cleaner forms of energy.

* We're not simply talking about retrofitting existing economies and institutions with new sources of energy.

* Changes at the techno-economic base of our globalized society will eventually affect every part of our lives, even the structure of society itself.

Interlocking relationships between institutions -- economic, political, and religious -- will change within nations and among them. Prevailing ideas about "the good life" and "progress" will change, as they should, which will affect our ideas about the meaning and purpose of religion and how society should be organized economically. This will require thoughtful, involved, and informed leadership, from the smallest congregations and local communities to the highest levels of the church.

To make this transition in the most effective, economically just, and sustainable way, we need to realize that global problems have local answers. There is more than one way to do this; one size does not fit all; the same roadmap will not work in different cultures and environments. We, as a church, can show practical, visionary leadership by convening international, provincial, diocesan, and parish-wide consultations, which are open to literally everyone, including representatives of civil society, government, and people of all faiths. We need to be asking what kinds of communities we want to create and how we can create them together. If we don't, they will be created for us, for better or worse. These are some of the hugely important, but very practical matters we must consider: What kind of clean, renewable energy will work for us -- in our own communities, cities, regions, and nations? How can we find the appropriate technology and pay for it? Who will own and provide the services? Are we talking about privately owned companies? If so, how will the profits be used? Will local communities be stakeholders or shareholders in these new technologies and services? What will justice and human rights look like in this new world? These are hard, but hopeful questions. The fact of asking them is hopeful. To

ask people in our communities and congregations to express themselves and participate in the answers is hopeful. To ignore them suggests not only a lack of hope, but a lack of faith.

The "environmental crisis" was never only about 'the environment,' as if God's creation was somehow "out there," but not part of us. The crisis we face has always been about how we must live together -- all of us -- as faithful stewards and people who strive to love God and our neighbors as ourselves. As a sacred institution, the church exists not only in relationship with God, but also in relation to God's creation. It's not one or the other, but both. We've always known this: We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit ... (Romans 8:22-23b).

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