

## **R-6: Declaration of Climate Emergency, Commitment to Net-Zero Greenhouse Gas Emissions by 2045, and adoption of Episcopal Covenant for the Care of Creation**

**Resolved** that the 227<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention of the Diocese of Virginia acknowledge that a Climate and Ecological Emergency threatens our Diocese, the nation, and the delicate balance of all creation, encourages all 179 congregations, six schools, and six retirement communities within the Diocese to recognize this and act to achieve net zero greenhouse gas (GhG) emissions by 2045; and be it further

**Resolved** that the Convention directs the Diocesan Creation Care Task Force to dedicate itself to researching the most effective policies for helping the Diocese achieve net-zero GhG emissions by 2045, drawing on the best practices of Episcopal parishes and communities within the Diocese and communities across the nation and world, to prioritizing Environmental Justice in each step, and to bringing forth new proposals annually to achieve this zero-emissions goal; and be it further

**Resolved** that the Convention recognizes that the Church is called to respond in this moment to the unique psychological and spiritual suffering of all people in response to ecological crisis, and the breakdown of preconceived expectations of the future, and urges faith leaders and congregations to welcome the suffering stranger and the poor in spirit through peer groups, listening and support for those confronting and working through [Eco-Grief](#); and be it further

**Resolved** that the Convention in keeping with prior General Convention and our Annual Convention resolution adopt [The Episcopal Church Covenant for the Care of Creation](#)<sup>1</sup>, thereby engaging in

1. Loving formation by growing our love for the Earth and all of life through preaching, teaching, storytelling & prayer.
2. Liberating advocacy by standing alongside marginalized, vulnerable peoples, and advocating and acting to reduce emissions, repair Creation and seek the liberation and flourishing of all people.
3. Life-giving conservation by adopting practical ways of reducing our climate impact and living more humbly and gently on Earth as individuals, households, congregations, institutions, and as a diocese.

And we urge all this for God's sake.

*Submitted by the Creation Care Task Force.*

## Background

God created the heavens and the Earth, declared them to be good, and calls us to be good stewards of Creation (Gen. 1:31, 2:15). In the final chapters of Job, God reminds us of the magnificence of His Creation and His delight in the fierceness of His wild creatures in order to remind us of our humility and lack of control. God cares about the fate of all creatures, from the sparrow to the disciple (Luke 12:6) to the Behemoth and to the Leviathan (Job 40:15-41:34). Jesus commands us to care for the least of those who are His family (Mt. 25:40). We are commanded to keep the Sabbath and to seek justice; our faithfulness in this regard will enable us to “live on the land securely and provide for the redemption of the land” (Leviticus 25:18-24) We are to live into our prophetic voice for climate justice as part and parcel of our baptismal commitment to "justice and peace among all people" and to "respect the dignity of every human being" and "renounce the evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God." Now, the Earth is suffering on a global scale that humanity has never experienced before, and it is time to live into our theological responsibility to take immediate action to address the climate crisis.

The Cathedral of the Diocese of Virginia, the seat of the Bishop and the heart of the diocese is Shrine Mont - a chapel in the wilderness, and a sign of our Diocese's commitment to the sanctity of creation, and the truth that the created world is the dwelling place of the divine.

As described in the August 2021 United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Sixth Assessment Report<sup>2</sup>, it is unequivocal that human influence has warmed the atmosphere, ocean and land. Widespread and rapid changes in the atmosphere, ocean, cryosphere and biosphere have already occurred. Human-induced climate change is already affecting many weather and climate extremes in every region across the globe, including heatwaves, heavy precipitation, droughts, and tropical cyclones. Moreover, global warming of 1.5°C and 2°C will be exceeded during the 21st century unless greenhouse gas emissions are reduced by 45% by 2030, reaching net-zero by 2050 at the latest. <sup>2</sup> Global temperatures have already risen to 1.1°C above pre-industrial levels. Many changes due to past and future greenhouse gas emissions are irreversible for centuries to millennia, especially changes in the ocean, ice sheets and global sea level.<sup>2</sup>

In November 2019, the United Nations Environment Programme Gap Emissions Report found that countries have collectively failed to stop the growth in global greenhouse gas emissions since the signing of the Paris Agreement in 2016; at the current rate of emissions, temperatures are expected to rise 3.2 degrees Celsius by the year 2100; and "incremental changes will not be enough and there is a need for rapid and transformational action."<sup>3</sup>

The climate crisis is a facet of a larger ecological crisis that manifests also as a rapid acceleration in the rate of species extinctions. A 2019 report by the UN

Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) asserts that human activity is pushing over 1 million species to extinction, and that “the loss of species and habitats poses as much a danger to life on Earth as climate change does.”<sup>4,5</sup>

Frontline communities globally, including people of color, immigrants, indigenous communities, the poor, the disabled and the unhoused are already disproportionately suffering the impacts of climate change, and will continue to bear unjust burdens from increasing temperatures, sea level rise, the spread of disease and the economic consequences of inaction on the climate crisis.<sup>6</sup>

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have described climate change as an urgent public health crisis.<sup>6</sup> The U.S. Department of Defense describes climate change as a “threat multiplier” connected with conflicts over scarce resources, conditions conducive to violent extremism, and the spread of infectious diseases.<sup>7</sup>

On September 1, 2021, Archbishop Justin Welby, Pope Francis, and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew issued a Joint Statement for the Protection of Creation, urging “everyone, whatever their belief or worldview, to endeavor to listen to the cry of the earth and of people who are poor, examining their behavior and pledging meaningful sacrifices for the sake of the earth which God has given us.”<sup>8</sup>

On October 4th 2021, Archbishop Justin Welby joined Pope Francis, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and 11 other leaders from all major world religious traditions signed Faith and Science: An Appeal for COP26 urging governments to commit to a rapidly accelerated timetable for emissions reductions at the upcoming UN Climate Conference.<sup>9</sup>

In addition, our Diocese adopted R 15 at its 220<sup>th</sup> Annual Council in 2015 of “Accepting the Duty of Care for God’s Creation.” In late October 2017, Anglican Archbishops around the world signed an open letter to world leaders urging responsible climate action ahead of the next UN climate change conference opening on 6 November in Bonn, Germany.

The Worldwide Anglican Communion, The Church of England, and the US Dioceses of Massachusetts, Western Massachusetts, and many other Episcopal and Anglican organizations have already declared a state of climate emergency, joining over 2,000 local governments, and 23 national governments representing over 1 billion people.

<sup>10, 11, 12</sup>

The Creation Care Task Force believes it is urgent for everyone in the Diocese to take sacrificial steps to preserve God’s creation, and is committed to building awareness

around the steps we can all take to make a difference; assisting to enact the Covenant for the Care of Creation.

## References

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Note: the emissions reduction target of net-zero emissions by 2045 is derived from the Church of England’s Climate Emergency Resolution of 2020, and we refer to the detailed rationale described in their report linked above to justify this specific emissions reduction target as both necessary and actionable.

