SEC Environmental Report

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TIME TO DECLARE A CLIMATE EMERGENCY

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“Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.”

- Martin Luther King Jr.

**Truth telling**

On June 9th, the World Council of Churches issued a [Pentecost message](https://t.co/PGOMKR18zZ) that reads as follows: “To prophesy is to tell the truth”. In a recent Facebook post, Bishop Mary quotes an article which stated, “in a 'post-truth' world…the Church can become known as the community that tells the truth.” A recent [article](https://johnpavlovitz.com/2019/05/14/dear-church-heres-why-people-are-leaving/) by John Pavlovitz explains that people are leaving the church because of the failure of church leaders to tell the truth.

“Church, people are leaving you because you are silent right now in ways that matter to them. You aren’t saying what they need you to say and what you should be saying—and it makes them sick. They spend their days with a front row seat to human right atrocities, to growing movements of cruelty, to unprecedented religious hypocrisy, and to political leaders who are antithetical to heart of Jesus,” John wrote.

“They see in their daily lives and on the news and across their timelines and in their communities, exactly the kind of malevolence and toxicity they expect you to speak into with boldness and clarity as moral leaders—and instead they find you adjusting the stage lights and renovating the lobby and launching websites” John added. “I know you’re worried about saying too much, about being branded too political, about offending people or somehow making it worse by speaking. *Trust me, you are making it worse by saying nothing*. Yes, you may be avoiding conflict or keeping a tenuous peace in the pews. You may be causing less obvious turbulence inside your walls. You may be appeasing a few fearful folks there who don’t want you to trouble the waters. But you’re doing something else: you’re confirming for millions of people, why they have no use for you any longer. You’re confirming the suspicions of those who believe the church has no relevance for them.”

John says that among other things people have been waiting for you “to denounce the degradation of the planet—to say with absolute clarity what you stand for and what you will not abide. And you have kept them waiting too long...The singular thing you can offer them is a clear and unflinching voice that emulates the voice of Jesus…Stand on your platforms and in your pulpits and specifically name the bigotry, precisely call out the politics, unequivocally condemn the people and the policies and the movements that sicken you. Jesus did.”

Perhaps it is time for us to take this message to heart as Christians prepare for the Season of Creation (Sept 1 - Oct. 4). As revealed in a [Crux](https://cruxnow.com/vatican/2019/06/18/christians-unite-for-season-of-creation-sep-1-oct-4/) article, Christians, including the Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, are coming together to tell the truth and advocate for climate action.

The Stewardship of the Environment Committee (SEC) is dedicated to communicating the facts about environmental degradation and climate change. Consistent with our mandate we are equally determined to confront untruths and challenge silence from those in the position of leadership.

**World Environment Day (WED) and the SEC’s short film**

Faith based actions were an important part of the 45th WED on June 5th and the SEC was Recognized for its for Participation. On this day we formally announced the [SEC's Short Film](https://stewardshipoftheenvironment.blogspot.com/2019/06/announcing-secs-short-film-on-world.html). In this announcement we explained that we have chosen to make a film in the hopes of delivering a broadly accessible message that reaches people in a way that both resonates and inspires action.

We know that facts alone are not getting through to everyone and as we reviewed in the [SEC's fifth quarterly report](https://stewardshipoftheenvironment.blogspot.com/2019/06/secs-5th-quarterly-report-why-faith.html) there is good reason to believe that faith communities are in a unique position to help people address the environmental crises we face.

There were thousands of faith-based initiatives on WED and people throughout the Anglican Communion addressed environmental issues prompting the [United Nations](https://www.anglicannews.org/news/2019/06/united-nations-hears-of-anglican-communion-churches-active-role-in-tackling-climate-change.aspx) to recognize their “active role in tackling climate change”.

In a live broadcast from the UN Head Office in New York on June 6th they highlighted the “vital role of the church and faith communities in tackling climate change”. Advocacy Officer and Head of New York Office for the Anglican Communion, Jillian Abballe, was one of six panelist who took part. She emphasized the crucial role of faith-based organizations, religious traditions and communities in planting and nurturing the seed of climate responsibility.

Jillian said the most vulnerable are already experiencing catastrophic climate change-related disasters and she shared stories of how members of the Anglican Communion are having an impact through influence, earth stewardship and in modelling responsibility towards the environment.

Jillian said the Anglican Communion is speaking out about the environment and how to understand the world through a holistic theology that reconciles the people, the planet and prosperity. “The commitments we make as communities and global networks make a statement to the world and re-shape our imagination of mission and how we respond to such crises,” she said.

She highlighted the actions of South American bishops and emphasized the role of the Anglican Communion Environment Network in advocating for responsible environmental stewardship, supporting local leaders and educating Anglicans to become better stewards of creation. She provided examples of the Communion’s climate and environment initiatives in both Sri Lanka and Pakistan.

Jillian said the Communion has begun to implement collaborative strategies across its provinces and working with the Environmental Network and the Anglican Alliance, it is bringing together development, relief and advocacy activities combined with capacity building and training.

Jillian pointed out that Anglican bishops are engaged in environmental justice work in their dioceses by focusing on issues like: Land use and deforestation; youth-oriented community organizing; reducing carbon footprints; recycling and organic gardening; water issues involving public use rather than privatized water; soil contamination from oil drilling; and education around the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Responding to questions, Jillian said: “there is urgent action that needs to be taken that we possibly haven’t fully imagined. . . I hope in our faith traditions we can call up the spirituality to usher us into an era where we can have that imagination to create new solutions.”

As explained in an [article](https://www.unenvironment.org/news-and-stories/story/how-all-religious-faiths-advocate-environmental-protection) published by the UN Environment, faith based communities have a crucial role to play and they engaged in a wide range of actions on WED from tree planting to youth forums. The article points to excerpts from the sacred texts of 11 traditions (Baha’i, Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Shintoism, Sikhism, and Taoism).

**Climate emergency**

All around the world we are seeing governments and faith communities make climate emergency declarations. Thus far we have seen such declarations in 717 jurisdictions including local governments that cover hundreds of millions of citizens. The declaration of a climate emergency is meant to mobilize immediate action as it draws attention to the fact that we are not doing what we must to avert a climate catastrophe. Anglicans are part of the dozens of action groups that have helped to take this movement mainstream.

Climate declaration motions share a common focus on raising awareness about the urgent need for action and planning to achieve carbon-neutrality. This planning focuses on minimizing climate impacts and includes transitioning to renewable energy, enhanced efficiency, improving public transit and promoting local food production. For more information on climate emergencies click [here](http://www.thegreenmarketoracle.com/2019/05/the-power-of-climate-emergency.html).

National governments and Christian leaderships are declaring climate emergencies. Even small organizations are making such declarations. Declarations in Scotland, Whales and Ireland as well as in hundreds of city councils including London encouraged members of parliament to support a national motion in the United Kingdom. As explained by Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn: “Are we content to hand down a broken planet to our children? That is the question members must ask themselves today. We have the chance to act before it’s too late. It’s a chance that won’t be available to succeeding generations. It is our historic duty to take it.” We must all ask whether we are content to leave a broken planet for our children and grandchildren. The UK's declaration of a climate emergency was followed by legislation mandating [zero emissions](http://www.thegreenmarketoracle.com/2019/06/ground-breaking-uk-climate-leadership.html).

In June the Canadian House of Commons passed a Climate Emergency motion with a vote of 186 to 63.

Vancouver was the first Canadian city to declare a climate emergency followed shortly thereafter by Halifax. In March Kingston became the first city in Ontario to make such a declaration. In April city councilors in Ottawa voted overwhelmingly in favor of declaring a climate emergency.

In Quebec more than 300 municipalities have endorsed a Déclaration d’Urgence Climatique – a climate emergency declaration, representing more than 70 percent of the population of the province. This includes major cities like Montreal, Quebec City, Sherbrooke and Trois-Rivières.

Support for such declarations is growing in much of the world including countries like the United States and Australia where national governments flout the facts. In August 2018, the Democratic National Committee (DNC) passed a climate emergency resolution which is a reassertion of a 2016 DNC platform amendment, calling for climate mobilization. In 2017 Hoboken New Jersey became the first US city, and Montgomery County, Maryland became the first US county to declare climate emergencies. Similar motions were passed in the Californian cities of Richmond, Berkeley, Los Angeles and Oakland. Most recently New York City declared a climate emergency.

In Australia a total of 17 local governments representing more than a million people have made formal declarations. Darebin City was the first to declare a climate emergency and they were followed by Moreland and Ballarat. In addition to these declarations the German speaking city of Basel has declared a climate emergency and other German speaking cities may soon follow suit.

Faith communities are also declaring climate emergencies. At the 17th session of the Anglican Consultative Council in April a resolution was passed that recognized the scale of the global climate emergency and encouraged all Anglican churches to live out the fifth Mark of Mission – ‘to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth.’” Pressure is mounting on the Church of England to declare a climate emergency.

On June 14th the leader of the [Catholic Church](https://climateemergencydeclaration.org/leader-of-1-3-billion-catholics-declares-a-climate-emergency/) declared a climate emergency. Pope Francis warned, “we must take action accordingly” adding the failure to act to reduce greenhouse gases would be “a brutal act of injustice toward the poor and future generations”. For those sitting on the sidelines the pontiff offered the following exhortation: “We do not have the luxury of waiting for others to step forward, or of prioritizing short-term economic benefits.”

In June, Environmental Advisor for the Council of Progressive Rabbis in Australia, Rabbi Keren-Black said the world is facing a climate emergency. “We blow the horn to awake slumbers from their sleep and to sound the alarm, so we blow it to sound the alarm for the climate emergency, for the sake of the world, for the sake of generations to come,” he said, adding “Judaism believes that we have a responsibility to be caretakers for God's world, and we're not doing a very good job of it at the moment”.

On July 4th the [Methodist Church](https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/news/latest-news/all-news/methodist-church-recognises-a-climate-emergency/) became the latest faith organization to recognize that we are facing a climate emergency. The Methodist Conference has also called on the UK to expedite their timetable to achieve net zero emissions. The Methodist Church is also addressing the problem of single use plastics, leading through example and urging its members and churches to reduce plastic pollution.

While the problem of plastic waste is indeed serious, we should not be lulled into the belief that we are doing our part by [recycling](https://www.treehugger.com/plastic/recycling-has-no-impact-when-it-comes-amount-being-produced.html) alone. The environmental problems we face are much bigger and none is more urgent than climate action. Recent reports indicate that so much plastic is being produced that recycling is not capable of addressing the scope of the problem.

**Models of action**

We are called to act and we have many models to draw upon. Religious leaders who have declared a climate emergency are perhaps the best example but others like Barbara Glasson, President of the Methodist Conference, are engaged in actions that raise funds for communities affected by climate change.

“As a Church we believe in the possibility of transformation. Our church has heard the voice of communities around the world that are already suffering severe consequences of climate change.” Barbara said. “Our response must be both individual and corporate to do all we can to tread more lightly on the earth.”

We also have a model of faith in action from the former Anglican Bishop of Quebec. As covered in the [Anglican Journal](https://www.anglicanjournal.com/retired-bishop-of-quebec-to-run-for-greens-in-election-like-no-other/), Dennis Drainville announced that he is running for the Green Party of Canada in the forthcoming federal election. Dennis hopes to become the representative for the riding of Gaspésie-Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine. Many of us remember that Dennis was a candidate in the episcopal election in the diocese of Montreal in 2015.

“Governments today are becoming dangerous” Denis said. “They have their own political and economic agenda and they pursue it, at times even ruthlessly.”

Denis describes his return to politics (he served under Bob Rae’s NDP government in Ontario 1990-93) as being spurred by the realization that the October 21st vote, will be “an election like no other,”

because Canadians will have to decide how to deal with both climate change and unethical government. In addition to the two issues mentioned above Dennis wants to address the political over-representation of the wealthiest Canadians.

“We should be electing leaders who care about the common good. They say they do, of course. The rhetoric is all there, but in fact when you see what they do and how they do it, they are not supporting the needs and aspirations of all Canadians.” The odds of him winning are a long shot at best, but Dennis is in it for all the right reasons.

**Urgent role for faith communities in the face of climate denial**

Faith groups include most of the people who inhabit the Earth. With a presence in 165 countries and representing 85 million people the Anglican communion has a powerful reach. However, faith leaders have their work cut out for them as powerful political forces are actively, and effectively denying reality.

“I don’t believe it,” American President Donald Trump said the other day in response to a question about the federal government’s latest report reiterating the veracity of climate change. “ It’s “not based on facts,” former press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders erroneously stated.

This brings us back to truth telling. We must tell the truth because the lie of climate denial imperils life on Earth and deprives future generations of their right to be born on a livable planet. As reviewed in a [Religious News](https://religionnews.com/2018/11/29/a-religious-opening-for-climate-change/) article titled, “A Religious Opening for Climate Change” this type of denial is “a species of faith—the non-evidence of things seen, as the author of Hebrews might have said. The GOP has made it a doctrine, and the party faithful have increasingly embraced it.”

The problem of political disinformation is not restricted to the United States as views on the climate crisis are commonly divided according to political affiliation. While conservative politics commonly eschew climate realities, the climate crisis transcends partisan politics. It is important to note that in Canada adhering to political conservatism [does not necessarily preclude environmental action](http://www.thegreenmarketoracle.com/2019/04/the-shift-to-right-and-hope-on-road-to.html).

The question that faith communities should ask is whether they are doing their part to confront untruths and help people address the *reality* of the climate crisis? We must simultaneously consider the possibility that by not openly acknowledging the facts and actively supporting action we may be contributing to the crisis.

Our faith demands that we act to prevent a global calamity. A total of 150 Australian religious leaders including Anglicans sent an open letter to Prime Minister Scott Morrison calling him to show moral leadership on the issue of climate change “for the sake of generations to come”.

Federation of Australian Buddhist Councils Spokesperson Gawaine Powell Davies said climate change is driven by “human foolishness”. “We have a very sharp analysis of human foolishness which has led us to put greed and short-term benefit ahead of the long-term interests of ourselves and our children, and our grandchildren,” Gawain said.

The [UN](https://stewardshipoftheenvironment.blogspot.com/2019/07/how-all-religious-faiths-advocate-for.html) points out that when it comes to the environment there is widespread agreement between science and religion. Even people who have no religious affiliation can agree with the need for climate action. Secular society and the diverse array of faith communities share a common interest in environmental stewardship. As explored in a [Star](https://www.thestar.com/politics/political-opinion/2019/06/07/can-climate-change-be-the-enemy-that-unites-us.html) article, rather than sew more division climate action can be something that brings us together.