



March 23, 2021

Dear People of the Dioceses of Massachusetts and Western Massachusetts,

With the advent of spring, our thoughts turn with renewed gratitude to the great gift of God's creation. "For behold, the winter is past; the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth, the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land."
(Song of Solomon 2:11-12)

Our thoughts turn also to the devastation of that created order which continues to unfold around us. With the prophet we ask, "How long will the land mourn, and the grass of every field wither? For the wickedness of those who live in it the animals and the birds are swept away."
(Jeremiah 12:4)

Each year on Ash Wednesday we offer the Litany of Penitence, decrying "our self-indulgent appetites and ways, ... our waste and pollution of (God's) creation, and our lack of concern for those who come after us." (*The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 268) In our stewardship of God's creation, we are thus called into the fullness of gratitude, repentance, and amendment of our lives.

What follows is a Declaration of Climate Emergency by your bishops. We urge you to read it thoroughly, thoughtfully, and prayerfully, receiving it as both challenge and invitation, and responding with commitment, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Faithfully,

The Rt. Rev. Douglas J. Fisher, Bishop Diocesan, Diocese of Western Massachusetts

The Rt. Rev. Alan M. Gates, Bishop Diocesan, Diocese of Massachusetts

The Rt. Rev. Gayle E. Harris, Bishop Suffragan, Diocese of Massachusetts

Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts

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Declaration of Climate Emergency

We, the bishops of the Episcopal dioceses in Massachusetts, declare a climate emergency.

We honor the call of our church's presiding bishop, the Most Rev. Michael B. Curry, to care for God's beloved world. We recognize that accelerating global warming and mass extinctions are destroying God's creation, threatening to make our planet uninhabitable. We likewise recognize that the climate crisis affects low-income communities and communities of color first and hardest.

We confess that we, and our churches, have not yet responded with adequate seriousness or urgency to the ongoing, intensifying effects of climate change, and to its underlying causes.

According to Scripture, God created the physical world and all its creatures as inherently “good” (Genesis 1). The very first task that God entrusted to human beings was responsibility to care for the earth (Genesis 2:15). As Christians, we honor the goodness and sacredness of the created world, recognizing that the earth does not belong to us, but to God (Psalm 24:1). The scope of God’s love embraces not only humanity but also the rest of creation (Genesis 9:8-17), and we recognize that Jesus gave his life for the whole world, so that all things could be reconciled (Colossians 1:15-20; Ephesians 1:10; 2 Corinthians 2:19). As Archbishop Desmond Tutu has said, the “supreme work” of Jesus Christ is to reconcile us to God, each other, and all of God’s creation.

As a member of the worldwide Anglican Communion, The Episcopal Church upholds the [Five Marks of Mission](#) as our understanding of God’s mission. The fifth mark establishes as an essential dimension of Christian mission and ethics the commitment “to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and [to] sustain and renew the life of the earth.” Because caring for God’s creation is central to our moral and spiritual concern, [General Convention](#), the church’s triennial legislative governing body, has adopted scores of resolutions addressing the environment, environmental justice, and climate change. At the 79th General Convention in 2018, [19 resolutions that relate to care for God’s creation were adopted](#). One of them (2018-A018) adopted [The House of Bishops’ 2011 Pastoral Teaching on the Environment](#) as an official position of our church, a document that urges every Episcopalian “to acknowledge the urgency of the planetary crisis in which we find ourselves.” In 2019, the [Anglican Consultative Council recognized a global climate emergency](#), and the [General Synod of the Church of England recognized a climate emergency](#) in 2020.

Other denominations are also responding. [Pope Francis declared a climate emergency in 2019](#). The [Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I has spoken repeatedly about the ecological crisis](#). The [Methodist Conference \(UK\) recognized a climate emergency in 2019](#).

Standing with our siblings in Christ, including St. Paul, we hear the groaning of creation as it waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God (Romans 8:19-23). We believe that God is calling us all to embrace brave and difficult change. Everything we do as faithful individuals and as a church must reckon with the unprecedented emergency in which humanity now finds itself.

We therefore encourage all Episcopalians to explore The Episcopal Church’s [Covenant for the Care of Creation](#), a commitment to practice loving formation, liberating advocacy, and life-giving conversation as individuals, congregations, ministries, and dioceses.

We strongly urge congregations across Massachusetts to **pray, learn, act, and advocate** as we build a bold and faith-filled response to the greatest moral challenge of our time. We urge members of our two dioceses to explore the resources of both dioceses, including the [Creation Care Justice Network](#) in the Diocese of Massachusetts, and in Western Massachusetts, [resources in all four areas](#) of engagement. Sign up for the monthly [Creation Care Network e-newsletter](#) produced by the Rev. Dr. Margaret Bullitt-Jonas, who is assisting both dioceses in developing a robust response to the

climate emergency, and for monthly [e-mail updates from the Creation Care Justice Network](#) in the Diocese of Massachusetts.

Reflecting the four areas of engagement, we urge members of our two dioceses to:

Pray

- We ask all preachers in our dioceses, lay and ordained, to take up the mantle of moral leadership and preach regularly about our moral obligation to protect God’s creation.
- We encourage use of the [Liturgical Materials for Honoring God in Creation](#), from our church’s Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music. Our worship services should regularly include prayers that lift up the urgent needs of God’s creation (e.g., to keep fossil fuels in the ground; to protect and restore forests), and prayers for our own transformation (e.g., repentance for the role humans have played in creating, denying, and accelerating the emergency).
- We encourage observance of the [Season of Creation](#) (Sept. 1 to Oct. 4) as a time for renewing, repairing, and restoring our relationship to God, one another, and all of creation.
- We encourage outdoor services (which might be ecumenical or interfaith) that express reverence for God’s creation, lament and repentance for humanity’s assault on Earth, and renewed resolve to protect the web of life entrusted to our care.
- We encourage retreats and educational events that teach emotional and spiritual resilience, including ways of prayer that quiet our minds, calm our nerves, steel our spines, and open our hearts to the still, small voice of God.

Learn

- We encourage deaneries and congregations to convene conversations and educational events around such topics as: how tackling the climate crisis connects with efforts to alleviate poverty, fight racial and social injustice, and defend human life; how eco-theology and eco-spirituality can guide us in the days ahead; how to cultivate the values and practices that liberate us from the consumerism, hyper-individualism, and violence of the dominant culture.
- We encourage everyone to read and reflect on the 2011 [House of Bishops Pastoral Teaching on the Environment](#), which was adopted at the 79th General Convention in 2018 as an official teaching.

Act

- We urge high-consuming people to cut back sharply on their use of fossil fuels and to support each other in changing their patterns of consumption and waste. We commend the carbon tracker, [Sustaining Earth, Our Island Home](#), as a free educational tool for cutting carbon use in our households. We urge houses of worship to work with [Massachusetts Interfaith Power & Light](#) to complete energy audits and implement the findings.

- We welcome the [Good News Gardens](#) movement – a Gospel-centered initiative to grow and share food – into our dioceses. We likewise support efforts to restore ecosystems, soil, habitat, and biodiversity – such as making space for wildlife near our homes, a practice that has been called “reconciliation ecology.”
- We encourage congregations to identify and find ways to assist those in our communities who are most vulnerable to climate disasters. We encourage working with [Communities Responding to Extreme Weather \(CREW\)](#) to make our churches “resilience hubs.”
- We further encourage collaborations between diocesan groups at work on interrelated justice concerns, such as racial justice, food security, and creation care, among others. [Episcopal City Mission’s Justice Network](#) brings together Episcopalians and grassroots and faith-rooted leaders for monthly conversations around opportunities to act, both collectively and individually.

Advocate

- Because the scale and pace of the climate crisis require systemic change, we urge members of our two dioceses to become informed about – and participate in – local, statewide, and national efforts to make a swift and just transition to clean, renewable energy and to support vulnerable communities. We encourage learning about and joining the advocacy efforts of such groups as [Massachusetts Interfaith Power & Light](#), [350MA for a Better Future](#), and [Climate Action Now in Western Massachusetts](#), as well as creation care initiatives of the [Episcopal Public Policy Network](#), the ecumenical [Creation Justice Ministries](#), and environmental groups.
- We also urge connecting with local organizers in environmental justice communities and supporting their priorities and efforts in appropriate ways. In our advocacy work, we have the opportunity draw upon our faith to make a prayerful and prophetic public witness for creation and its most vulnerable people and creatures, to envision a new world, and to call upon the God of life and resurrection to assist us.

Our efforts to revive God’s creation, to build a just and sustainable society, and to restore a safe climate will require communication and collaboration. We encourage everyone to sign up for the monthly [Creation Care Network e-newsletter](#) and [Creation Care Justice Network e-mails](#) referenced above, and again commend engagement with our respective online diocesan resources in the [western](#) and [eastern](#) dioceses.

We give thanks to the God who makes all things new (Isaiah 43:18-19; Isaiah 65:17; Rev. 21:5) and who came among us to bring us life, and life abundant (John 10:10).