

Response to Presiding Bishop Curry's Declaration of a Climate Emergency

Submitted by:

The Rt. Rev. Roy Cederholm, Plymouth, Christ Church
Alex Chatfield, Lincoln, St. Anne's in-the-Fields Episcopal Church
The Rev. Tim Crellin, Boston, St. Stephen's Church
Dr. Anne Ipsen Goldman, Alewife Deanery
The Very Rev. Amy McCreath, Boston, Cathedral Church of St. Paul
The Rev. W.H. Mebane, Jr., Falmouth, St. Barnabas's Church
The Rev. Laurie Rofinot, South Weymouth, Church of the Holy Nativity
Dr. Stephen Steadman, Watertown, Church of the Good Shepherd
The Rev. Deborah Warner, Woods Hole, Church of the Messiah

Resolved, that the 235th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts will call on the bishops to issue a proclamation declaring a climate emergency, recognizing that rapidly accelerating global warming and mass extinctions threaten God's Creation that can make our planet uninhabitable unless we embrace brave and difficult change; and be it further

Resolved, that the text of such proclamation will be determined by the bishop(s) of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts in consultation with the diocesan Creation Care Justice Network (CCJN); and be it further

Resolved, that the 235th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts encourages the clergy and laity of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts, through preaching, education, and outreach, to promote that the Western worldview is resulting in the destruction of God's creation. The attitude that assumes limitless rights to extract resources, exploit others, and overconsume must be replaced by repentance, the recognition that the created world is finite, humility that we are only one creature in the interconnected web of life, and resolve to work for sustainability and justice; and be it further

Resolved, that the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts will publicize this proclamation by a letter, addressed to the congregations of the diocese and by a press release, in which it will seek co-signers among other Episcopal dioceses, particularly in Province One, and other religious groups in Massachusetts. It will also seek cooperation with secular organizations with common goals to publicize this declaration of climate emergency.

Explanation

Explanation 1: The Episcopal Church (TEC) has committed to limiting global warming to 1.5°C and is a strong advocate for climate justice. It is a top priority of the church, as expressed by Presiding Bishop Curry in his [Earth Day Address](#).¹ In the "Take the Next Step for Creation" resolution, the 234th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts resolved to affirm "An Episcopal Vision for Creation Care," calling upon clergy and lay members to commit to TEC's Covenant for the Care of Creation, through its [Creation Care Pledge](#).² This Covenant accepts the terms "climate crisis" and "climate emergency," and also uses "triple emergency" to show the intersection of climate change, poverty and inequality, and biodiversity loss.

Explanation 2: The Coronavirus pandemic is forcing us to bravely embrace new change for our mutual survival. We have to learn many lessons, the most important of which are: 1. Listen to the scientists, 2. It takes each of us, 3. It takes leadership. This resolution applies these three lessons to the climate crisis.

¹ <https://www.facebook.com/PBMBCurry/videos/544136483182192>

² <https://episcopalchurch.org/creation-care/pledge>

1. Listen to the scientists when they warn us of the dangers ahead and describe the way to mitigate the looming disasters. They warned us to prepare for pandemics, and we didn't listen. They have warned us that the planet is on the brink of disaster, and we have not taken them seriously enough. It is time to accept their authoritative voice and take the actions they recommend.

The earth is already following the worst-case scenario of scientific model predictions and suffering unprecedented warming, storms, floods, wildfires, coral reef destruction, arctic ice melting, and biodiversity loss. [Limiting global warming to 1.5°C is already slipping out of reach.](#)³ Beyond these severe losses we are rapidly approaching the ultimate risk that we will reach a point where the catastrophes are in charge, and we cannot stop the temperature from rising too high too fast.⁴ As of 2019, nine of the 15 tipping points were active, suggesting that we are in a state of planetary emergency posing an urgent risk to human civilization and to Life.⁵ The climate tipping points tie into biodiversity loss, and we are losing our planet's life and life-support systems in the ongoing 6th mass extinction.⁶

2. It takes each of us and huge effort to do what must be done—we are all interconnected and cannot pass the responsibility to others. Just as the pandemic has revealed the fault lines in the structure of society whereby the burden of illness has been the heaviest for those least supported by society, so the disasters that are already the consequence of climate change are being felt most by those without power.

The same dynamics of racism and classism by the dominant society that devalues and exploits people without power for material gain are also in its attitudes towards the rest of God's Creation. We have dominated, exploited, and extracted from the natural world for material gain, citing Genesis 1:26 (which has been translated as "have dominion over them") as Biblical justification. We must re-educate ourselves to understand that we are part of God's Creation and accept our role as caretakers, not exploiters. [Poor and minority communities are most at risk](#) for the adverse effects of climate change, largely stemming from systemic racism that has trapped them in underserved locations with few mitigating factors, such as green space and trees.⁷ To address the climate emergency means to address the root patterns of White domination in our society: systemic racism, income-inequality, justice-inequality, and inadequate access to health care and other resources.

3. It takes leadership to coordinate and drive forward what must be done. Our Diocese and its ordained and lay leaders must take up this mantle. Declaring climate and ecological emergencies will focus societal priorities during these challenging times. Although we are in a severe pandemic, there is no time left to postpone our needed radical change to a sustainable future. This resolution will embolden our discussions, inspire our prayers, and spark focused actions led by a loving, liberating, life-giving vision of what the future could be.

Statements Against the Resolution

There are too many other urgent matters causing great pain to our communities, and these matters are higher priority now. We are in the midst of a pandemic that will likely result in the deaths of millions of people and is causing severe economic hardship. Solving the climate crisis can be deferred to future generations.

³ See CarbonBrief <https://www.carbonbrief.org/unep-1-5c-climate-target-slipping-out-of-reach>)

⁴ Steffen, W. et al. Trajectories of the Earth System in the Anthropocene. Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. U. S. A. 115, 8252-8259 (2018)

⁵ Lenton, T. M. et al. Climate tipping points - too risky to bet against. Nature 575, 592-595 (2019)

⁶ Ceballos, G., Ehrlich, P. R. & Raven, P. H. Vertebrates on the brink as indicators of biological annihilation and the sixth mass extinction. Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. U. S. A. 117, 13596-13602 (2020)

⁷ "Population of top 10 counties for disasters: 81% minority," Tom Frank, E&E News, <https://www.eenews.net/stories/1063347205> accessed 8-23-20.

Treating climate and ecology as emergencies may cause people financial, physical, emotional, and/or spiritual burden(s). These "emergencies" are based on predictions, not certainties, and therefore are not emergencies.

Implementation Requirements

The 235th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts issues a proclamation declaring a climate emergency recognizing that rapidly accelerating global warming and mass extinctions threaten God's Creation and will make our planet uninhabitable unless we embrace brave and difficult change.

The Diocesan Council will communicate the climate emergency proclamation to its committees and to the clergy and lay members of the Diocese. The Creation Care Justice Network (CCJN) will be asked to facilitate the Diocese's response through workshops and to distribute educational materials as they continue their work of informing our congregations about the state of Creation and call their clergy and lay members to concerted actions that we all need to take as a community of faith to provide a socially just and sustainable future. The CCJN will be asked to coordinate networking with neighboring dioceses and allied local religious and secular organizations to address this emergency. A modest budget of approximately \$2,000 is needed to produce educational materials, support workshops, and provide diocesan staff coordination, and funds for this work are requested from the Creation Care Justice line item (CC2241) in the 2021 diocesan budget.