



FROM THE ANGLICAN ARCHBISHOP OF CAPE TOWN
The Most Reverend Dr Thabo Cecil Makgoba, DD(hc), PhD (UCT)

20 Bishopscourt Drive,
Claremont Cape 7708
South Africa

Telephone: 086 1001171
International: +27 21 763-1300
Fax: +27 21 761-4193
e-mail: archpa@anglicanchurchsa.org.za

Dear Archbishop Justin,

Caring for God's Creation in the Anglican Church of Southern Africa is one of our eight key mission priorities. All six countries in our Province – Angola, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Swaziland have been impacted by climate change and environmental degradation.

In Southern Africa we are dependent on water for life – and climate change is changing rain patterns. On the eastern coast of southern Africa, Mozambique has been devastated by flooding. In contrast, in Namibia, Swaziland and South Africa the greatest impact has been that of crippling drought. Schools in parts of Swaziland had to be closed when they ran out of water for school toilets. In northern Namibia and southern Angola, people have been forced to slaughter their cattle, destroying their future economic stability. And in Cape Town we are a few months away from reaching “Day Zero” when a city of three million people might run out of water before next year's winter rains come.

So how are we responding as a Province?

Firstly we are developing a theology of care for creation. The very first commandment that God gave to the human race in the book of Genesis was “care for my world”. In Genesis 2:15 God said to Adam and Eve: work the earth, but take care of it. Salvation is not only about saving the individual so that he or she can go to heaven. God sent his son to save the world, not just the human beings on it. So we need to integrate care for creation into our preaching and our prayers.

Around the world we are joining a movement of churches who celebrate a “Season of Creation” during the month of September. This is being included in our liturgical calendar and during this month we pray, preach and act to care for Creation.

We are also providing materials for children and young people. In many ways it is the youth who are leading us – our Young Green Anglicans, as we call them – since they are aware of the need to heal the Earth that we elders have been destroying. Many churches are now having open-air services and learning to appreciate the second book of God, “the book of Nature”. During Lent we have what we call “a carbon fast for Lent” when we encourage people to take a different action every day for 40 days to reduce their impact on the earth.

Secondly we are beginning to act locally. Our oceans and waterways are clogged with single-use plastics, our rivers are polluted with litter and we are pumping carbon emissions into the atmosphere. Churches are responding in many ways according to their contexts. In urban areas the focus is on mitigation, with recycling, water-wise gardens, reducing electricity, paper, etc. In rural areas the focus is on organic farming, preventing soil erosion and tree planting. Some good initiatives have been taken such as the Provincial Mothers' Union banning Styrofoam. Bishops are beginning to incorporate tree planting into their confirmations, encouraging young people to care for a tree as a symbol of their spiritual life. An exciting development is that we are exploring solar farms for some of our diocesan properties, which as well as helping with the sustainability of our churches will generate green energy to feed into local power grids.

Thirdly we are involved in advocacy. Climate change is an urgent issue and what we do over the next five years may affect the future of our children and grandchildren. Although we don't have vast amounts invested, we are taking our money out of fossil fuels, believing this to be a symbolic action that puts pressure on investment companies to develop fossil-free portfolios and help speed the transition to green energy. We have taken a firm stand against nuclear energy for both environmental and anti-corruption reasons. We stand against fracking. And at the moment one of our key focuses is “water justice” – in a water-scarce region the injustices of water distribution are among the greatest that society faces. We took part in an international water justice conference with cathedrals around the world and are encouraging parishes to take up the issues of water justice at a local level with WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) projects.

The root causes of environmental problems are greed and apathy, which are both spiritual problems. From colonial times through to the current era of neo-liberal policies, our business models are based on maximizing profit at the cost of workers and the earth. As individuals we often don't consider the environmental impact of what we buy and how we travel. We do not care what happens to what we throw away. Our generation will not be able to say in future that we did not know about climate change – and yet why is it taking us so long to clean up our act? Poverty and environmental degradation go hand in hand, and climate change hits the poorest of the poor hardest, yet still we fail to act. The Church has always been called to feed the hungry, and climate change threatens to plunge millions more into hunger.

If we do not preserve our water, our forests and our topsoil, we are not only destroying the Earth, of which that God called us to be guardians. We are also destroying the future for millions of people whose lives will be impacted by our actions now. The Bible calls us to be stewards of the Earth but I think we have left it too late. God is now calling us to become healers of the Earth.

Climate change and environmental degradation will not be solved without input from the faith communities. Creation is groaning and is waiting for us – “standing on tip toe for the children of God to be revealed”. (Rom 8:19) We need faith leaders who – in the words of Pope Francis – can hear the cry of the poor and the cry of the Earth.

The world needs you now. The actions that we take in the next five years are crucial to stop us from reaching the tipping point where climate change becomes unstoppable. Look into the eyes of your children and grandchildren and do what you need to do to preserve the world for their future.

Yours in the service of the Lord

+ Mabo Cape Town