

American Baptist Creation Justice Network

## **A Call for Dialogue and Action on Climate Change**

“The Earth is the Lord’s and everything in it,  
the world and those who live in it.”

- Psalm 24: 1

The whole world is holy, the work of the Creator. God’s breath gives life to humanity (Gen 2:7) and to all creatures (Ps 104:29-30). We live in a world of beauty and wonder, a world animated by the love of God. Let us give thanks for the beauty and vitality of the Earth; let us work to preserve God’s Garden!

God calls us to be stewards of creation, caretakers who pass on the gift of life on Earth from generation to generation. In this generation we stand at a crossroads—we are in danger of passing down a curse rather than a blessing. The threat to all of God’s creation by human-caused climate change is clear. As God’s creatures called to be stewards of life, we have failed to live out our responsibility to care for creation. We have, instead, abused creation in ways that are tearing the web of life.

For twenty years, the world-wide scientific community has agreed that Earth’s climate system is changing rapidly. Globally, temperatures and sea levels are rising, and extreme weather events are becoming more common. These changes, which are disruptive to life as we know it, are being caused primarily by human activity, especially the burning of fossil fuels (as well as other polluting practices such as deforestation and livestock production). The destabilizing and destructive effects of this rapidly changing climate are being felt now and will be experienced much more intensely in the years to come.

Rapid global climate change affects us not only in the present – it affects the future of humanity and the future of all God’s creation. Climate change threatens our ability to protect, preserve, and conserve the natural and human environment. And fundamentally, it presents us with a moral, ethical, and spiritual crisis. This crisis has led us to reexamine our worldviews and ways of life, and to seek a new and just path forward through repentance and transformation. Towards this end we are simplifying our lifestyles, engaging in activism, rediscovering the wisdom of our Christian faith and the presence of God in creation, dialoging with people of other faiths, especially indigenous peoples, and listening to members of the scientific community, naturalists, farmers, fishermen, and others who work closely with the

land and waters. We are joining a worldwide movement of millions of people seeking to restore balance to creation.

Climate change is destroying and/or dramatically diminishing eco-systems around the world, contributing to the massive extinction spasm in which we now find ourselves. This is an unprecedented ecological crisis. At the same time, climate change is a matter of human justice. The great injustice of climate change is that those least responsible for the emission of greenhouse gas emissions, the primary cause of climate change, are and will be the most severely affected and least able to adapt to changing conditions. All people will be victims of climate change but at this moment, the rapidly changing climate is primarily impacting the vulnerable poor, indigenous communities, and tens of thousands without the resources to withstand the now very real effects of climate change. As the World Council of Churches 10<sup>th</sup> Assembly in 2013 observed, “victims of climate change are the new face of the poor, the widow and the stranger that are especially loved and cared for by God.” Climate injustice is also a matter of racial injustice: people of color in our nation and throughout the world suffer the most from the effects of climate change, as seen in the flooded 9<sup>th</sup> Ward of New Orleans, the heatwaves of Pakistan, the rapid erosion of the Marshall Islands, or the droughts of Southern Africa.

Climate change is also a matter of generational justice. It is the moral responsibility of each generation to pass on a habitable planet to the next generations of human and other than human beings. Not to act decisively on climate change would be a profound moral, ethical, and spiritual failure of this generation because we know the devastating effects of climate change for people and the planet.

As people who live and work primarily in the United States, which emits more greenhouse gases per capita than any other nation, we confess that we bear much of the responsibility for this crisis. Our patterns of overconsumption and overproduction, driven by an economy of greed, are irresponsible and deadly. As people of faith who follow the Way of Jesus, we are called to respond decisively. We accept the assessment of the overwhelming numbers in the scientific community who confirm the urgency of the crisis and believe that we have a brief window of opportunity to take action, preserve humanity from disaster, and assist in the preservation of hundreds of thousands of God’s creatures.

Therefore, we encourage American Baptists, congregations, and all people of faith and goodwill to build a culture that can live in harmony with God’s creation by:

1. Deepening our biblical understanding of God's creation, the connection between ecological wholeness and human justice, and our role in preserving the Gift that is God's Creation through personal and group study, educational materials, and special programs and courses.
2. Developing a spirituality that recognizes that we are part of Earth and Earth is part of us, that we are intimately connected to every person and every living being, with God as our Creator and Sustainer.
3. Dialoging and acting with others to build a just and sustainable future for all of God's creation.
4. Striving for human justice by (a) acknowledging that the human impact of climate change already falls most heavily on the people in our country and around the world who are least able to mitigate the impacts and (b) strongly advocating for state and national legislation that prioritizes the empowerment of the poor and the vulnerable.
5. Educating ourselves about climate science and ecological science in general, so as to better understand the impacts of our actions and inactions for life on Earth today and for future generations.
6. Calling upon the President and all national leaders to fully implement the international agreement reached in Paris, 2015, which came into legal effect on November 4, 2016.
7. Implementing energy conservation and the use of renewable sources of energy in our homes, our places of worship, and our communities.
8. Advocating for federal, state and local governments to lead through research and example in the practice of implementation of energy conservation and the rapid development and use of renewable energy.
9. Encouraging our American Baptist Churches (boards/agencies/etc.) to make the mitigation of and adaptation to the effects of climate change a priority in their work nationally and internationally; for example, by divesting from or striving to avoid fossil fuel holdings in our endowments and pension funds.
10. Regaining a sense of awe, wonder, and Mystery by spending time outside rejoicing in the beauty of God's other than human creation.