

GOD'S FIRST COMMANDMENT:

To Be Earthkeepers

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Interfaith Partners in Action for the Earth

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NCUMISA MAGADLA is a black South African young woman, a former journalism student, and currently communications officer for the Anglican Church of Southern Africa's Environmental Network. Her work is focused on leadership among the youth of Southern Africa, especially Anglicans, to heighten awareness of our environmental challenges and to advise them regarding recreating a vision for Eco Churches and communities.

The very first commandment that we were given as human beings is found in Gen 2:15: Adam and Eve were placed in the garden planet and told: "Work the Earth and care for it."

Over the years humans have worked the earth in order to find energy. Since the discovery of fire, humans have burnt wood to keep themselves warm and to cook. There was minimal impact on the garden planet. But with the discovery of fossil fuels, all this changed—oil, coal and gas are releasing carbon emissions that are damaging our planet and its inhabitants, and pollutants that are damaging our health.

In order to develop, we need energy, but there are many types of energy now available. For Anglicans, we are influenced by the Five Marks of Mission.¹

The Five Marks of Mission are:

- To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
- To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
- To respond to human need by loving service
- To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth

Mark Three—to respond to human need by loving service,

The third mark of mission shows us that we must look at how best human needs can be met. Electricity is needed to light our homes, to help young people break out of poverty by being able to study. It enables people to start small businesses, creates jobs. Fuel is needed for people to be able to cook, to warm themselves. Fuel is needed for transport. Energy is needed to meet these human needs.

¹ "Marks of Mission," Anglican Communion <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/identity/marks-of-mission.aspx>

However we also need to balance the need for energy with the human needs of health. Fossil fuels contribute massively to air pollution and are threatening the present and future health and safety of the poorest of the poor.

There is no doubt, when one considers the impact of fossil fuels on the integrity of creation, that the age of fossil fuels must come to an end. The coal industry has destroyed vast swathes of our country; The oil industry similarly creates vast areas of environmental degradation

Mark Four—To Transform Unjust Structures of Society

The fourth mark of mission emphasizes the growing inequity of our society, where wealth is concentrated in the hands of shareholders, and the continual influence of the fossil fuel industry on political decisions. In our South African society the government is pushing for an unaffordable nuclear expansion. The South African Government has been reported to have concluded a trillion nuclear deal with Russian Rosatom. Already a R171 000 000 contract for the “Nuclear New Build Programme Management System’ has been issued.² Climate change is impacting on the most vulnerable of society and we should talk rather of climate justice. The impact of climate change is leading to a growth in refugees and increasing violence as people compete for simple necessities such as water and education.³ There is a link between our depreciating economy, poverty and education: and resources must be directed to support the futures of young people.

2 Ulrich Steenkamp and Dominique Doyle, “Nuclear Deal will be a Financial Meltdown,” *Nuclear Costs SA*, September 21, 2016 <http://nuclearcostssa.org/?p=3519>

3 Lebo Tshangela, “Funds for Nuclear Should be Used for Education,” *SABC News*, October 26, 2016. <http://www.sabc.co.za/news/a/c4a487804ebc965e8cdcacc17c6e412d/Funds-for-nuclear-should-be-used-for-education:-Activists-20162610>

Mark Five—To Safeguard the Integrity of Creation and Sustain and Renew the Life of the Earth

There is no doubt, when one considers the impact of fossil fuels on the integrity of creation, that the age of fossil fuels must come to an end. The coal industry has destroyed vast swathes of our country, polluting water with acid mine drainage and leaving communities devastated with ill health.⁴ The oil industry similarly creates vast areas of environmental degradation and accidents create environmental disasters. Fracking uses huge amounts of water and threatens to contaminate underground water sources. Nuclear energy leaves us with waste products for tens of thousands of years ahead.

If we are faithful to the fifth mark of mission, then renewable energy is the only way to go, as the use of solar, wind and tidal energy leaves no pollution, no carbon emissions and is healthy both for the worker and the user.

It is vital that we accelerate the shift from fossil fuels to renewable energy. Individual Christians and churches can do this through personal life-style choices, installing a solar geyser, changing light bulbs, reducing fossil fuel usage by using public transport and reducing electricity usage. But these changes although important, need to be accompanied by policy advocacy.

The divestment movement, taking our money out of fossil fuels and re-investing it, is an important symbolic and practical action. Even if the amounts are small, it gives a strong message to industry and financial institutions that the day of fossil fuels is coming to an end. The Anglican Church of Southern Africa at its latest Synod in 2016 agreed to divest from fossil fuels. Although there is currently no fossil fuel free portfolio on the Johannesburg stock exchange, the Church will work with others to put pressure on the financial institutions to create one.

Prior to COP21 the nations of the world agreed on their INDC, “Intended” nationally determined contributions. These goals are good and a step in the right direction, but even if all these intentions are fulfilled, we are still looking at a devastating 3 degree increase. As people of faith, we need to pressurize our own national governments to be more visionary and

4 “Faith and Fracking: Why Should I as a Person of Faith be Concerned?” *Southern African Faith Communities’ Environment Institute* <http://safcei.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/SAFCEI-Fracking-leaflet-March-2015.pdf>

become leaders in renewable energy.

The world stands at a crossroads—it is time to call for a just transition from fossil fuels to renewables. A just transition provides the opportunity for deeper transformation that includes the redistribution of power and resources towards a more just and equitable social order where we create jobs, reduce the impact of climate change and create a healthier world for all.

Creation is groaning with the birth pangs of this new society. And Creation is waiting on tiptoe for us, the children of God, to take up our place and be part of this transformation. (Rom 8:19)

“When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch. Simon answered, “Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.” Mark 5:4

From a personal experience, care for creation is probably one of the most overlooked ministries in our spiritual journey, especially by young people, for one because it bears no immediate results, requires perseverance, passion and obviously does not draw crowds. You can then conclude from a distance it’s not attractive.

Although I was not really conscious of my concern for the environment, I believe that deep inside me, it has always been there. My early childhood years were spent in a wonderful rural environment with a real forest just outside our front door. Since then I have been a young green Anglican and it has been a gradual journey with new knowledge and experiences adding to my commitment to care for creation. Growing up in a very spiritual household taught me so much about being faithful to your cause, and that’s what keeps me grounded and passionate all the time.

Educated people may understand environmentally pressing factors, but it is not just those in places of fortune who can turn the wheel around. We have an amazing base of people in our pews who would love to take action but have no proficiency in environmental management. With training and education, we could be able to assist people in developing a vision to serve and renew the earth in their own small corners and that includes divesting their investments and energy into renewables.

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People in faith ministries have the ability and the capacity to change the world. Looking at the quantity of people sitting either in a church, mosque, synagogue, etc., every day of the week and you tell me that all those people do not have some form of belief in saving this world and are waiting to take action. At the moment many are deeply buried in a material world. They are not aware of the consequences of their purchases. For example they do not connect investing their monies in mines to borrowing time from their children and coming generations; they think it’s preparing for the betterment of their future. By reaching out to people through their comfortable ways of communication, through the Church, it is possible to grow awareness. It is also important for those of us who are environmentally aware to set responsible examples. The Anglican Church has set a very good example in Southern Africa by divesting and moving their investments into renewables and also setting up a structure that focuses on earth keeping. It not only reduces our carbon footprint, but it is an opportunity to activate a sense of community with God’s creation, and to make a bold statement of where the Church stands.

Care for creation requires thorough understanding, faith and, I believe, positive thinking. The Anglican Communion can never achieve this on its own. We need for world leaders to join and like good stewards, mind God’s commandment to work and take care of the land. The thought of an environmentally peaceful society is the drive behind every effort. The day where the environment will be equally loved and protected is yet to come, but it needs coalition from all parties.

We are the lucky ones that have the ability to make change.

However it means dealing with reality, the risks to our future. It takes courage, but I believe in change, effort, as well as love for our precious planet, so now it's all about advocating and acting on climate change and other environmental issues. Those of us who can see the light, need to go into the deep waters and fish for more earth keepers. Jesus gives us the will.

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