

2008 – 3: Earth Stewardship

Submitted by: The Rev. Carol Stewart and the Rev. Rose Mary Foncree

Be it resolved that the 181st Annual Council of the Diocese of Mississippi urges every vestry and mission committee to request that every sermon or homily on April 27, 2008 (the Sunday nearest Earth Day) incorporate specific recommendations to communicants to increase responsible stewardship of God's Creation and that the text of Bishop Gray's 2008 letter (see below) on Earth Stewardship be either read out loud as part of the sermon/homily or printed in full in the church bulletin or provided to the parish or mission in an appropriate manner on Sunday April 27, 2008.

Letter from Bishop Gray
Sept. 15, 2007

As your Bishop, I must at times bring important issues to the forefront within the diocese. The state of the world is now such that all of us in Mississippi need to reexamine the moral responsibility that we have to protect God's Earth. The Creation surrounding us is a constant reminder of God's Grace given to his people. Our actions must honor that grace. As Episcopal Bishop of Mississippi I joined my fellow bishops from the surrounding southeastern states in 2003 to urge our parishes and missions to take on the joyful, weighty responsibility of stewardship of the earth that sustains us all.

In our joint letter, we urged congregations to educate their members on relevant environmental issues in each diocese. In Mississippi, we emphasized recycling, environmental education for children and adults, and education on water issues. The larger issue of climate change was not squarely addressed at the time and was not in the forefront of our message on environmental ministry. For me, this has changed.

As Christians we are stewards of God's Creation and have a duty and obligation to take care of the earth and its living systems. We feed ourselves by planting in the soil, we drink the earth's fresh water and are baptized in it, and we breathe its air. This earth is a gift from God that sustains humanity and all of life. "Global warming" appears to be happening in our time though its possible causes generate disagreement. If real, its results include severe damage to our children's future, the health and future of our communities, and the health of generations yet unborn. Because the consequences could be so dire, and because human actions are demonstrated to be likely causes, we cannot afford to delay action. We Christians, like most Americans, consume material things and energy at a rate never before seen in human history. I hope you will agree that conservative use of energy, fuel, and water, along with the reduction of waste and pollution are all ways to honor God's Grace toward us.

As your Bishop, I encourage you as an individual, parish, or mission, to recycle if you are not now doing so. I urge you to learn about and implement the actions outlined in the "Climate Change Top Ten". This list and other materials to help you understand climate change, and lists of recommended actions for individuals and for congregations will be made available at ([www,dioms.org](http://www.dioms.org)) the Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi's website. I hope that you will make use of these resources as they are a solid source of reference on this topic.

As your Bishop I ask senior and junior wardens and priests of every parish and mission in Mississippi to take action now. Identify someone in your congregation to coordinate recycling, energy conservation, and education of all your members in promoting care of the earth. In short,

start an environmental ministry in your church now. Our churches must lead by example. I further encourage and expect all wardens and priests to support this environmental ministry as an essential part of our response to the gifts we enjoy from our Creator. Time is of the essence in caring for this rare and beautiful gift God has given us, this earth, our island home.

Thank you for your time and action on this issue. I look forward to hearing about the progress of our individual parishes and missions in the very near future.