



## **Caretakers of God's Creation Vestry Papers March April 2022**

### **Climate Change, Biodiversity and Indigenous Peoples**

Francisco José Duque Gómez

It is an honor for me to address this group on issues of climate change, biodiversity and indigenous peoples.

Science is clear with respect to the climate crisis and biodiversity. We are reaching, exceeding and then ignoring the turning points for the world's environment that constitute a threat to mankind and all life on the planet – turning points that are hitting the poorest and most vulnerable the hardest.

#### **Rising global warming, species extinction and abuse of indigenous peoples rights**

The recent report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reveals that our planet is suffering the consequences of a global warming of one degree Celsius, which means extreme weather conditions, rising sea levels and melting of the Arctic Sea ice. The report further states that we have less time than we thought – just 11 years – to avoid much more serious droughts, flooding, wildfires, extreme heat and poverty for hundreds of millions of people.

A report from the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services published just a few months ago reveals that 1 million species are presently facing extinction. And this time, mass extinction is being caused by us, not by an asteroid.

Consider this: A recent report by the World Wide Fund for Nature shows that animal populations throughout the world have decreased by an average of 60 percent since 1970. This is a profound and shocking decimation of "God's creation" due to overuse and agriculture!

All of this is unnecessary. The recent EAT-Lancet Commission shows that we could feed the world's expected population of ten billion people in 2050 without having to cut down a single hectare more of tropical forest, provided we take certain measures that would involve agricultural efficiency, reducing food waste and eating more plants.

Also, human rights abuse of indigenous peoples are on the rise. Last year's Global Witness report shows that at least 164 defenders of the environment, many of them members of indigenous communities, were murdered for defending their lands against exploitation by the extraction industries.

#### **The challenges before us**

We religious leaders are very pleased to see the increased attention to peace and awareness caused by these events in relation to the issues regarding forests and the special rights of indigenous peoples, which are increasingly violated or ignored by one government after another. Such events are an extremely strategic and effective way to approach these three challenges: climate change, the loss of biodiversity and human rights abuses.

**Consider climate change:** If tropical deforestation were a country, its annual contribution to emissions causing climate change would exceed that of the entire European Union.

But at the same time, protection, restoration and sustainable management of forests offers up to one-third of the climate solution needed to fulfill the objectives of the Paris Agreement. This is not widely known, and it needs to be.

**Consider biodiversity:** Protection of tropical forests is vital if we are to confront the crisis of extinction, as it is estimated that these forests are home to two thirds of all plant and animal species.

Additionally, conservation of tropical forests is key to maintaining the cultures and ways of life of the indigenous peoples. Study after study shows that when the rights of indigenous people are protected, the forests are protected as well.

However, indigenous people and the forest communities are on the front line of the deforestation crisis. They are under threat by illegal felling and miners, by poachers, drug traffickers, agroindustry and even some governments.

### **Recognizing the territorial rights and authority of indigenous peoples is key**

The link between culture and the environment is obvious to the indigenous communities. All indigenous peoples share a spiritual, cultural, social and economic relationship to their traditional lands. The traditional laws, customs and practices reflect both their closeness to the land and their responsibility to preserve their traditional land for use by future generations. In Central America, the Amazon Basin, Asia, North America, Australia, Asia and Northern Africa, the physical and cultural survival of indigenous communities depends on the protection of their land and their resources.

Over the centuries, the relationship between indigenous peoples and their environment has been undermined by dispossession or forced displacement from traditional lands and sacred sites. Rights to the land, use of the land and resource management continue to be critical issues for indigenous peoples all over the world. Development projects, mining and forestry activities, and agricultural problems continue to displace indigenous people. Environmental damage has been substantial. Various species of fauna and flora have become extinct or threatened, unique ecosystems have been destroyed and rivers, as well as other bodies of water, have become intensely polluted. Commercial plant species have replaced the multiple varieties that were locally adapted and used in traditional agricultural systems, resulting in increased prevalence of industrialized agricultural methods

In Colombia, despite far-reaching policies that recognize special rights for indigenous peoples and minority ethnicities, enshrined in our National Constitution itself, which holds up the nation as a multiethnic and multicultural state, the indigenous peoples' rights to their territory and full recognition of their authority have yet to reach the degree necessary for their protection.

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*Born on September 17, 1950 in what is called the "Coffee Region" of Colombia, Bishop Gómez studied law and social sciences in Bogotá and later became a professor at different university centers. Ordained a priest on December 8, 1987, he served as a worker priest in various parishes and missions in Bogotá. He was consecrated Bishop on July 14, 2001 in the San Albán parish. In 2006, Bishop Gomez was the first Hispanic and foreign national nominated by the House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church in the United States to serve as Presiding Bishop of the Church in the United States.*

**Resources:**

- [Global Warming and Global Ministry](#), an ECF Vital Practices webinar presented by the Rev. P. Joshua Griffin, March 5, 2015
- [Sharing the Bounty of God's Garden](#) by Bill Eakins, Vestry Papers, November 2018
- [Greening Our Faith – Putting Belief into Action](#) by Fletcher Harper, Vestry Papers, March 2011
- [Earth: "And God saw that it was good."](#) by Nancy Davidge, an ECF Vital Practices blog, April 19, 2012

**Creation Care and Community Engagement**

Audra Abt

Coming in as the new vicar to Church of the Holy Spirit four years ago, I met a faithful, core group of Jesus followers whose passion for God and ministry in the world included a deep care for God's creation. Though many of this core group are aging and less spry than before (aren't we all, though?) they continued to wonder with me what our call looks like in the particular place where we're planted as Christ's Body.

Thinking about caring for God's creation as a ministry and not a program or activity, we found ourselves first contemplating our relationships. We began with the land around our church building. It includes a community garden space that hadn't been maintained in some seasons and ten acres of woods with a disused nature trail, also from years back. It's not that we didn't have a relationship to the land where we also worshiped, but some connections were broken, and others needed nurture.

When we looked around further, we realized that we could say the same thing about our relationships with our neighbors and wider community. While our church believes in connecting and collaborating with others outside our membership for the sake of seeking peace and restoring what's been damaged in our social life, over the years our connections to neighbors, like our land, needed tending.

**A ministry built on relationships**

We wanted to imagine a ministry involving care for creation that could restore our caring relationships with the land and its creatures *and* with our human neighbors.

Our approach was to nurture existing relationships and form new ones. We talked with church members, neighbors, parents, students, teachers and city employees, asking about what caring for creation meant to them.

What we quickly learned is that we are already connected to communities that can offer vibrant collaborations.

In our conversations, we learned that elementary and high schools, as well as technical schools and universities, are full of educators looking for community partners to develop applied service-learning opportunities for their students. Churches can become wonderful sites for learning, growth, experimentation and connection!

We served as an internship site for some environmental studies students from a local university. They helped lead a trail clearing day, and throughout the spring they documented native flowers and herbs in the woods. They attended Sunday worship to share what they were discovering.

### **Involving the neighboring community**

Ministry like this means going out to spaces like university environmental studies classrooms that aren't necessarily about "church" or even spirituality, at least not on the surface. It's meant being open to people outside our church membership, being curious about their needs and interests and passions, and saying "yes!" as often as possible to their ideas.

In our experience, those outside our church bring perspectives and knowledges to creation care that we need, while our "churchy" commitment to the divinity inherent in every part of creation is interesting and appealing to young people hungry for soul connection to the careers they're in educational training for.

We've also connected to a fifth grade class in a multi-year partnership for community-based service learning, inviting them to spend the first year building a relationship with the land (the woods, trail and garden) and experiment with building places along the trail for spiritual contemplation and eco-spiritual refreshment.

As we invite others to co-steward this part of creation, we don't rush into projects, but instead make time to linger, walk, stop and listen and learn to perceive the life around us that is a reflection of our Creator, to whom we are all bound in cycles of life and death and rebirth.

These young people are already developing skills for "reading" the environment and sharing what they're experiencing. Members of our church with Native American ancestry are working with them to envision planting native herbs along the path to design educational and spiritual healing grounds.

Neighbors who hadn't engaged the church before are noticing the activity, the laughter and trail clearing taking place in the woods, and stopping by to ask how they might be involved.

Forming community relationships takes extra time and energy, to be sure. But it's worth it, to see relationships unfolding among people who formerly were only loosely connected to each other and to creation. We're wondering together about how to create an organic garden, new brush piles for woodland creature habitats and a nature trail that invites people closer to God and non-human kindred.

### **How to begin**

*Ask questions.*

Start by asking members of your congregation who are teachers, school staff, parents and students about the community-oriented projects and assignments in which they're involved. At most educational

levels and institutions, community-engaged service learning is more of a priority, and climate change and environmental stewardship are concerns for many young people.

*Ask this.*

How could our church's landscape (no matter how small or large) become a place for equipping people, particularly young people in our wider community, to learn, grow and try out ideas for care of creation? *Show up in new spaces.*

One of our community collaborations was made possible when, as the vicar, I went to a public screening of a documentary about the environmental impacts of Hurricane Maria (having seen the flier on a university list serve a church member got me onto). During the Q & A, I asked a question and let drop my church wanted to be more engaged in creation care. Afterward, multiple professors approached me asking how our church might be a place where their students could fulfill requirements for community-engaged projects.

Not every church may have the kind of acreage we do, but the approach to creation care that we're finding most rewarding can work whether you have 10 acres, 1 acre, or less.

Care for creation as a ministry involves a deep commitment to becoming grounded in your particular place, and growing with your neighbors and wider community in the capacity to know, love and care for the plants, rocks, animals, air, water and soils in the name of love and in the name of Christ.

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#### **Resources:**

- [Formation Moves into the Neighborhood](#) by Greg Syler, an ECF Vital Practices blog, April 4, 2019
- [Sustainability in the Scrappy Church](#) by Nancy Frausto, Vestry Papers, July 2017
- [Sharing the Bounty of God's Garden](#) by Bill Eakins, Vestry Papers, November 2018
- [Greening Our Faith – Putting Belief into Action](#) by Fletcher Harper, Vestry Papers, March 2011

#### **Holy Hikes and Thin Places**

Haley Bankey

Growing up I was raised in the Episcopal Church by very faithful parents. I was expected to go to worship every week, attend youth group and was even confirmed in early middle school. And I was atheist. I was adamant that God did not exist and that all this 'church stuff' was irrelevant.

Then during my Freshman year of college, God literally smacked me on the back of the head and introduced himself.

I was driving home from the dorms along a windy back road in the Colorado Rockies and it was the week after 9/11. The globe was still reeling, and I was listening to the local radio station and watching the scenery I was passing through. It just so happened that this section of the forest had recently been burned to the ground by a forest fire, so I was surrounded by barrenness, ashy trees and monotone color. To add to the mood, it was a dreary, overcast day with intermittent drizzle.

The speaker on the car radio reminded listeners that there was going to be a national moment of prayer (or silence) in just a few minutes and encouraged everyone to set aside what they were doing to join in. I wasn't going to pray, but I decided to find a place to pull over so that I could observe the moment of silence – and if you've ever driven on a back road in the Rockies, you know that isn't an easy task.

It was coming up on time for the moment of prayer/silence, and I thought I would be out of luck finding a safe place to pull over when I came around a sharp switchback in the road that shifted my perspective in more ways than one. I came around a bend and was instantly in lush, evergreen forest at the top of a mountain that looked across a rolling landscape of gorgeous green. It was the perfect place to pull over to enjoy the view. I turned my engine off and stepped out of the car just as the moment of prayer/silence began, expecting to stand in silence in observance of all those lives lost in the attacks.

Instead, *everything changed*. The clouds that had been following me all day parted, a rainbow reached out across the valley in front of me, and I heard a voice clear as day say, "It will all be okay."

I began to bawl gut-wrenching sobs of joy and hope, and I knew in that moment that God was present, real and with me. I was in a thin space where heaven and earth were right in front of me in the most undeniable way, a way that I had never experienced in all my years of "going to church."

### **Holy Hiking & Wild Churches**

For many people, walking their Christian journey doesn't begin in a building. In fact, the building is often a roadblock with massive 'Do Not Enter: Falling Rocks' signs all over it. While I've learned to love all that a traditional Episcopal community brings to my faith, and in fact have now dedicated my life to helping build up these communities, it was the last place I wanted to be in the beginning. It took God's glorious creation to show me his majesty and to help me see myself through his eyes.

I encourage our faith leaders (and those of us who question our faith) to get out into the world in which we are stewards and to find God among the rocks, leaves, animals, chirps, rain, rocks and rivers. For some this is easy, and for others, I would like to share some resources.

Last summer I was led on a Holy Hike where we participated in the entire Eucharistic liturgy while walking a path through a nature preserve on the Seattle Sound. [Holy Hikes](#) is an eco-ministry committed to rebuilding communion between all of God's creation. The elements are in your backpack, and God is all around you. My favorite quote on their website is from 8-year-old Gabrielle, "I didn't know we could do church outside... I think God meant for us to do church outdoors!"

Another organization with a plethora of resources is the [Wild Church Network](#). From their website: "Wild Churches don't just "meet outside," they gather (when we can gather!) to recognize and learn to participate in the kindred interconnection of all beings, elements and places. It is a relationship, rooted in love, that the ancients described as Logos. A relationship that our gospel stories and teachers like

Matthew Fox, Tielhard de Chardin, Richard Rohr, Cynthia Bourgeault and so many others describe as Christ.”

### **Life in the Cracks**

I was lucky enough to have wide open country around me when I discovered God, and I live in an area of the country with sprawling landscapes and wildlife all around. I also visit big cities and urban landscapes all the time, and I find God’s creation there just as abundant. If you look closely, even in the densest concrete jungle, you can find vibrant life in the cracks: small window gardens three stories up on an apartment balcony, a neighborhood garden squeezed in an alley way, a seedling pushing up through a crack in the concrete reaching up toward the sun.

God’s creation is all around us. We only need to look. It is his gift to us, if only we can open our eyes and hearts to see its beauty.

***Haley Bankey** is Program Director for Leadership Resources at the Episcopal Church Foundation and also serves as the Executive Director for Gathering of Leaders (GOL). Prior to working with GOL, Haley served as the Director of Operations and Management for her home parish of St. George Church and School in San Antonio, Texas. She also ran her own faith-based operations consulting company with a primary focus on project management for multi-year, large scale community projects. She has been a website designer focusing on user experience, and is currently the Digital Product Owner for the Congregational Vitality Assessment Tool at ECF. Haley grew up in the Episcopal church in the Middle East and brings an international perspective to her work. Her passion is equipping lay and clergy leaders alike through leadership training and community building to grow God's church into the future.*

### **Resources:**

- [Power of Spiritual Practices](#) by Linda Buskirk, an ECF Vital Practices blog, October 24, 2016
- [Walk-Around Evangelism](#) by Alan Bentrup, an ECF Vital Practices blog, July 22, 2019
- [My Spiritual Art Journey](#) by Arnolito L. Romero, Vestry Papers, September 2021
- [Surfing and Spirituality](#) by Scott Claassen, Vestry Papers, March 2020

### **Make a Start on Creation Care**

ECFVP Editorial Team

It can be one thing to learn about a problem, and yet another to do something about it. The Episcopal Church has adopted a [Covenant for the Care of Creation](#), which states in part that, “For God’s sake, we will adopt practical ways of reducing our climate impact and living more humbly and gently on Earth as individuals, households, congregations, institutions and dioceses.” In one of our first forays into the important topic of creation care, ECF’s Vital Practices Team wanted to gather resources from around the church to help you start to take action steps towards living more gently on the Earth.

### **Five ways to begin**

1 The Episcopal Church has a [Carbon Tracker](#) that allows individuals to band together with like-minded folk to make environmentally-sound change. [“The Carbon Tracker](#) is a web-based application that helps

individuals, households, congregations and even dioceses, to measure their carbon footprint and take steps to shrink it to fit a sustainable life.” Check it out!

2 The [Episcopal Asset Map](#) is another resource for finding similarly-minded Episcopalians. “Check the diocesan page on the [Episcopal Asset Map](#) to find churches in your area dedicated to conserving resources and living harmoniously with creation. First, find your [diocese’s website](#), and search for “creation care.” Then leverage those relationships for regional learning and collaboration.”

3 The [Blessed Tomorrow Carbon Offset Program](#), powered by Cool Effect, provides a simple and powerful way for houses of worship to offset annual carbon emissions. This will zero out your carbon impact for the year and help families cook with clean and healthy stoves at the same time. Read more [here](#).

4 [Creation Justice Ministries](#) (formerly the National Council of Churches Eco-Justice Program) represents the creation care and environmental justice policies of major Christian denominations throughout the United States. You can find a section of [helpful resources](#) on their website.

5 [Interfaith Power & Light \(IPL\)](#) mobilizes people of faith and conscience to take action on climate change and care for those who are most harmed by its impacts. This includes advocacy for policy solutions including energy efficiency, renewable energy, and leadership to care for earth and [programs](#) to help congregations. Their website also includes a useful section of [resources](#).

#### **Resources:**

- [Greening Our Faith – Putting Belief into Action](#) by Fletcher Harper, Vestry Papers, March 2011
- [Meeting God in a Faith Garden](#) by Timothy Goldman, Vestry Papers, March 2011
- [Earth Day Resources](#), an ECF Vital Practices tool
- [One Cup at a Time...](#) by Jeremiah Sierra, an ECF Vital Practices blog, August 20, 2012

#### **Eco-Justice Lives in the Heart**

Marc Andrus

Climate crisis has been called the “long emergency,” threatening all of life both now and in generations to come. For the Episcopal Church, meeting this threat starts in the heart, with the lens of justice. Matthew 6:21 (NIV) says, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” There is no we/they in this big work; rather, as invoked powerfully by Martin Luther King Jr., we understand that:

“In a real sense all life is inter-related. All [people] are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be...This is the inter-related structure of reality.”

This essay uses the accounts of two communities, one near the Salton Sea in southern California, and a second community, the Kavalina Village in Alaska, to explore our call as Episcopalians to eco-justice and ways that our Episcopal branch of the Jesus movement can help care for creation.



## **Called in our baptismal covenant to eco-justice**

Because the threat to the world from climate change and environmental degradation is planetary, there are many approaches to both understanding and addressing the problem(s). The approach the Episcopal Church has chosen to meet climate and environmental degradation is one that concentrates our energies on *justice* – justice is the homeland of the Church.

The call of the prophets is heard anew within the life of the Church week after week as the people of God gather to be transformed by word and sacrament. Who can tell how many Episcopalians have been transformed towards the work of justice by the use of our Baptismal Covenant, introduced as part of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer. In addition to affirming our belief in the Trinity, we also make and renew promises to, among other things, “...strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being.” In the Diocese of California we often add, “...*respect the dignity of the Earth* and every human being.” The Baptismal Covenant shapes the Episcopal Church to approach climate change and environmental degradation through justice. The Baptismal Covenant is shaping the contents of our hearts.

When we name justice as the focus of the Episcopal Church’s approach to environmental issues, and when we invoke the Baptismal Covenant as forming our justice emphasis, we are saying that the environmental crisis is a spiritual crisis. Turning back climate change begins with the nurture of a healthy heart, spiritually speaking. Acting at the level of the Spirit has been a hallmark of the Presiding Bishop’s delegation to the United Nations climate summits, beginning with Paris in 2015. “Popup worship,” prayer cards, online worship, chants and hymns, banners and painted umbrellas – as well as our General Convention resolutions on the environment – have characterized the unique contributions of Episcopal delegations to the United Nations.

## **Eco-justice means helping the most vulnerable**

Why both climate change and environmental degradation? What is meant by these two terms? What ties climate change and environmental degradation together is human action that damages the biosphere, the area of life on the earth; however, environmental degradation has a more easily discerned human cause as compared to climate impacts.

For example, environmental degradation is the result of direct actions, such as spraying pesticides and “throwing away” (there is no ‘away,’ as environmental activists have astutely pointed out) plastic containers. Though environmental degradation can be clearly traced back to the polluter, the degradation is often unseen until it shows up as disease and ill health, far too often in Black, brown and Indigenous communities and in plant and animal populations.

Human choices are also driving the climate crisis, albeit in a less direct way. The burning of fossil fuels – to power vehicles, to produce electricity and to generate the dynamism that makes industry work – creates a family of gases that are collectively called Green House Gases (GHGs). As the name indicates, GHGs make the whole atmosphere work like the ultimate greenhouse, trapping radiant energy from the sun and heating it up, but also “weirding” the atmosphere – leading to extreme climate events that include both the “coldest” and “warmest” winters we’ve ever known and both flooding and extreme drought. Because climate change works through immense, complex atmospheric and oceanic processes, rather than the simpler route of dumping toxins on the land or in bodies of water, it is harder to trace the routes of responsibility for climate disasters.

The story of the Salton Sea community that follows illustrates the effects of environmental degradation, and the Kivalina community story illustrates the difficulty faced by populations on the leading edge of climate change effects. Both communities live with what is often called *eco-injustice*, a term used to describe places where climate change or environmental degradation is being experienced by vulnerable people. Eco-injustice sites and areas of climate emergencies are often located near poor and minority communities, or other areas lacking the necessary resources to cope with negative environmental impacts.

### **Environmental degradation of the Salton Sea**

The Salton Sea is the largest lake in California, located near the border with Mexico and the city of San Diego, and a poignant example of how environmental degradation can devastate local, vulnerable people. Formed by the conjunction of an extreme flooding event in the early twentieth century with regional agricultural practices that inadvertently contained the flood waters, the Salton Sea has no outlets to the ocean. Over the course of the twentieth century, the waters flowing into the Salton Sea became increasingly polluted with runoff pesticides and fertilizers. Then megadrought gripped the West, and the waters of the Salton Sea began to evaporate. Now, wind lifts dust from the newly exposed playas, irritating the skin of people living near the sea and causing respiratory illnesses.

Who lives near the Salton Sea? For decades, sparkling stretches of water enticed the wealthy, who moored their yachts in the Salton Sea's marinas. As the toxicity in the water began to cause massive die-offs of fish and birds – 150,000 eared grebes died in April 1992 and 7.6 million fish were killed in August 1999 – the attraction of the Salton Sea waned, and the wealthy tourists decamped. The people who remain are those who have little choice – Indigenous peoples on designated reservation land, Latino/Latina agricultural workers, and prisoners. The Salton Sea tragically demonstrates what environmental degradation looks like, and how it affects Black, brown and Indigenous communities.

### **Climate Change and Kivalina Village**

Far to the north of the Salton Sea, on the western coast of Alaska, is the Indigenous island community of Kivalina, where human-induced climate change is already bearing down on vulnerable people's lives. With a population of 442, Kivalina Village is comprised largely of Episcopalian, Inupiat people. They were relocated there over a century ago, and now must find a new home off the island. Rising sea levels mean that the shores of the island are increasingly battered by waves, eroding the land. As the sea levels rise, water is inundating Kivalina Village, literally washing it away.

Who is responsible for making Kivalina uninhabitable? Climate change is behind the rising sea levels; the scientific community is virtually unanimous in this conclusion, and in related assessments, that climate change is human-caused. Kivalina has gone to court to try to hold major oil and gas companies responsible and to secure funds to help the community relocate.

Still, despite consensus that humans are to blame for Kivalina's demise, the indirect chain of causation we find in climate change has made Kivalina's legal efforts unsuccessful. To date, no one is willing to accept responsibility for helping this vulnerable tribal community relocate. How urgent is this emergency? By 2003, about half the livable space on the island had been lost, and some estimates predict that by 2025 the island will be completely uninhabitable. Kivalina is a real, living example of how climate change unequally bears down on Black, brown and Indigenous people.

## How shall we respect the dignity of every human being and all of life?

These narratives of communities striving to address the impacts of the climate crisis and environmental degradation are foundational for the Episcopal Church. How then shall we live sustainably, with each other and all of life? With intentionality – seeking the blessing of the divine in prayer; experiences of God’s beautiful, created world; being true students of what is driving devastating impacts of life on earth today; and by making life-sustaining choices.

Presiding Bishop Curry has given the Episcopal Church a [Care of Creation Pledge](#) wherein we learn each other’s stories, stand with the most vulnerable and live more gently on the earth. Episcopalians are answering this call with our own way of being Christian – with resolutions embracing both science and faith and with the inspiration that prayer and our common worship can bring.

The reality of the Salton Sea and Kivalina can be a lens for how all on planet Earth need the hearts, minds and spirits of faithful Episcopalians to do the work of environmental justice. Other impacts are readily understood – the effects of the climate crisis on wildfires, floods and droughts that result in food insecurity and mass migrations and more. This is a moment to embrace the “long emergency,” renewing the earth and caring for creation in ways aligned with our faith and tradition. We can learn, we can work together, we can change our own habits, and we can be advocates for policies and resources to support the most vulnerable among us.

As you live your Baptismal Covenant, taking up care of the earth as a true embrace of justice, consider the following opportunities:

- Look deeply in your own heart, especially by taking time to experience the created world and helping others to do the same. This renewal and remembrance of wonder in all that God has made can strengthen our resolve, for we will protect what we love.
- Review the [Presiding Bishop's Creation Care Pledge](#), which calls us to share our stories about creation; to stand with those on the margin, who are suffering because of environmental degradation and climate change; and to begin life giving practices that can sustain life.
- Sign on to our Office of Governmental Relations’ [website for care of creation](#) and support advocacy aligned with Episcopal Church policy.
- Follow your passion for the world God has made by taking part in activities such as [Holy Hikes](#), a ministry that supports experience and worship in natural settings; joining others in your church in learning how you can lower greenhouse gas emissions in your community through the on-line program [Sustain Island Home](#); participating in the [Episcopal Church’s Good News Gardens](#) movement; or joining in [tree planting](#) as a church community, among other many actions.

As people of faith, and as Episcopalians, we can answer the call to prayer and to action, for the sake of God’s beautiful creation and the most vulnerable among us. We trust that this life – a more sustainable life – will be rich in wholeness and blessing.

### Resources:

- [Global Warming and Global Ministry](#), an ECF Vital Practices webinar presented by the Rev. P. Joshua Griffin, March 5, 2015
- [Sharing the Bounty of God’s Garden](#) by Bill Eakins, Vestry Papers, November 2018

- [Greening Our Faith – Putting Belief into Action](#) by Fletcher Harper, Vestry Papers, March 2011
- [Earth: “And God saw that it was good.”](#) by Nancy Davidge, an ECF Vital Practices blog, April 19, 2012

## **La ecojusticia vive en el corazón**

Marc Andrus

### **La ecojusticia vive en el corazón**

La crisis climática ha sido llamada la "larga emergencia", que amenaza toda la vida tanto ahora como en las generaciones venideras. Para la Iglesia Episcopal, hacer frente a esta amenaza comienza en el corazón, con la lente de la justicia. Mateo 6:21 (NVI) dice: "Porque donde esté vuestro tesoro, allí estará también vuestro corazón". No hay un nosotros/ellos en esta gran obra, sino que, como invocó poderosamente Martin Luther King Jr.:

*En un sentido real, toda la vida está interrelacionada. Todas [las personas] están atrapadas en una red ineludible de reciprocidad, atadas en una sola prenda de destino. Lo que afecta a uno directamente, afecta a todos indirectamente. Yo nunca podré ser lo que debo ser hasta que tú seas lo que debes ser, y tú nunca podrás ser lo que debes ser hasta que yo sea lo que debo ser... Ésta es la estructura interrelacionada de la realidad".*

Este ensayo utiliza los relatos de dos comunidades, una cerca del Mar Salton en el sur de California y una segunda comunidad, el pueblo de Kavalina en Alaska, para explorar nuestro llamado como episcopales a la ecojusticia y las formas en que nuestra rama episcopal del movimiento de Jesús puede ayudar a cuidar la creación.

### **Llamados a la eco-justicia en nuestro Pacto Bautismal**

Dado que la amenaza del cambio climático y de la degradación del medioambiente es planetaria, hay muchos enfoques para comprender y abordar el problema. El enfoque que la Iglesia Episcopal ha elegido para hacer frente a la degradación del clima y del medioambiente es uno que concentra nuestras energías en la *justicia*: la justicia es la patria de la Iglesia.

La llamada de los profetas se oye nuevamente en la vida de la Iglesia, semana tras semana, cuando el pueblo de Dios se reúne para ser transformado por la palabra y los sacramentos. ¿Quién puede decir cuántos episcopales han sido transformados hacia el trabajo de la justicia por el uso de nuestro Pacto Bautismal, introducido como parte del Libro de Oración Común de 1979? Además de afirmar nuestra creencia en la Trinidad, también hacemos y renovamos las promesas de, entre otras cosas, "...luchar por la justicia y la paz entre todas las personas y respetar la dignidad de todo ser humano". En la Diócesis de California solemos añadir: "...respetar la dignidad de la Tierra y de todo ser humano". El Pacto Bautismal da forma a la Iglesia Episcopal para abordar el cambio climático y la degradación del medioambiente a través de la justicia. El Pacto Bautismal da forma al contenido de nuestros corazones.

Cuando nombramos la justicia como el enfoque de la Iglesia Episcopal a los temas ambientales y cuando invocamos el Pacto Bautismal como formador de nuestro énfasis en la justicia, estamos diciendo que la crisis ambiental es una crisis espiritual. Para revertir el cambio climático hay que alimentar un corazón sano, espiritualmente hablando. Actuar a nivel del Espíritu ha sido un sello distintivo de la delegación del Obispo Presidente en las cumbres climáticas de las Naciones Unidas, empezando por París en 2015. La

"adoración emergente", las tarjetas de oración, la adoración en línea, los cantos e himnos, las pancartas y las sombrillas pintadas - así como nuestras resoluciones de la Convención General sobre el medioambiente - han caracterizado las contribuciones únicas de las delegaciones episcopales a las Naciones Unidas.

### **Justicia ecológica significa ayudar a los más vulnerables**

¿Por qué el cambio climático y la degradación del medioambiente? ¿Qué significan estos dos términos? Lo que une al cambio climático y a la degradación medioambiental es la acción humana que daña la biosfera, el área de la vida en la tierra; sin embargo, la degradación medioambiental tiene una causa humana más fácilmente discernible frente a los impactos climáticos.

Por ejemplo, la degradación del medioambiente es el resultado de acciones directas, como rociar plaguicidas y el hecho de "tirar" (no hay "tirar", como han señalado astutamente los activistas medioambientales) envases de plástico. Aunque la degradación del medioambiente puede ser claramente rastreada hasta el contaminador, la degradación a menudo no se ve hasta que se manifiesta como enfermedad y mala salud, con excesiva frecuencia en las comunidades negras, marrones e indígenas y en las poblaciones de plantas y animales.

Las decisiones humanas también están impulsando la crisis climática, aunque de forma menos directa. La quema de combustibles fósiles - para propulsar vehículos, producir electricidad y generar el dinamismo que hace funcionar la industria - crea una familia de gases que se denominan colectivamente gases de efecto invernadero (GEI). Como su nombre indica, los GEI hacen que toda la atmósfera funcione como un invernadero, atrapando la energía radiante del sol y calentándola, pero también "rarificando" la atmósfera, lo que da lugar a fenómenos climáticos extremos que incluyen tanto los inviernos más "fríos" como los más "cálidos" que jamás hayamos conocido, así como las inundaciones y las sequías extremas. Dado que el cambio climático funciona mediante inmensos y complejos procesos atmosféricos y oceánicos, en lugar de la vía más sencilla de verter toxinas en la tierra o en las masas de agua, es más difícil trazar las rutas de responsabilidad de los desastres climáticos.

La historia de la comunidad del Mar Salton que sigue a continuación ilustra los efectos de la degradación medioambiental y la de la comunidad de Kivalina ilustra la dificultad a la que se enfrentan las poblaciones que se encuentran en la vanguardia de los efectos del cambio climático. Ambas comunidades viven lo que se denomina ecoinjusticia, un término que se utiliza para describir los lugares donde el cambio climático o la degradación del medioambiente afectan intensamente a gente vulnerable. Los lugares de ecoinjusticia y las zonas de emergencia climática suelen estar situados cerca de comunidades pobres y minoritarias, o de otras zonas que carecen de los recursos necesarios para hacer frente a los impactos ambientales negativos.

### **Degradación medioambiental del Mar Salton**

El Mar Salton es el mayor lago de California, situado cerca de la frontera con México y de la ciudad de San Diego, y un ejemplo penoso de cómo la degradación medioambiental puede devastar a la población local vulnerable. Formado por la conjunción de una inundación extrema a principios del siglo XX con las prácticas agrícolas regionales que contuvieron inadvertidamente las aguas de la inundación, el Mar Salton no tiene salidas al océano. A lo largo del siglo XX, las aguas que desembocan en el Mar Salton se contaminaron cada vez más con pesticidas y fertilizantes de escorrentía. Posteriormente, la megasequía se apoderó del Oeste y las aguas del Mar Salton empezaron a evaporarse. Ahora, el viento levanta el

polvo de las playas recién expuestas, irritando la piel de la gente que vive cerca del Mar y provocando enfermedades respiratorias.

¿Quiénes viven cerca del Mar Salton? Durante décadas, las centelleantes extensiones de agua atraían a los ricos, que amarraban sus yates en los puertos deportivos del Mar Salton. Cuando la toxicidad del agua empezó a provocar la muerte masiva de peces y de aves: 150.000 zampullines murieron en abril de 1992 y 7,6 millones de peces murieron en agosto de 1999, la atracción del Mar Salton disminuyó y los turistas ricos se marcharon. La gente que permanece es la que no tiene muchas opciones: los pueblos indígenas en tierras de reserva designadas, los trabajadores agrícolas latinos y los presos. El Mar Salton demuestra trágicamente cómo es la degradación medioambiental y cómo afecta a las comunidades negras, marrones e indígenas.

### **El cambio climático y el pueblo de Kivalina**

Muy al norte del Mar Salton, en la costa occidental de Alaska, se encuentra la comunidad insular indígena de Kivalina, donde el cambio climático inducido por el hombre ya está afectando la vida de gente vulnerables. La aldea de Kivalina, con una población de 442 habitantes, está compuesta en su mayor parte por gente del pueblo Inupiat, que fue reubicado allí hace más de un siglo y ahora debe encontrar un nuevo hogar fuera de la isla. La subida del nivel del Mar hace que las costas de la isla estén cada vez más azotadas por las olas, erosionando el terreno. A medida que el nivel del Mar sube, el agua inunda la aldea de Kivalina, arrasándola.

¿Quién es el responsable de que Kivalina sea inhabitable? El cambio climático está detrás de la subida del nivel del Mar; la comunidad científica es prácticamente unánime en esta conclusión, así como en las evaluaciones afines, de que el cambio climático es causado por el hombre. Kivalina ha acudido a los tribunales para tratar de responsabilizar a las principales empresas petroleras y de gas y para conseguir fondos que ayuden a la comunidad a reubicarse.

Sin embargo, a pesar del consenso de que los humanos son los culpables de la desaparición de Kivalina, la cadena de causalidad indirecta que encontramos en el cambio climático ha hecho que los esfuerzos legales de Kivalina no den fruto. Hasta la fecha, nadie está dispuesto a aceptar la responsabilidad de ayudar a esta vulnerable comunidad tribal a reubicarse. ¿Cómo es de urgente esta emergencia? En 2003, se había perdido aproximadamente la mitad del espacio habitable de la isla y algunas estimaciones predicen que para 2025 la isla será completamente inhabitable. Kivalina es un ejemplo real y vivo de cómo el cambio climático se ceba de forma desigual con los negros, los morenos y los indígenas.

### **¿Cómo vamos a respetar la dignidad de cada ser humano y de toda la vida?**

Estos relatos de comunidades que se esfuerzan por hacer frente a los impactos de la crisis climática y la degradación del medioambiente son fundamentales para la Iglesia Episcopal. ¿Cómo debemos entonces vivir de forma sostenible, entre nosotros y con toda la vida? Con intencionalidad: buscando la bendición de lo divino en la oración; experimentando el bello mundo creado por Dios; siendo verdaderos estudiantes de lo que está provocando los impactos devastadores de la vida en la tierra hoy en día; y tomando decisiones que sostengan la vida.

El Obispo Presidente Curry ha dado a la Iglesia Episcopal un Compromiso de Cuidado de la Creación en el que aprendemos las historias de los demás, apoyamos a los más vulnerables y vivimos con más delicadeza en la tierra. Los episcopales están respondiendo a esta llamada con nuestra manera de ser

cristianos, con resoluciones que abarcan tanto la ciencia como la fe y con la inspiración que la oración y nuestro culto común pueden aportar.

La realidad del Mar Salton y de Kivalina puede ser una lente para ver cómo todo el planeta Tierra necesita los corazones, las mentes y los espíritus de los episcopales fieles para hacer el trabajo de la justicia medioambiental. Otros impactos son fácilmente discernibles: los efectos de la crisis climática en los incendios forestales, las inundaciones y las sequías que provocan inseguridad alimentaria y migraciones masivas, entre otros. Este es un momento para adoptar la "larga emergencia", renovando la tierra y cuidando la creación de forma alineada con nuestra fe y tradición. Podemos aprender, podemos trabajar juntos, podemos cambiar nuestros propios hábitos, y podemos ser defensores de las políticas y los recursos para apoyar a los más vulnerables entre nosotros.

Mientras viva su Alianza Bautismal, asumiendo el cuidado de la tierra como un verdadero compromiso hacia la justicia, considere las siguientes oportunidades:

- Mire profundamente en su propio corazón, especialmente dedicando tiempo a experimentar el mundo creado y ayudando a otros a hacer lo mismo. Esta renovación y recuerdo de la maravilla en todo lo que Dios ha hecho puede fortalecer nuestra determinación, ya que protegeremos lo que amamos.
- Repase el Compromiso del Obispo Presidente para el Cuidado de la Creación, que nos llama a compartir nuestras historias sobre la creación; a apoyar a los que están en el margen, que están sufriendo a causa de la degradación del medioambiente y el cambio climático; y a iniciar las prácticas de dar vida que pueden sostener la vida.
- Regístrese en el sitio web para el cuidado de la creación de nuestra Oficina de Relaciones Gubernamentales y apoye la defensa alineada con la norma de la Iglesia Episcopal.
- Siga su pasión por el mundo que Dios ha hecho participando en actividades como Holy Hikes, un ministerio que apoya la experiencia y el culto en entornos naturales; uniéndose a otros en su iglesia para aprender cómo puede reducir las emisiones de gases de efecto invernadero en su comunidad mediante el programa en línea Sustain Island Home; participando en el movimiento Good News Gardens de la Iglesia Episcopal; o uniéndose a la plantación de árboles como comunidad eclesial, entre otras muchas acciones.

Como personas de fe, y como episcopales, podemos responder a la llamada a la oración y a la acción, por el bien de la hermosa creación de Dios y de los más vulnerables entre nosotros. Confiamos en que esta vida - una vida más sostenible - será rica en plenitud y bendición.

*El Reverendísimo Marc Andrus, PhD, es el octavo obispo de la Diócesis Episcopal de California, elegido en 2006 después de su ministerio como Obispo Sufragáneo en la Diócesis Episcopal de Alabama. Criado entre las colinas y los lagos del este de Tennessee, el obispo Marc desarrolló un temprano amor por la belleza de la tierra y una llamada a protegerla. Su activismo, basado en la oración contemplativa, se ha centrado en los derechos de los pueblos vulnerables, la justicia medioambiental y el cambio climático. El Obispo Marc ha tenido el privilegio de liderar las delegaciones del Obispo Presidente en las Conferencias Climáticas de la ONU (2015-2021). Con el reverendo Matthew Fox, PhD, es coautor del premiado libro Stations of the Cosmic Crisis (Unity Press, 2016), y es autor de Brothers in the Beloved Community: The Friendship of Thich Nhat Hanh and Martin Luther King Jr. (Parallax Press, 2021). Vive en San Francisco con su esposa, Sheila.*

**Recursos:**

- [El Acuerdo de París y 1,5 grados Celsius](#), La Iglesia Episcopal, 1 de abril, 2021
- [El Obispo Presidente anuncia la delegación de la Iglesia Episcopal a la conferencia COP26 de las Naciones Unidas](#), La Iglesia Episcopal, 6 de octubre, 2021
- [52 maneras de cuidar de la creación](#), Recursos Metodistas Unidos, Formación Espiritual

## **Let Earth be Heaven**

Rachel Taber-Hamilton

Indigenous cultures bear traditional stories that teach lessons about the nature of the cosmos and of the natural world that are critical to human survival. Within my Indigenous tradition of storytelling, generationally transmitted cultural beliefs establish the context of how to live in right relationship with all our relations. The thing is, our relatives include: rivers, mountains, valleys, clouds, stars, animals, insects, winds, planets, rock formations, fire, soil, seashells, plants, trees, flowers, pollen, minerals, metals, tools, medicines, rain and everything we interact with or encounter within our human existence. We conceive of our connection to one another as intergenerational – as transcending time – in the belief that both our ancestors and generations yet to come rely on one another in the choices and direction taken by we who live in the present time.

Our sacred stories cast an understanding of community that is expansive. We live in recognition of the vulnerability of life, that all that exists has intrinsic value and that we must maintain and cultivate our interdependent relationships with all our relations as a sacred responsibility essential to our identity as Indigenous people. Christian Western European colonizers brought a very different worldview with them when they “discovered” the lands where we had dwelled for millennia. They did not view Indigenous people as related to Europeans, even as they did not view the new environment they encountered as valuable for its own sake, but only as profitable, exploitable resources within an economy of venture capitalism. Indigenous people were market currency for commercial trade, along with everything else.

## **A catastrophic collision of cultural cosmologies**

The cultural cosmology of colonial-era Christian Europeans developed over several centuries. Pope Nicholas V issued the papal bull *Dum Diversas* in 1452 as the first in a series of papal bulls reflective of the dominant Christian worldview of the time. In it, the papacy sanctioned the seizure of non-Christian lands and the enslavement of any occupants, granting the King of Portugal permission: “To invade, search out, capture, vanquish and subdue all Saracens and pagans whatsoever, and other enemies of Christ ... and [claim] all movable and immovable goods whatsoever held and possessed by them and to reduce their persons to perpetual slavery... and to convert them to his use and profit.”

The society and Christian belief system of fifteenth century Western Europe reflected and supported a highly stratified hierarchical social structure. The culture and theology of the time were specific to the history of Western Civilization with its ideological links to Classical Greece and Ancient Rome. The philosophical construct of ranking the world's organisms goes back to Aristotle's biology in which animals are hierarchically ranked over plants based on their ability to move and possess sensation. Aristotle's non-religious concept of higher and lower organisms was adopted by natural philosophers to form the basis of the *Scala Naturae* (“Ladder of Nature”). The scala became associated with theological



ideas of divine order towards perfection, assigning a sliding scale of valuation from lower to higher orders of being.

The creation story in the Book of Genesis undergirded the belief that God had created a graduated order of beings ranging from lower forms (plants/animals) to the higher forms in the crowning achievement of the creation of people. The *Scala Naturae* was long the dominant worldview of European thinkers and became the basis for the theological model of a Great Chain of Being outlined within the theology of Thomas Aquinas in the First Part of his *Summa Theologica*, a section of writing first drafted in the mid 1200's. By the late Middle Ages and the Age of Discovery, the great chain was seen as a God-given and unchangeable ordering, with Christian nations and their kings (along with church hierarchy) placed at the top of the known world order.

The first encounters between Christian Western European explorers and the Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island [\[i\]](#) constituted an epic clash of cultural cosmologies, as catastrophic and transformative as two galaxies colliding over eons of cosmic evolution. Through the forces of colonization, Indigenous communities and the environments in which they lived experienced a gradual process of a human-imposed mass extinction, resulting in an era of climate change. [\[ii\]](#)

### **Time to dismantle old ways of thinking and believing**

Human beliefs have the power to impact the Earth like a rogue meteor. However, a worldview that is essentially Indigenous has an inherent capacity to change the course of human history and enhance our capacity for survival. Christianity must make the journey of its own sacred story – it must die to an old way of thinking and believing by setting aside the values of the empires it has helped create since the time of Constantine the Great. The dominant culture Church must let go of beliefs and traditions that continue to deny people their basic humanity through classification and discrimination. Our theology and ethics can no longer place human beings at the top of a cosmic pyramid of value that fails to recognize the interdependent nature of species and environments.

Through the renewal of theology and Christology – through the creation of a new Sacred Story – the world and cosmos in which we live and have our being must be identified as the sacred realm where God dwells. Heaven is *here* for us to either cultivate or to destroy, and there is no escape for the elect or for the wealthy. In the here and now, in this present time, our spiritual ancestors and any future generation to come are met in the decisive moment of the present. The commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves requires a cosmologically expansive understanding of who and what are our neighbors – are we willing to love enough to save the Earth?

The cosmos that we are blessed to inhabit is a profoundly wondrous, dynamic place of creativity, connection and inter-dependence. The ecological and social challenges of our time require both drawing on the latest scientific knowledge and drawing on human beliefs that frame human experience within a context of sacred story. In human history, there has never been a greater need for repentance *and* innovation, a more needful time for love *and* knowledge, a deeper darkness so desperate for light *and* mutual understanding.

People of faith were made for this time. The power to transform the world is ours and always has been, and the time has come to accept the responsibility to change a worldview that has directly contributed to the current climate crisis and ongoing species loss. Let our new Sacred Story speak of salvation in terms of reconciliation with the Earth itself and let our New Community include all that God has made.

[i] Turtle Island is a name for Earth or for North and Central America, used by some Indigenous peoples in Canada and the United States.

[ii] Kocha, A., Brierleya, C., Maslina M.M., Lewisab, S.L. (2019). Earth system impacts of the European arrival and Great Dying in the Americas after 1492. *Quaternary Science Reviews*, Vol. 207, pp. 13-36

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*Rachel grew up in a multi-cultural and mixed-race heritage of First Nations (Shackan, British Columbia), Pennsylvania Dutch and Scots-Irish and has a life-long passion for cross-cultural communication, preservation of traditional life ways and folk traditions, social diversity and ethnic ministries. She holds a BA in Theater Arts from SUNY Geneseo, an MA in Cultural Anthropology from the University of Alaska Fairbanks, and an MDiv from Loyola University in Chicago, along with post-graduate work at Indiana University in the area of Folklore Studies.*

#### **Resources:**

- [A Native Sense of Stewardship](#) by Forrest Cuch and Michael Carney, Vestry Papers, September 2020
- [Global Warming and Global Ministry](#), an ECF Vital Practices webinar presented by P. Joshua Griffin, March 5, 2015
- [Pandemic Learnings in Navajoland](#) by Leon Sampson and Gerlene Gordy, Vestry Papers, January 2021
- [We Have What They Seek by Ken Kroohs](#), an ECF Vital Practices blog, February 21, 2022

#### **Seeking Refugia: Hope for a World in Climate Crisis**

Josh Anderson

Serious consideration of our current climate crisis is, in a word, frightening. Scientists warn of tipping points and an ecological event horizon. Some say we've already sealed our fate and are bound for imminent devastation. Others profess hope – but only if our mitigation efforts are drastically scaled up, which seems impossible in a world where even acknowledging the existence of a climate emergency is extremely politically charged.

In the midst of this, not quite four years ago, I became a father. I don't know what the world will look like for my son as he grows into adulthood and perhaps considers becoming a parent himself. I don't know what planetary legacy will be left to him. On an intellectual level, this is a bleak thought. And yet, when I see him consider the earth, dig in the sand, run in the rain, turn his face to the sun, wade into the ocean – I can't help but feel hopeful.

## Hope in small spaces, hidden shelters

Another thing that has stirred this whisper of hope is the recently released book *Refugia Faith: Seeking Hidden Shelters, Ordinary Wonders, and the Healing of the Earth* by Debra Rienstra. Perhaps it



was meant for me, as it is dedicated to the author's children "and all young people who long for refugia and worry about the future." The book takes its name from a biological concept: in an extreme event, like a wildfire or volcanic eruption, small spaces in the affected area are spared from the worst damage. Refugia are "tiny coverts where plants and creatures hide from destruction, hidden shelters where life persists and out of which new life emerges."

Rienstra sees this scientific concept as a spiritual metaphor for our relationship with the earth and describes nurturing spaces of refuge in both the biological world and in our cultures and spirits. As she writes, "The refugia model calls us to look for the seed of life where we are, concentrate on protecting and nurturing a few good things, let what is good and beautiful grow and connect and spread. Trust God's work." This is not a textbook, though it is written by a professor. Nor is it an instruction manual. It is not didactic nor political. If anything it is a thoughtful, researched love letter to the beauty of the earth, the wonder of our interconnectedness, to particularity and specificity and incarnation.

## Biology, theology, sociology and poetry weave an honest and hopeful vision

*Refugia Faith* carries readers through the movement and growth of weather and life in the Upper Midwest. From October to September, we journey through the seasons there. We travel the wilderness of Lent, consider the disorientation of COVID lockdowns, soak in the warmth of summer and face the icy bleakness of winter. The table of contents offers a map for this journey, which will carry us "From Despair to Preparation," "From Alienation to Kinship," "From Consuming to Healing," "From Avoiding to Lamenting," "From Resignation to Gratitude," "From Passivity to Citizenship" and finally, "From Indifference to Attention." Each chapter considers current work in ecology and refugia and how that intersects with faith, culture and community, as well as sections dealing very much with place and land that offer glimpses of relationship, connection, embodiment – of what it means to be human on the earth.

Rienstra grew up in Western Michigan and lives there now after some time away. While the ideas in this book are universal, it is decidedly anchored in place – in the dunes and grasses, the creeks and cottonwoods, the city streets and developments that are so like other locales, yet still unique.

This specificity of setting struck a particular chord for me, as I spent the first decade of my life in Southwest Michigan. While I would generally describe myself as "indoorsy," the Michigan of my memory has those sparkling memories of childhood in nature. I marked seasons with my neighbor-cousin, imagining we were forest druids, searching for magical creatures in fresh puddles, sledding down huge drifts of lake-effect snow. There were camping trips and lake days, and the smell of rain and the hot sun on my head – the land of sense, possibility and delight that my son now inhabits.

Rienstra says she hopes the book will “spark imagination,” and it does that. It weaves threads of biology, theology, sociology and poetry into a consideration that is somehow both achingly honest and defiantly hopeful. Writer, farmer and environmentalist Wendell Berry describes the book as “joyful, though [it has] considered all the facts.”

### **A call to joy, hope and action**

*Refugia Faith* winds up in a call to joy, to hope and to action – even when we can’t be certain of positive outcomes or what restoration will look like. And while I was deeply grateful for that hard-won hope at the end, the kind of Easter hope that grows out of suffering and death, what most stirred hope for me was spread throughout the text. It was the understanding that refugia need not be expansive, immediate and perfect. It happens on the small scale of individuals and communities. It can be “good enough,” and failures are just stepping stones and opportunities to learn. It is realized in small acts and patchwork construction.

This, I think, is what makes refugia seem possible and kindles hope for me. While global action and massive-scale change are necessary, the greatness of this need can leave me frozen. What difference is it ultimately going to make for me to sort recyclables or plant a tree when the giant machines of industry roar on without a care?

*Refugia* answers this question with the promise that small work, “microcountercultures,” pockets of restoration and renewal, can make a real difference. And when we realize we’re not doing this work alone, we see these pockets grow and flourish. Rienstra writes, “We begin small, where we are. We dig out and repair, we plant seeds, we nurture what we can. We seek joy and give thanks, give thanks and find joy. Everywhere I look, people – and creatures – are doing this resurrection work.”

I commend this book to anyone who, like me, could use a spark of hope – not the vague hope that *someone* will do *something* to *fix* this, but the near and concrete hope that we can make a difference *now*, begin living resurrection *now*. In a world that often feels bleak or lost, *Refugia Faith* feels like a true breath of gloriously fresh air.

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### **Resources:**

- [Make a Start on Creation Care](#), ECFVP Editorial Team, Vestry Papers, March 2022
- [Global Warming and Global Ministry](#), an ECF Vital Practices webinar presented by the Rev. P. Joshua Griffin, March 5, 2015
- [How Does Your \(Church\) Garden Grow?](#) by Peter Strimer, ECF Vital Practices blog, June 2, 2011
- [One Cup at a Time...](#) by Jeremiah Sierra, an ECF Vital Practices blog, August 20, 2012

## **Stewards of the Earth**

John Leech

*There was a landowner who put his top employees in charge of his holdings. He said to them, "Take charge of it – and take care of the place. Bring your families to live on the land, and enjoy its produce. Serve it faithfully, and from its care you will live abundantly."*

*So the servants came on board. They lived on the land, and raised families there. They were as fertile as the land itself, and they grew in numbers. And it was theirs for the taking – to take charge of, to take care of, or to take advantage of – and with the land they served as their home, they would live in hope and abundance or in fear and scarcity. It was up to them.*

*What will they say when the landlord comes? How will they be with him? As servants entering into joy? Or as sad stewards with empty fields, exhausted resources and mistreated fellow creatures to show for their stewardship?*

We are familiar now with the data and analysis that have exposed to our concern the phenomenon of climate change. It is a transnational challenge that faces us on a global front. Many of the crises and problems facing humanity on occasional or local bases connect to this root phenomenon: we live in the Age of the Anthropocene.

Human activity shapes geography, climate, biosphere – and even geology. We are making, through our collected and cumulative activities, a permanent impact on the landscape of our world: its ice and free water, its air and clouds, its land and growing things (including food for ourselves and all other animal creatures) – and hence, on the sustainability of life for ourselves and our fellow beings.

Recently I attended a meeting of the American Academy of Religion in San Diego. I met a Turkish seminarian from Istanbul, an exchange student in the United States, who told me he'd polled his fellow students, asking them, *If you saw a cricket in your room what would you do?* Ninety percent said, *I'd kill it.*

"And these were seminarians!" he exclaimed. "What became of compassion for all creatures?"

### **Remember our role in the Creation**

Let us not make the Anthropocene the anthropocentric. Let us remember our special mandate as human creatures to care for the earth – not just to multiply and fill it, but to tend it. We are the stewards, the workers in the garden, of this green and gold and glorious, blue white planet. It is our home – not as owners, not as exploiters, but as chief tenants. We are the managers of the apartment house, so to speak, not the landlord.

We look forward to the return of our landlord with joyful expectation, but also some anxiety. Our anticipation is mixed with feelings of loss and grief – and even guilt. In our Christian hope we turn to that landlord and yearn for his presence.

As preparatory work for the hope that is born in us through faith, we must acknowledge our failures – perhaps irrecoverable, some of them – as stewards, even brothers and sisters, to earth and our fellow created beings.

But our Christian perspective, even in the kingdom of anxiety that is this world, is that we can do something still worthwhile, small and large, in our collective identity and our solitary pursuits, to move toward the day of his coming with rejoicing – a welcome made possible only because we do not stand alone.

God is indeed already with us – in our suffering and elation, our watchfulness and neglect.

### **More than changing lightbulbs**

What we face now with environmental catastrophe is unprecedented in scale, possibly, but not in moral quality or human impact. A famine up close is a hungry village, a starving face and a child with no solace.

A forest fire or a drought is in aggregate a great disaster.

But again, up close it is the tragedy of each creature swept up and away by destructive forces. Each of us has stories to tell and promises to keep on the human level – efforts, token or tiny, that help us move forward as we confront the common foe. Together – as we band together – there are large things we can do even yet to make the world a better place.

Maybe the time of changing light bulbs is over as enough. But the time of the Anthropocene, as geologists call this, our human-fashioned epoch, has just begun.

### **Our place and role in creation**

We too easily indulge in a self-delusion about the place of humanity in creation. We are deluding ourselves if we think our self-assumed pose of superiority to the rest of creation is something mandated in the Bible.

Genesis 2:15 (CEB): *The Lord God took the human being and settled him in the garden of Eden to farm it and to take care of it.*

In other words, we are both to cultivate the land and to take custody of it as servants of the Lord. We are stewards of the earth, caretakers and custodians.

We are God's representatives, or images, in creation, so exercising that stewardship is a servant role, subservient to the true landlord of the universe. We have power to alter the world, but we depend on the earth and its life for survival.

Our "rule" is subordinate – submissive to God and God's will for creation – God's will, not our own. Take care, take charge. Fill the earth, be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth. And delight in it.

May this day be holy, good, and peaceful.  
May the creative spirit of the universe  
enliven us with hope.

May the nurturing spirit of the universe  
compel us to care for creation – and each other.  
May the valiant spirit of the universe  
imbue us with the fortitude  
to see the truth,  
and the wisdom  
to act upon it.

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**Resources:**

- [Good morning, Steward!](#) by Lisa G. Fischbeck, an ECF Vital Practices blog, September 25, 2020
- [Stewards: Caretakers of God's Abundance](#) by Frances Caldwell, Vestry Papers, May 2007
- [Greening Our Faith – Putting Belief into Action](#) by Fletcher Harper, Vestry Papers, March 2011
- [How Does Your \(Church\) Garden Grow?](#) by Peter Strimer, ECF Vital Practices blog, June 2, 2011