

The 234th Convention of the Diocese of New Jersey

Bishop's Address to Convention - Part Five

Reflection on Anglican Mark of Mission # 5 – “To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth”

The Right Reverend William H. Stokes, 12th Bishop of New Jersey

Mark Five

“To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth”

Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’ So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.’

Genesis 1:26 - 28

The opening chapter of Genesis is familiar to us all. It portrays a sovereign God bringing order out of chaos; life out of earth with beauty, goodness, relationship. The verses I just read are remarkable including, as they do, God's declaration that humankind is made in God's own image; and that humankind is instructed to subdue the earth and given dominion over every living creature.

In his commentary on Genesis from the *Interpretation* series, well-known scholar of the Hebrew Scriptures, Walter Brueggemann writes that “the creation, which exists only because of and for the sake of the creator's purpose, has freedom to respond to the creator in various ways, and that “the response of creation to the creator is a mixture of faithful obedience and recalcitrant self-assertion.”

As a northern industrial state, New Jersey, the Garden State is challenged with serious environmental issues from air and water pollution to containing sprawl and preserving natural habitats and reserves. Recalcitrant self-assertion is evident all around.

In 2012, this diocese was devastated by Superstorm Sandy. There is wide consensus that global warming, while perhaps not the cause of the storm, was likely responsible for the magnitude of Sandy; more recalcitrant self-assertion. How are we to respond as people of faith? There is also a growing body of scientific evidence that global warming is causing our sea levels to rise at continually accelerating rates. Estimates of how much our global sea levels will rise by the year 2100 vary widely, from a minimum of 1.5 feet to as much as 8 feet.¹

Even a median increase of 4 feet would be devastating for our diocese. Certainly the usual suspects – our coastal and barrier island churches – would be immediately vulnerable. But as you can see from the slide on the screen, resulting increases in levels of our bays and rivers puts places you wouldn't normally think of at risk; Salem, Pennsville and Penns Grove, for example. An increase of 6 feet would jeopardize many more of our Delaware River community churches, as well as some further inland along estuaries notorious for flooding such as Rancocas

Creek. Yet today, the United States stands alone in the world as the only country outside the Paris Climate Accord. More recalcitrant self-assertion.

In 2009 the General Convention held in Anaheim, California, adopted The Genesis Covenant. (Anyone remember that?) which challenged faith institutions – The Episcopal Church and others - to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions of each facility they maintain by 50% over ten years. The ten years are almost over and we have not yet realized the goal of reducing our carbon footprint by 50%.

Our churches face challenges. We use a lot of carbon in running our buildings. Many of them, though beautiful, are large, old and terribly inefficient.

In 2015, Father Jack Zamboni and the leadership of St. Francis, Dunellen instituted a long-term project they labeled, *The Greening of the Church*. St. Francis was one of the first congregations in our Diocese to participate with the organization GreenFaith and its Director, Episcopal Priest, Fletcher Harper. The Diocese entered into an agreement with GreenFaith on behalf of the parishes in 2014. This afforded discounted services.

Prior to their work with GreenFaith, the church knew they needed to replace a 50 year old boiler in their parish hall. The existing boiler was inefficient. They received three bids for the replacement work all in the range of \$9,000.

Working with GreenFaith, they learned about available state grants that would cover up to 70% of costs for efficiency upgrades to lighting and HVAC equipment. GreenFaith arranged for a contractor to do an energy audit of their entire facility. The audit results showed that St. Francis could qualify for a grant for the boiler replacement and, they also discovered, for a second 25 year old furnace, as long as they upgraded their lighting fixtures to more efficient fluorescent fixtures and/or LED lights. The total cost of all the upgrades, including the boiler replacement, was \$45,380, but their cost after the grant was \$13,614, only \$4,600 more than replacing the one boiler would have cost.

The upgrades were done in March of 2015. At the same time, St. Francis switched electricity suppliers from PSE&G to a less expensive green supplier, further contributing to their bottom line while also reducing their carbon footprint.

St. Francis Church realized significant savings in the rest of that year and even more in the following years -- 30% on average for the two full years in the upgraded set-up compared to the 5 prior years; 35% comparing the last two years of the old system with 2 full years of the new. The annual savings of approximately \$3700 is lower than initial projections of \$4900, but is substantial nonetheless.

Fr. Zamboni reports that all of this will reduce their carbon footprint significantly, thus contributing to the stewardship of God's creation.

The ongoing energy savings, which will continue once the loan they took out to pay for the boiler and other work is paid off, will free up funds to support other aspects of St. Francis' ministry. They saw it as a "win-win!" I agree. Great work, St. Francis, Dunellen.

Eight years ago, Fr. Jeff Kirk and Grace Church, Merchantville began taking steps to make their buildings more energy efficient and environmentally friendly. They replaced aged, inefficient windows throughout the campus with more efficient windows; they replaced existing doors with more efficient doors; incandescent chandeliers with more efficient compact-fluorescent-bulb chandeliers that greatly improved illumination. Grace Church upgraded the parish hall attic insulation and installed two heat pumps and ceiling air conditioning for use as needed to heat or cool the room quickly. They upgraded existing air conditioning.

In 2012, the Vestry had 86, 250-watt solar panels installed on their flat roof which has an ideal southern exposure. The panels reduced their electrical costs by about 30%. They were installed by Powell Energy and Solar of Moorestown. Powell and his partner Brad Denn are both members of St. Peter's, Medford and have done similar projects for that parish and St. Mary's, Stone Harbor.

In 2014, Grace Church's oil-fired, steam-heating boiler affectionately called "Big Bertha," was replaced with two relatively small, natural-gas-fired hot-water boilers, with seven new heating zones added, all with computerized controls. The \$122,000 cost for engineering, asbestos removal of the old boiler, and new piping throughout the building was paid for with a bequest of \$50,000, a special gift of \$40,000, and pledges for three years of \$32,000. The first year, Grace used its new heating system it reduced heating costs by over \$10,000.

This affords me an opportunity to pitch Project Resource – which is now *the Stewardship Committee* of the Diocese of New Jersey. Through Project Resource we are encouraging every congregation to engage in holistic financial stewardship that *AMP Up!* the financial strength and position of the congregation through well-conceived and executed Annual Giving campaigns that emphasize giving from a thankful heart; the use of Major Gifts to help manage one-time capital expenses and to help build endowments; and Planned Giving which includes the creation of active Legacy Societies in each congregation. I am grateful to Fr. Bob Fitzpatrick and Fr. David Snyder for their willingness to lead this initiative.

Both St. Francis, Dunellen and Grace Church, Merchantville offer examples of how efficient approaches to energy both serve the environment and provide additional monies for mission and ministry. Grace, Merchantville has done a great deal more beyond the works I spoke of. I just didn't have time to talk about all of it.

But there is more to it than money. Grace Church began a vegetable garden that provides additional fresh vegetables for their food pantry. It offers the people of Grace a weekly reminder when they attend church services that they are the stewards of creation. The food pantry serves about 400 people each month with food provided by the Food Bank of South Jersey. It's Fr. Kirk's prayer that eventually their vegetable garden will become a community garden to help the church's immediate neighbors....Again, terrific work, Grace - Merchantville.

In a 2013 article in *The Anglican Theological Review*, Margaret Bullitt-Jonas, an Episcopal Priest and environmentalist wrote, "I dare to hope that congregations are awakening to the call to love God, neighbor and our dear God-given earth, as our selves. I continue to be amazed," she writes, "by the creativity and persistence of so many people of faith. Across the country, Episcopal churches are conducting and implementing energy audits, installing solar panels, and investing in geo-thermal energy...Many congregations encourage walking, biking, or car-pooling to worship services; groups of parishioners are meeting with political leaders to advocate for climate justice; and one church held an outdoor, interfaith prayer vigil in response to a tragic oil spill."

She concludes, "In a time of uncertainty and rapid change, when climate change threatens to unravel life as we know it, people and communities are reaching out to each other in love and building new collaborations that are mutually life-giving. In order to build resilience in uncertain times, we need to connect churches and farms, and to connect people with each other, with the land and with the God they love...."²

I know I've only scratched the surface. I'm aware that many of you are taking similar creative steps in your churches to become more energy efficient and environmentally friendly. Keep up the good work.

As I mentioned earlier, the Diocese of New Jersey partnered in 2014 with GreenFaith in an effort to encourage our congregations to engage in the kind of efforts you have just heard about. Here Fr. Greg Bezilla with a video to share more about GreenFaith and how they might be able to work with your congregation.

¹ Mooney, Chris, "Scientists keep increasing projections of sea-level increase by 2100" – *Washington Post*, April 26, 2017

² Bullitt-Jonas, Margaret "The Episcopal Church and Climate Change: The First Twenty-Five Years" – *The Anglican Theological review* – Fall 2013 Vol. 4, Number 4, pp. 679-680.