

Memo

To: Diocesan Council
From: Synod Motion Working Group, Bishop's Committee on Creation Care
Date: June 7, 2021
Re: Single-Use Plastics and Diocesan Environmental Plan

At Diocesan Synod in November 2019, two motions relating to creation care were passed: Motion #10, encouraging parishes and individual Anglicans to curtail their use of single-use plastic products, and Motion #15, urging the Bishop's Committee on Creation Care to develop a Diocesan Environmental Plan.

Bishop's Committee on Creation Care – An Introduction

The Bishop's Committee on Creation Care (the Committee) was established in July 2020. Its current members are Dr. Sylvia Keesmaat and the Rev. Susan Spicer (co-chairs), Ms. Elin Goulden (staff liaison), the Rev. Canon Dr. Eric Beresford, Mr. Roberto Chiotti, the Rev. Dr. Stephen Drakeford, Ms. Hannah Johnston, the Rev. Dr. Alison Kemper, Ms. Chanelle McLeod, Dr. Jenny Salisbury, Ms. Paige Souter, Ms. Karen Turner, and Ms. Monica Woodley. Bishop Andrew Asbil attends the meetings regularly as an ex-officio member of the Committee. We also gratefully acknowledge the contributions of Dr. Grant Jahnke, who co-chaired the Committee from July 2020 through March 2021.

While as a Bishop's Committee, the Bishop's Committee on Creation Care does not report to Synod but rather directly to the Diocesan Bishop, the work of the Committee has to some extent been shaped by the requirements of Motions #10 and #15 passed at Synod in 2019. Each member of the Committee is a member of one or more of the following working groups:

- Education Working Group (Stephen Drakeford, chair)
- Liturgy Working Group (Sylvia Keesmaat, chair)
- Pilgrimage Working Group (Karen Turner, chair)
- Communications Working Group (Chanelle McLeod, chair)
- Synod Motion Working Group (Stephen Drakeford, chair)

The Synod Motion Working Group is responsible for responding to Diocesan Council and Synod on the progress made on Motions #10 and #15 but much of that progress has been the work of the other Working Groups as well.

Through these Working Groups, the Committee has undertaken the following significant projects:

- Education
 - A Fast for the Earth: Lent 2021 resource
 - Earth Sunday Bulletin insert with reflection and action ideas
 - Community Garden Toolkit
 - First steps in developing a network of church gardens throughout the Diocese for food security, pollinator support, community-building, and meditation. This project will connect existing gardens and provide mentorship and support to parishes beginning or expanding a garden.
 - Best Practices for Reducing Plastics in Your Parish (in progress)
 - Updating of the Green Congregation Guide (in progress)

- Liturgy
 - "Worship in the Shelter of Creation: Creating Outdoor Sacred Space for Liturgies, Prayer and Contemplation"
 - Suggestions for Outdoor Worship (in progress)
 - Resources for Season of Creation 2021 (in progress)

- Pilgrimage
 - Working on a project to connect Diocesan community and creation, to be launched Advent 2021, with the working title "Walking the Earth" (in progress)

- Communications
 - Promotion of resources created by the Committee
 - Regular articles in the Anglican (March, May, June 2021)
 - Facebook page (to be launched in June 2021)

- Synod Motion
 - Regular Reports to Diocesan Council and Report to Synod 2021

As a Committee, we have further come to realize that we are talking about changing the culture of our church and developing a kind of discipleship that sees creation care as an integral part of our spirituality. This is not just the work of the Committee, but of everyone: laity, Christian educators, theologians, deacons, priests, and bishops throughout our Diocese.

Responding to Motions #10 and #15

Of course, the Covid-19 pandemic has brought profound changes to our world that were not foreseen at Synod in November of 2019. In some ways, as with the increased use of disposable plastics, the pandemic has exacerbated our environmental problems; in others, such as curtailing travel, it has shown us new options and contributed to a flexibility our institutions didn't know they had. Both of these effects can be seen in our responses to the motions, which are addressed in turn below.

Motion #10 – Plastics

MOVED by the Rev. Canon David Harrison and SECONDED by the Rev. Dr. Stephen Drakeford that this diocesan Synod:

- 1. Encourages parishes to curtail their purchase of single-use plastic products, with the intention of ending their use by 2023, taking into consideration the accessibility needs of their communities.*
- 2. Encourages individual Anglicans to reduce their reliance on single-use plastic products.*
- 3. Encourage the Bishop's Committee on Creation Care to develop and promote resources aimed at supporting local efforts toward plastics reduction. CARRIED.*

Plastics. As soon as you start thinking about them, you realize how ubiquitous they are. They're everywhere: bagged milk, detergent containers, electronics packaging, PPE, gloves... everywhere. And COVID-19 has made our dependency on plastics all the greater for obvious safety and hygienic reasons.

“Here in Canada, less than 10% of plastics are recycled, contributing to over 3 million tonnes of plastic being thrown into landfills or into the environment each year. Over a third of plastics produced in Canada are for single-use packaging or products – such as plastic bags, take-out containers, and bottle caps – which constitute one of the largest sources of plastics found in fresh water.”¹

Some 30 million tonnes of plastic waste have found its way into the waters of the world – an amount that is set to triple within 20 years if alternatives are not found.² The problem has been exacerbated by the pandemic. According to the CBC, “The International Solid Waste Association estimates that our single-use plastic use has increased by 250 to 300 percent during the pandemic.”³

And visible plastic waste is only the tip of the iceberg. Though the term “microplastics” was only coined in 2004, these microscopic particles – formed by the breakdown of everything from coffee cups to tires to polyester clothing – can now be found everywhere on earth, even in the most remote locations. Most worryingly, they are in the food we eat and the water we drink, and even in our bodies, on which their long-term effects are as yet unknown. The threat is sufficiently clear that the UN has recently declared plastics to be “the second most ominous threat to the global environment, after climate change.”⁴

The federal government has indicated that it will be banning certain single-use plastic items by the end of 2021, including plastic bags, cutlery, straws, stir sticks, six-pack rings, and hard-to-recycle food containers.⁵ These regulations will help to move parishes away from single-use plastics, yet there are other single-use items, from Styrofoam cups to glitter, which are

¹ <https://www.iisd.org/articles/covid-19-has-canada-using-more-plastic-what-impact-will-have-our-fresh-water>

² <https://www.thestar.com/life/2021/03/22/what-can-we-do-about-increased-plastic-use-during-the-pandemic.html>

³ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/single-use-plastics-covid-1.5683617>

⁴ <https://www.thestar.com/opinion/contributors/2021/03/01/new-science-on-microplastics-suggests-macro-problems.html>

⁵ <https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/news/2020/10/canada-one-step-closer-to-zero-plastic-waste-by-2030.html>

not at present covered by the ban. While government action is essential for addressing a problem of this magnitude, there continues to be a role for parishes, not only in complying with the new regulations but in going beyond them, as well as in advocating for additional regulations, better recycling practices and non-plastic options.

The Committee has undertaken the following projects that respond to Motion #10:

- The resource “A Fast for the Earth: Lent 2021,” emphasized fasting from consumption of single-use/disposable plastics and recommended alternatives.
- The resource “Best Practices for Reducing Plastics in Your Parish” recommends alternatives to the single-use plastics most commonly used in parishes, including but not limited to those to be banned by the federal government.
- These recommendations will form part of the updated Green Congregation Guide (in progress) which will help parishes take greater steps to incorporate creation care into all their operations.

In this work the Committee has been informed by the work also being done in this area in the Dioceses of British Columbia, Huron, and Niagara, all of whom have passed similar motions at their Diocesan Synods.

Motion #15 – Diocesan Environmental Plan

MOVED by the Rev. Canon David Harrison and SECONDED by the Rev. Dr. Stephen Drakeford that Synod requests the Bishop’s Committee on Creation Care, working through a creation care lens and in the context of our developing relationship with Indigenous Peoples, to develop and propose environmental policies and resources for all diocesan operations that reflect the need to increase the use of renewable energy services and decrease our carbon footprint. In particular, Synod requests a review of and development of policies pertaining to:

1. *our spending practices;*
2. *our travel policies;*
3. *our land use and development;*
4. *the creation of a fund to assist parishes to reduce their carbon footprint;*
5. *the creation of a fund to assist clergy to purchase or lease zero emission vehicles;*
6. *the curtailment of the purchase of single-use plastic products, with the intention of ending their use no later than the beginning of 2023, taking into consideration the accessibility needs of our communities;*
7. *developing modules for clergy and lay formation on the connection between creation care and the Gospel; and*
8. *promoting reduced consumption as part of a Christian Rule of Life.*

Synod and the diocese shall be provided with a report on the work of the Bishop’s Committee on Creation Care and the progress made on these issues by June 30, 2020 and every six months thereafter until the next Regular Session of Synod. CARRIED.

The Synod Working Group classified each of these 8 areas as a short-term, intermediate, or long-term priority:

- Short-Term: Items #2 and #6
- Intermediate: Items #1, #3, #7 and #8

- Long-Term: Items #4 and #5.

The report to Synod in November 2021 will include fully-developed guidelines for the short-term priority items; a framework for addressing the intermediate priority items, and suggestions for how Synod and Diocesan bodies might address the long-term priorities.

Taking each element of Motion #15 in turn, here is what the Bishop's Committee on Creation Care has accomplished to date:

1. Spending Practices (Intermediate Priority) The chief expenditures of the Diocese are: salaries and benefits; ministry; travel, capital expenditures; and investments. Salaries, benefits, and ministry expenditures are not considered here as they do not have a direct environmental impact. Travel expenditures will be considered under item #2 below. Capital expenditures will be considered under items #3 and #4 below. This leaves investments.

Members of the Synod Motion Working Group met with the Diocesan Investment Committee in May 2021 to discuss Diocesan investment policy as it relates to environmental considerations.

The Diocesan Investment Policy Statement provides that the Consolidated Trust Fund of the Diocese “shall be invested in companies and other investments that practice, uphold, and promote socially responsible investing” and directs investment managers accordingly. The Investment Committee has an ESG subcommittee devoted to monitoring the environmental, social, and governance (ESG) factors of its investments. This subcommittee is working toward getting fund managers to report twice annually (rather than annually) on ESG factors. They are also pursuing third-party evaluation of each fund manager and each investment within that manager's portfolio, for better monitoring of the environmental and social responsibility of the Diocese's investment holdings. The Synod Motion Working Group looks forward to continuing our conversation with the Investment Committee on its progress, and encourages the Investment Committee to develop and release a statement on environmentally and socially responsible investment with Synod, so that others in the Diocese are aware of the initiatives being taken in this area as well.

2. Travel Policies. (Short-Term Priority) This is an area in which Covid-19 has had a positive environmental impact, as meetings and events have shifted online due to lockdowns and travel restrictions. While we look forward to gathering face-to-face again, and recognize that some meetings are better served in person than online, the experience of the past 15 months has shown us that much of our travel can be avoided. As we emerge from pandemic, we look for adopting a new balance between in-person and online meetings.

The Committee urges all parties within the Diocese – Bishops, Diocesan staff, parish clergy, Diocesan and parish volunteers, and parishioners – to consider carefully what travel is truly essential. For Bishops, regular parish visits will likely resume when restrictions are lifted, as will gatherings such as Lambeth, General Synod, and National and Provincial House of Bishops meetings. However, we envision, and

hope, that some of these gatherings might move to less frequent in-person meetings, interspersed with online gatherings.

Diocesan Council and other committees have been meeting online for the duration of the pandemic. For many members, the freedom from having to travel across the Diocese for a monthly meeting has been liberating. Post-pandemic, we recommend that the majority (50 – 90%) of these meetings continue to take place online. Similarly, we recommend that parish councils and committees continue to hold the majority of their meetings online. Even where in-person events are held, there should be a “hybrid” option for people to participate remotely. This would help to accommodate those with geographical, scheduling, and health challenges. We also encourage organizers of meetings, retreats, etc. to choose venues that are accessible by public and active modes of transportation.

3. Land Use and Development. (Intermediate Priority) Since Synod 2019, the Property Working Group (PWG) is seeking to develop a new framework for land use and development in the Diocese. The PWG has been informed by the Rev. Dr. Jason McKinney’s presentation “Reimagining Church Property: A Theological Basis for Church Redevelopment” which was presented to Diocesan Council in March, 2021. This theological framework seeks to understand land in the context of Scripture and tradition, as a gift of God, transferred as an inheritance from generation to generation, and shared as ‘a commons.’ Such an understanding acknowledges that we are caretakers or stewards, rather than owners, of land; recognizes that we are implicated in historic and ongoing injustices in our use of land, particularly toward Indigenous peoples, and calls us to act in respect to land in such a way as affirms the goodness of creation, helps redress injustice, considers sustainability for succeeding generations, and works collaboratively with others in the community for the common good.

Over the course of summer 2021, the PWG is planning a series of events in the Diocese for parishes interested in redevelopment, which will include a study of this theological framework and seek to incorporate environmental best practices in future developments.

In addition, the Community Garden Toolkit and Garden network project mentioned above (under Education Working Group) are aimed at helping congregations to work with their parish property for the good of their local community as well as the community of living things (other native plants, pollinator species, birds, etc.) in the local ecosystem and watershed.

4. Creation of a Fund to Assist Parishes to Reduce Their Carbon Footprint. (Long-term Priority) One of the most significant actions that parishes can undertake as faithful stewards of creation is the reduction of their carbon footprint. It is also one of the most expensive actions, and many parishes will need assistance to undertake this work. At this time, with the financial repercussions of the Covid-19 pandemic still to be seen, the Committee is holding off on recommendations for new funding. However, we anticipate that there may be other sources of funding available. This

Committee is in the early stages of identifying various funding opportunities through which parishes can fund the reduction of their carbon footprint. The Committee anticipates bringing forward recommendations for the next Synod.

5. Creation of a Fund to Assist Clergy to Purchase or Lease Zero-Emission Vehicles (Long-term priority) This item was seen as a low priority for a number of reasons. Firstly, as with item #4, the Committee is reluctant to bring recommendations for new Diocesan budget items while the full financial impact of the pandemic is yet to be ascertained. Secondly, a former Diocesan program of clergy loans for purchase or lease of vehicles had to be cut due to bad debt. We also expect clergy to be reducing their work-related travel under item #2. However, we do anticipate that as part of reducing their carbon footprint, (item #4) parishes will consider installing at least one charging station in their parking lots, which could assist clergy in shifting to zero-emission vehicles. The Committee anticipates bringing some such recommendation forward to next Synod.
6. Curtailment of Single-Use Plastics. (Short-term Priority) See Motion #10 above.
7. Clergy and Lay Formation on Creation Care and the Gospel. (Intermediate Priority) In our discussions, the Committee as a whole and the Synod Motion Working Group in particular felt that the work of clergy and lay formation on the connection between creation care and the Gospel went far beyond developing modules for Momentum, Fresh Start, and similar programs. As mentioned earlier, what is required is a transformation of our church culture and a deepened understanding of discipleship which sees creation care as integral to our Christian walk, and this is the work of everyone in the Diocese, not simply that of one Bishop's Committee. However, we recognize that this Committee has a key role to play in nurturing this transformation so that it becomes part of our Diocesan "DNA."

Some of what has already been done in this regard includes the resources produced by the Education, Liturgy and Pilgrimage Committees – the Fast for the Earth Lent resource, the Earth Sunday bulletin, resources for outdoor worship and for Season of Creation. In addition, the work of the Communications committee in publicizing creation care activities throughout the Diocese will help inform Anglicans and encourage them to see creation care as integral to the Church's mission.

The Pilgrimage project (tentatively called "Walking the Earth"), to be launched in Advent 2021, will carry the work of formation even further. Through the practice of walking the land, Anglicans will be invited to learn its history and to listen to the stories of the plant, animal, and human communities that dwell in the places where we live, worship, and serve. As we come to know and love the places where we are located, and the human and non-human creatures who share them with us, our commitment to their flourishing grows. This project combines getting to know our localities with the ancient practice of pilgrimage, to deepen our understanding of our earth as sacred ground, the place where we, and all of creation, encounter God our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer.

More formal opportunities for clergy and lay formation are already happening and being planned. One of our co-chairs is a member of the teaching staff at Trinity College. In addition, over the past year, despite Covid-19 restrictions, Committee members have given lectures, presentations, workshops, sermons and eco-retreats at parishes in the Diocese, or events sponsored or co-hosted by parishes in the Diocese. At least one workshop is planned for the virtual Diocesan Outreach Conference in October 2021.

After consultation, we have determined that the Momentum and Fresh Start programs are not the best vehicle for reaching Diocesan clergy. Instead, we are looking at creating workshops for future Diocesan and Area clergy conferences, Diocesan Synods, Area and Deanery events, in addition to making continued use of the educational opportunities mentioned above.

8. Promoting Reduced Consumption as part of a Christian Rule of Life (Intermediate Priority.) The promotion of reduced consumption was a key element of our Lenten resource, A Fast for the Earth. Also, in some ways we consider this to be linked with the formation of clergy and lay people, as mentioned above under Item #7.

However, we are intrigued by the possibility of creating a “Rule of Life” that reflects reduced consumption and creation care. The Committee is considering writing one for its own members as part of the process of calling other members of the Diocese to incorporate this into their own personal Rule of Life.

Conclusion:

The work of developing an environmental plan that touches every aspect of Diocesan life is not something to be fully accomplished in two years between Synod meetings, much less two years that have been marked by a global pandemic. As we have said, this requires a change in our church culture and a deepening of our own walk as disciples of Jesus Christ. At the same time, we believe that the Bishop’s Committee on Creation Care has marked out not only the first steps of how our Diocese can live out our commitment to the care of creation, but outlined the next steps to be taken in this ongoing work.

Respectfully submitted,
Synod Motion Working Group, Bishop’s Committee on Creation Care

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The Rev. Dr. Alison Kemper
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