

AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES USA

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General Secretary*

**Journeying Toward the Summit by the Sea**  
*A Pastoral Letter on Environmental Care and Creation Justice  
in observance of the 48<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Earth Day  
April 22, 2018*

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*“The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it” (Psalm 24:1)*

2018 marks the thirtieth anniversary of the passage of the American Baptist Policy Statement on Ecology, which was based on this beautiful verse. As the Psalmist proclaims, God is the Creator of our world and all living things. Similarly, John's Gospel introduces Jesus, “the Word,” as the one through whom “all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made” (John 1:3; see v. 10). Paul links Jesus' role in the universe's creation to his roles as Savior and Lord of the church:

*The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible,...all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy...and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. (Colossians 1:15-20)*

Salvation, reconciliation, discipleship, creation care and justice all find their source in God through Jesus. Environmental concern and stewardship has been a life-long aspect of my personal spiritual journey. As a new Christian dedicated to integrating science and spirituality, I served as the president of my high school's ecology club, aptly called “S.A.V.E.” (Students Against Violence to the Environment). Through this expression of activism, I became friends with a fellow student, Lois, who would subsequently express her own faith in Jesus as her Savior and Lord. We have now been married for over four decades, and as grandparents, we continue to feel a responsibility to preserve and enhance our global eco-system so that future generations might enjoy the God-given beauty of nature and life.

As Christ's followers, American Baptists have throughout the years heard God's call to respect, love and tend to our environment. In addition to the 1988 Policy Statement, creation care and justice have been highlighted in several resolutions and policy statements. In the American Baptist Churches Policy Statement on Human Rights (1976), “the right to a secure and healthy environment, clean air, pure water, and an earth that can nurture and support present and future generations” was cited as a fundamental human right. Statements can be found on a range of environmental and creation justice issues, including energy (1977), nuclear power (1982), the disposal of hazardous and radioactive waste (1982), environmental concerns (1983), the Law of the Sea treaty (1983), clean air (1990), individual lifestyles for ecological responsibility (1990), the CERES Principles for environmentally responsible economies (1991), and global warming (1991). American Baptists continue to respond generously and sacrificially to environmentally related events, such as massive fires in the western U.S. and hurricane relief, through One Great Hour of Sharing and ABHMS coordinated disaster relief efforts. Globally, our IM missionaries engage in life-changing development work, such as clean water projects and sustainable agriculture. Many regions and Green Lake offer opportunities to grow spiritually in settings that inspire a deeper appreciation of nature.

ABCUSA's commitment to creation care and justice has been consistent and longstanding, and as General Secretary, I call upon all American Baptist related churches, institutions, leaders and members to continue this tradition of environmental activism. Before I assumed this pastoral position, the ABCUSA Board of General Ministries approved the formation of the ABCUSA Creation Justice Network to encourage our denomination's witness on environmental matters. In November 2017, the Board approved the network's proposal to enter into a partnership with ecoAmerica and its faith community arm, Blessed Tomorrow (<http://blessedtomorrow.org>).

The upcoming Biennial Mission Summit in Virginia Beach, Virginia (June 21-23, 2019) is the perfect setting for us to reaffirm our commitment to ecological care as we gather for our family-wide *Summit by the Sea*. VBS-style programs focused on appreciating God's creation will be offered for children (elementary through high school). Come and enjoy the beautiful coastal ecosystem and the majesty of the ocean as it meets the shore. Our seas are very sensitive to environmental challenges, such as global warming, the melting of glaciers, and pollution from plastics. I would like to encourage our spiritual family to prepare for this *Summit by the Sea* by embracing spiritual disciplines and practices such as:

*Clergy and Lay Leaders:* Please consider offering a preaching or teaching series on creation care and justice. There are many Scriptural texts to base such messages on, which maximizes individual creativity in approaching this complicated concern. Send us your message, and perhaps we will spotlight it on our website, or even at the *Summit by the Sea*!

*Congregations:* Please consider taking the positive and proactive steps necessary to become an ABCUSA Creation Justice Church. This is a new initiative, which I hope you'll support! There are 3 levels of participation. The brochure describing this initiative can be downloaded by visiting our ABCUSA Creation Justice website at (<https://www.creationjusticenetworkabc.org>).

*Individual Disciples:* Please consider specific lifestyle choices and practices that will demonstrate your and your family's appreciation for our environment and its health.

*Support Camping Ministries:* Please partner with our ABC camping/outdoor ministries. Our camps play a key role in counter-balancing our hurried lives and calling us to enjoy nature's beauty.

Environmental care is not solely a political issue, but a matter of faith and stewardship. We are not motivated by any partisan political purpose, and it is regrettable that this issue has been politicized to such an extent that it has caused confusion and inaction. Part of our unique witness as a politically diverse spiritual family (joining in witness with others) involves showing the world that climate change can be addressed on a higher moral and spiritual plane that transcends divisive political discourse.

As inhabitants of this world and citizens of the wealthiest country in history, we share responsibility for the future of our planet. Global environmental protection requires cooperative steps between all the countries of the world. Multi-national companies also play a key role in impacting how natural materials are utilized. Although thoughtful people may reach different conclusions on how to address the various pressing issues the earth's ecosystem faces, I would encourage all of us to appreciate the contributions of scientific research in helping to guide policy decisions, to resist the temptation to deny that environmental changes are taking place, and to support international treaties and agreements on ecological concerns.

In spite of the real and pressing environmental challenges facing our generation, I am hopeful that we will find creative ways to address ecological challenges and its associated justice issues. The whole world is holy, the work of the Creator. God's breath gives life to humanity (Genesis 1-2) and to all creatures (Psalm 104). We live in a world of beauty and wonder, a world animated and sustained by the love of God. Let us give thanks for the beauty and vitality of the Earth; let us work to preserve God's Garden!

Yours in Christ,



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