

Anglican Communion's Eco-bishops' initiative begins to take shape

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From the Anglican Communion Environment Network

The Primate of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa, the Most Revd Dr Thabo Makgoba has invited 20 bishops from around the Anglican Communion to join him in a process of discussion and discernment concerning the Communion's witness and mission in the face of climate change and environmental degradation.

"I have asked a number of sister and brother bishops in dioceses already experiencing the impacts of climate change to join me in a process of dialogue", said Archbishop Makgoba.

"This will involve exchanging ideas, concerns, and information about the responses we have already made in relation to climate change, and those we hope to make. Our goal will be to develop a Communion-wide strategic plan that meets the challenges ahead and builds confidence in God's future."

The invitation is to participate in a process of dialogue leading to, and following on, a face-to-face meeting in Cape Town, South Africa, in February 2015.

According to Canon Ken Gray, Secretary to the Anglican Communion Environmental Network (ACEN), this is the first time that bishops have been invited to focus together on ecological issues with the intention of speaking collectively to the Communion world-wide.

"The Bishops will communicate initially by email and other electronic media", he said. "Their 2015 Cape Town conference will use an indaba-style process of dialogue and lead to strategic planning.

"This will not be a conference where 'experts' provide information to participants but where participants will share at a deep level their experiences, hopes and concerns. What will bind the bishops together is a shared sense of urgency around the Church's stewardship of creation and the importance of the fifth Mark of Mission, 'to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth'."

Members of ACEN's steering committee have been supporting Archbishop Makgoba in initiating the Eco-Bishops' dialogue by identifying participants from around the Anglican Communion whose dioceses are in regions affected by, or contributing significantly towards climate change and environmental degradation, and who are actively engaged in mitigation, the 'greening' of their communities, and advocacy.

Bishop Nicolás Drayson, for example, describes how the highly adaptive and resilient livelihood strategies of indigenous people in the Diocese of Northern Argentina are being affected by the expansion of Argentina's agricultural frontier into their traditional territories. The area covered by the Diocese includes one of the region's most affected by deforestation in South America. "There are increasingly visible links between climate change and the wellbeing of the people we serve", said Bishop Drayson, "especially among the poorest ... We are recognizing that this is a topic we have to rapidly push to the top of our agenda."

In the Diocese of Harare in Zimbabwe, Bishop Chad Gandiya said that all parishes have been given trees to plant. "We have started a Green Church movement in our parishes. We are going to be working with all our Mission Schools in the diocese about caring for the environment. Thankfully our diocesan youths are taking this very seriously. My hopes include mobilising other churches to do the same so that we raise awareness in all our communities and do something about it."

The Anglican Communion Environmental Network Website is at: <http://acen.anglicancommunion.org/>

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