

Toward a Sustainable World: A Role for Churches

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In our time, human activity has subjected the social and ecological systems of planet Earth to unprecedented stress. Global climate change, habitat loss, extinctions, overpopulation, and pollution degrade the biosphere while epidemics, poverty, resource depletion, inequality, war, and violence degrade the human world. Present habits and trends cannot be sustained without serious and perhaps fatal damage to the Earth and its community of life.

In a sustainable world humanity and nature would flourish in mutually enhancing ways. Human communities would care for one another, using resources modestly and equitably, without impairing the ability of future generations or other life communities to meet their own needs.

How can the world's churches help us pursue such a worthy, and indeed such a vital goal?

It may help to realize that sustainability is not something we achieve and then we're done; it's something that has to go on forever, requiring a deliberate transformation of our way of living. It's not a simple problem, like baking a cake, or a complicated problem, like putting a man on the moon; rather it's a *complex* problem, like raising a child or making peace in the Middle East. Complex problems have many possible solutions, none given or foreseen; they can arise only through learning and change *from within*, on the part of all components within the system. If you are part of the problem, you have to be part of the solution.

Gazing down this strenuous, uncertain path, we can take some light and comfort from our religious life. *Faith* can provide direction and purpose in the midst of uncertainty. *Hope* can help us cleave to more promising visions of the good life and human flourishing. *Sacrifice* can help us embrace the challenge to do more with less for the sake of the greater good and a deeper sense of fulfillment. And *community* can encourage and support us as we disentangle ourselves from the webs of privilege, entitlement, and wasteful consumption spun by industrial capitalism.

Because social change happens one person at a time, we believe that congregations can become seedbeds of transformation. A deliberate program of green faith, green learning, green living, and green outreach can foster right thinking and right action in our individual lives as well as our lives in church, neighborhood, city, and bioregion. With each other's help and encouragement, we can become the change we wish to see in the world.

2/9/18