

## GENERAL SYNOD

DIOCESAN SYNOD MOTION:  
CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE CHURCH'S INVESTMENTS*Background Paper from the Diocese of Birmingham*

1. On 29th January 2015 almost identical motions were passed in Moseley and Sutton Coldfield Deanery Synods concerning Climate Change and the Church's Investments. This followed discussion on the issue in a number of PCCs across the Diocese of Birmingham. The motions then came to Diocesan Synod on March 21st and a slightly amended motion was passed unanimously. In the debate three points were stressed; the need for urgency; the need for criteria for the speed and range of disinvestment and the need to explore the alternatives of investing in clean energy. This background paper has been prepared by a group from across the Diocese. It is deliberately brief, the authors being aware that a number of detailed papers on the subject have recently been published and will be circulated.
2. In the book of Genesis we read of humanity created as a part of a wider created order, with a particular responsibility of stewardship, of dominion not domination, a responsibility to be good stewards of all that God has created (Gen 1.26-31). In the New Testament we read that redemption is for the whole of creation (Rom 8.18-25). The responsibility God entrusts to us is great. As Anglicans we draw from this the Fifth Mark of Mission (ACC), 'to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth'.

**The need for urgency**

3. *'We don't need any more scientific evidence. We are experiencing climate change now and we need immediate action.'* Bishop Apimeleki Qiliho, Fiji.<sup>1</sup>

*'Weather systems are moving south. The rain is now falling in the ocean instead of on the land. Southern Australia is drying out. Bush fires – some have had to extinguish themselves by running out of bush to burn.'* Bishop Tom Wilmot, Perth, Australia.<sup>2</sup>

The melting of the Arctic, the acidification of the oceans, unprecedented patterns of drought and flood – all this is now happening with just under 1° of warming. The internationally agreed target is to restrict warming to 2°. At this level, although very challenging in terms of what it will mean climatically, human life as we have known it throughout our time on this planet will still probably be manageable. It is now the widely held scientific consensus that to hold global temperatures at below 2°, 60-80% of known reserves of coal, oil and natural gas will need to stay in the ground unburnt.<sup>3</sup> In order not to exceed this target, given the current increase in carbon emissions, we need monumental and coordinated global action. To have a 50% chance of remaining below a 2° C rise, global emissions must peak by 2020 and rapidly decrease thereafter.<sup>4</sup>

**Criteria for Disinvestment**

4. Our debate called for a clear policy of staged disinvestment beginning with the 'dirtiest' fuels (tar sands, coal) and progressing swiftly to oil and then gas. If the Church is to retain shares in fossil

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<sup>1</sup> The Anglican Consultative Council and the Anglican Communion Environmental Network, 'The World is Our Host: A Call to Urgent Action for Climate Justice', 2015, (<http://acen.anglicancommunion.org/media/148818/The-World-is-our-Host-FINAL-TEXT.pdf>)

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.carbontracker.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Unburnable-Carbon-Full-rev2-1.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> UN Environment Programme (UNEP), *The Emissions Gap Report*, 2010, <http://www.unep.org/publications/ebooks/emissionsgapreport/chapter2>.

fuel companies, it can seek to use its power of engagement to ensure fast, effective change. We urge that there should be a set of criteria for a response from such companies. One example of such a criterion is the immediate withdrawal from investments linked to tar sands and coal. We welcome the £12million divestment from thermal coal and tar sands announced on 30th April 2015. Another criterion would be a decision to end exploration in the Arctic, other sensitive coastal and ocean sites, and those where natural and human life are known to be directly under threat, with a time scale of under five years. Another might be that within a decade a very high percentage of assets and funds of companies (maybe 50%) should be shifted from the extractive sector to the renewables sector. Adherence to such criteria could be required by the NIBs for their continuing investment.

### **Investment in Alternative Forms of Energy**

5. We are no longer in some unattainable world of green futures. Encouraging developments are happening around the world, and sometimes very close to home. For example, according to the *New Internationalist*:<sup>5</sup>
- 39% of Denmark's electricity was generated from wind power in 2014
  - wind power globally grew at 15% in 2014 (17% growth rate required for wind to provide ¼ global energy by 2040)
  - solar electricity is cheaper than the grid average in Spain, Italy, Australia, Chile, Germany, Brazil and at least ten US states (the cost of solar has dropped by two thirds in six years)
  - On the Isle of Eigg the residents control a 100% renewable energy grid, powered by a mixture of wind, small hydro and solar power

It is clear that switching to renewables is not only scientifically and ethically necessary but possible, profitable and socially desirable. For example, the Trade Union Campaign against Climate Change argues that a co-ordinated government response could generate a million new jobs within the renewables and allied sectors by 2020, with a projected cut in greenhouse gas emissions of 83% in 20 years.<sup>6</sup> Proposals such as this sit alongside warnings about the increasing risks associated with investment in fossil fuels. Many voices, including that of Mark Carney, Governor of the Bank of England, warn that the vast majority of fossil fuels are unburnable and will therefore risk becoming 'stranded assets'. It is as much for financial as ethical reasons that many organisations and individuals, including several huge endowment and investment funds have already disinvested a total of more than \$50 billion from fossil funds. The NIBs have an opportunity to support the transition to a low carbon economy by steadily increasing the portfolio share of renewables in tandem with a sharp decrease in reliance upon fossil fuels.

### **Conclusion**

6. For the General Synod to affirm the need for urgency, the need for criteria for the speed and range of disinvestment and the need to explore the alternatives of investing in clean energy would also add weight to the Church's voice as the international summit in Paris in November-December 2015 approaches. This is a time when clearly living the Fifth Mark of Mission needs to be central to the life and witness of the whole church. This is a moment in history when we must run and not walk.

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*On behalf of the Birmingham Diocesan Synod*

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<sup>5</sup> *New Internationalist*, March 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Campaign against Climate Change Trade Union Group, 'One Million Climate Jobs: Tackling the Environment and Economic Crisis', 2014,  
(<http://www.campaignccc.org/site/data/files/sites/data/files/Docs/one%20million%20climate%20jobs%202014.pdf>)