

Anglican WORLD

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Being a godparent: a holy calling

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Fracking and the environment

Doing God's will in a
vulnerable world

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SHUTTERSTOCK

We Don't Have Much Time: Fracking and the Environmental Crisis

NOW MORE THAN ever, we need to engage with the environmental crisis as people of faith. As Christians we proclaim the Good News, which sometimes makes us reluctant to talk about worldly news when it's grim and scary. Yet we find hope when the church keeps a watchful, discerning eye on the way things are, and responds faithfully, prophetically and with good works.

The profound need for faith, discernment and action is exemplified by the controversial method for extracting natural gas called hydraulic fracturing, or simply *fracking*. The politicized nature of the debate about fracking and the ambiguous use of the science behind it make it difficult to know what anyone is actually

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talking about or how reliable the information is.

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profits (as a solution to poverty), energy independence (as a solution to energy poverty), and clean energy ("gas is cleaner than coal") motivates the pro-fracking point of view. Because these arguments reach the public largely through media campaigns funded by the fracking industry, which are often echoed by elected officials, opportunities for informed public debate can be few and far between. Citizens ask important, often unanswered questions about risks to God's creation: the possible contamination of ground water, the impact on human health, the immense volume of water (millions of litres per well) needed for drilling, and how toxic wastewater will be stored. Landowner rights and community decision-making also

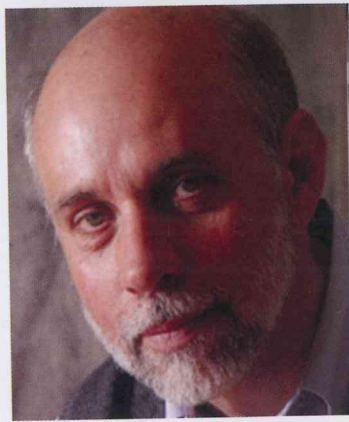


→ come into play. So do concerns about the decline of property values and of whole communities when farmland or residential areas are transformed into industrial zones. Last but not least is the possible impact on climate change – fracking can release methane, a greenhouse gas far worse than carbon dioxide. These legitimate concerns point to the further impoverishment of God’s creation by fracking, rather than genuine sustainability and real freedom from poverty.

In our time the big picture surrounding the fracking debate is climate change and we don’t have much time. The future is uncertain on a global scale that previous generations never experienced. The cause is carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases that we have put into the atmosphere by burning fossil fuels. The result: the earth’s temperature will probably increase 3 degrees C (5.6 F) by 2100. Ocean levels could rise at least 1 metre – much more depending on how quickly the ice sheets melt or break apart. All this, and not only this, will take place unless we make substantial changes in how we live today.

Another fact is that we’re falling behind in the race to reduce carbon emissions. Scientists know that in the nearly 800,000 years before the industrial age carbon dioxide levels never rose above 300 parts per million. Since then, yearly levels have risen far above what is considered to be marginally safe – 350 ppm. Just this year, scientists recorded 400 ppm on a single day. We will reach that figure as a yearly norm by 2017, unless emissions are drastically reduced. Otherwise we can expect the worst, and this is not only about rising temperature and oceans. There will be stronger storms in some areas; more severe droughts in others; shortages of food and water, waves of refugees, more species extinctions, changes in ocean chemistry that will destroy fisheries and coral reefs – not to mention heightened social and political upheaval.

No one intended this to happen,



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Jeff Gollither



but it is happening. Some richer nations have polluted the air and impoverished the land a great deal more than others. A few continue to do so, despite efforts organized by the United Nations to change our collective course. The vulnerable and poor (in the Global South and elsewhere) suffer the consequences for which they are not responsible. They have made repeated, desperate pleas for climate justice at the UN. The Rt Revd Apimeleki Qiliho, Bishop in Vanua Levu and Taveuni, tells the story of climate change in the Pacific. Islands, atolls and villages are washed away, shorelines recede, crops decrease in yield. We as a diocese continue to search for responses to mission that combine our need to be good stewards of God’s earth with advocacy for climate justice. How do we, as a diocese, continue to do God’s work in a vulnerable world?’

Climate injustice is not confined to the Pacific. Consider the

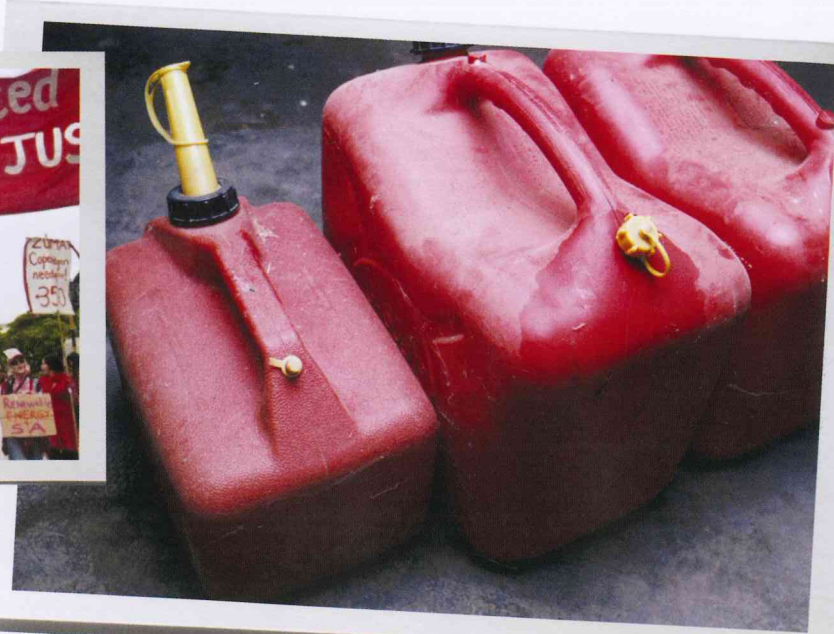
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experience of the Most Revd Dr Thabo Makgoba, Archbishop of Cape Town, Metropolitan of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa, and Chair of the Anglican Communion Environmental Network (ACEN). ‘Crop yields, particularly of maize and wheat, have dropped and we have seen a rise in the costs of basic foods within Southern Africa. Already water-stressed, the dryer parts of our Province such as Namibia have experienced drought which has led to farmers being forced to slaughter starving livestock. In →



ANGLICAN CHURCH OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

Southern Africa Archbishop Thabo Makgoba is the Chair of the Communion's Environmental Network



→ other parts, such as Mozambique, above average rains have led to severe flooding, with people fleeing from their homes. My plea to you as fellow Anglican brothers and sisters is to make the change now from fossil fuels. If we don't do so then, in the words of Christian Aid, "we can forget about making poverty history – climate change will make poverty permanent."

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The environmental crisis is so closely tied to economies that impoverish people and the earth that the challenge of finding an ethical and sustainable future is daunting indeed. How can we make the transition to clean renewable energy, provide food, water, and meaningful work for an estimated 9.6 billion people by 2050, while sustaining the ecological integrity of God's creation at the same time? The United Nations' Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development Goals are designed to find answers to this very question. The sense that we

live in a time when the world seems to be up for sale only makes matters worse. Land and water grabbing in the Global South are on the rise; and as the divide between the rich and poor increases, get rich quick schemes can seem very appealing. Obviously, the dream of unlimited economic growth is just that – a dream. This is not to suggest that every business and corporation is part of the problem. Many – more than we might think – are well aware of the urgency of the crisis, and they pursue profits and a better life in socially and environmentally responsible ways. Nevertheless, at the present moment, no one has a practical solution to all the challenges we face.

People of previous ages have faced challenges that tested their

faith. It was scary then. The future was uncertain. Survival was at stake, as it is today. Now is the time for us to rise up as people of faith, with loving kindness, respect for each other and God's creation, a keen sense of justice, discerning hearts and minds, and with as much forgiveness as we hope God will have for us. Anglican sisters and brothers, it's time to come together so we can have a life together.

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