

CHURCH OF SOUTH INDIA SYNOD SECRETARIAT
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Circular TKO Circ- 001/2017

LENTEN CALL FOR 'CARBON FAST'
'CIRCULAR' BY THE MODERATOR
THOMAS K. OOMMEN

TO ALL THE BISHOPS IN THE CHURCH OF SOUTH INDIA

To all who read this Circular, mercy and peace!

1. WE HAVE COMMITTED SIN

- 1.1.** God being the creator and we, His creation, ought to respect and care the rest of His creation, the flora and the fauna. The call to 'subdue' in Genesis 1:28, is not a call for human dominion or exploitation of nature. In Ezekiel 34:4, God condemns the kings for 'ruling' (subduing) with force and harshness, failing to strengthen the weak, to heal the sick, to bind the injured, to bring back the strayed, to seek the lost. Therefore, the call to subdue is not to dominate, but to care and 'steward' the creation. Failure to do so is indiscipline to the Creator and indifference to the creation, and hence it is sinful.
- 1.2.** God's providential care is for all. After the flood, God establishes the Covenant not only with Noah and his descendants, but also with every living creature, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with (Genesis 9: 9 – 10). Psalm 145: 9, affirms God's providential care for all that He had made, saying, "The Lord is good to all, and His compassion is over all that He has made. Failure to recognize God's providential care for all His creation is a breach of accepting God's sovereignty, and hence it is sinful.
- 1.3.** God not only feeds His creation, as it is mentioned in Matthew 6: 26 (*Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.*), but also wants us to participate in His care by sharing our resources. In the Bible, we see various decrees by God requiring the people of Israel to share the resources of the land, with the poor and strangers, and also with the wild animals.(Leviticus 25:7). Failure to share our resources, rather than accumulating and exploiting is a violation of God's decree, and hence it is sinful.

2. WE NEED TO REPENT

- 2.1.** Forty days of Lent is often related to Moses' 40 days on the mountain with God, the 40-year journey of the Israelites in the desert, and Jesus' 40-day period of fasting and temptation. The Church of South India, joining with the universal Church, observe from Wednesday, March 01, 2017 to Saturday, April 15, 2017, as 40 days of Lent, as a time to reflect on God's purpose for our life as well as to repent and reorient our lives to accomplish God's will. Further, during Lent, through abstaining

from certain habits and fasting, we engage in self-examination and penitence, preparing ourselves for Easter, Jesus' victory over sin and death.

- 2.2.** However, in Isaiah 58: 5 – 7, God asks, *“Is such the fast that I choose, a day to humble oneself? Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush, and to lie in sackcloth and ashes? Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD? Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house, when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?”* Thus, God calls us to ‘fast’ as an active participation in His mission to establish justice, which includes eco-justice.
- 2.3.** There is a close linkage between eco-justice and socio-economic justice and in order to have a healthy earth community, we ought to act on ecological issues connecting with struggles for socio-economic justice. The struggle to restore eco-justice is a spiritual act, expressing a spiritually grounded moral posture of respect and fairness toward all creation. It calls for a kind of development that is not human centered, rather ‘creation centered’. The budgetary allocations by any government should take this into account. While it is appreciable that the Union Budget 2017 has increased nearly 19 per cent in its budgetary allocation for the ‘Environment Ministry’, it seems to have failed to step up allocations towards meeting India’s commitments on renewable energy, energy efficiency and additional carbon sequestration through the forestry sector. The minuscule nature of the indirect tax incentives for renewable energy sector is inadequate in phasing out the generator sets in India, a key focus area of the central and state pollution control boards. The issue of ‘carbon emission’ too does not seem to be seriously addressed. The governments at the centre and state need to remember that the root word in Greek for ‘economics’ and ‘ecology’ are same vis-à-vis ‘Oikos’. The ‘economics’ that ignores ‘ecology’ is dangerous to the ‘oikos’ (household); be it understood as the ‘family of God’ or ‘*Vasudaiva Kutumbakam*’.

3. WE OUGHT TO ‘CARBON FAST’

- 3.1.** In India, increase in Carbon emission is resulting in warmer temperatures and rising sea levels, having fatal impacts on agriculture, fishing, community developments, plants and animals that are important to our ecosystems and the protection of our coastline. As per scientific predictions, by 2070, one human being will have only two glasses of water to drink per day. By 2035, Ganga, Brahmaputra and Indus rivers will disappear. In 2016, 330 million people, more than a quarter of India’s population, were hit by drought. The whole creation has been groaning for water due to desertification, which is an irreversible process. Migration of poor people and wild animals is now common, and the number of climate refugees is increasing due to our acts of climate injustice. In this context of ecological injustice (SIN) by the human hands, let us pledge to hold 40 days of ‘Carbon Fast’ - a call not only to repent our ecological sins, but also to restore eco-justice.
- 3.2.** ‘Carbon fast’ challenges us to look at our daily actions, to reflect on how they impact on the environment. It challenges us to take some small steps, some of which will reduce our carbon dioxide output while others will help the environment for a more sustainable world. In the process we may

come to rediscover a different relationship with God, with His Creation and with one another. Most of the CSI Congregations belong to the communities that are vulnerable to Climate Change. We shall create awareness on 'Climate Justice' at the congregational level in these dioceses. Further, we shall re-read the Bible and reaffirm our faith from the perspective of Climate Refugees. We can inspire the congregations to discern climate justice as an integral part of churches' public witness today. We hope that the congregations would be equipped to involve in saving creations, whose life and livelihood are under threat.

3.3. This 'Carbon Fast' shall provide myriad ways for our congregations to get involved in enhancing climate justice. Join the Carbon Fast because you can change the world a little in 40 days, but more importantly you could change yourself a lot! Look back over the year and how much petrol did we use? How much did we spend? Reflect on how we have treated the environment. Commit ourselves to living simple during Lent, simple food, less travel and sharing with others in need. Practice effective waste management; Reduce, Re-use, Refuse and Recycle Waste. Plant saplings and nurture them since trees can directly remove carbon dioxide and store it as wood and foliage. Reduce energy used for light, power and transport and thus, reduce emissions. Conserve water, knowing that water is a divine blessing to be treasured, to be shared with all creations, to be protected for future generations. Join in the struggles by those fighting for life and livelihood, exploited through ecological injustice.

4. CONCLUSION

"He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8). We have to build an economy that will support, not undermine, future generations. It is not only the responsibility of the respective union and state governments, but also of the citizens to engage in efforts to establish climate justice. As Christians we should have an extra burden to come together, pray together and act together for the world in general, and our nation in particular, so that we try to solve the climate crisis. God is calling us to be the change we long to see. Let us engage in this spiritual discipline, as one of His creations, caring the rest of His creations, trusting that with God, all things are possible.

Given in Chennai, India, at the Church of South India Synod Secretariat, on February 8, 2017, in the First Year of my ministry as Moderator.

Not to be served, but to serve!

Thomas K. Oommen

(You are encouraged to translate this to your regional language and publish it in your Diocesan journal or in appropriate forums.)