

Nilackal Declaration

We the, Religious heads, Religious Scholars, Environmentalists, Scientists from different countries of the globe and from different states in India met at Nilackal Ecumenical Centre from 17th to 20th .April 2012, organised by Nilackal Trust which is a joint venture of Catholic, Orthodox, Jacobite, Marthoma and CSI Churches in Kerala, India, emphasized the significance to promote cooperation among spiritual leaders regarding reinforcing the importance of environmental protection among their individual communities

Call

Religious leaders and institutions have the potential to mobilize billions of followers in the global struggle to curb climate change and achieve sustainable development. The degradation of the natural world is equivalent to a spiritual crisis and causes a sense of imbalance for the globe's billions of people. Degrading the environment is not just an environmental issue. It is a moral imperative of our faith. Being in charge and control of this earth, it is incumbent upon us to maintain the balance of life on it, to guarantee an honest living and a dignified preservation of all elements, and everything living on the face of this earth, including its animals and plants, and non-living objects.. The gifts of creation are not meant to be bought and sold or exploited for profit and personal gain, not for our greed but to meet our needs. Climate is a sign of the times that calls us to deep reflection and conversion..

Poor affected

Climate change affects the poorest around the world. It calls us evaluate our lifestyles and make needed changes in our wasteful habits, our over consumption and use of goods that contaminate water and leave millions without safe water to drink.

Environmental protection is a part of the faith

Care for the environment is not an option. It is an integral part of our lives, which are all interconnected. All living things are deeply interconnected, and all life depends on the life of others. Study of the Bible, and of the Judeo-Christian religious tradition, have made us equally aware that this interconnectedness which is one of the central narratives of Scripture. God creates all people and all things to live in relationship with one another and the world around them. At the end of the biblical creation account, the writer of Genesis tells us that "God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good." We believe that each of us must recall ourselves to the vision that God has for us to realize in our own day. It is a vision in which all human beings live together as siblings, at peace with one another and with God, and in right relationship with all of the rest of creation.

The solution to the present ecological challenges is a paradigm shift from Anthropocentric to eco centric principles

It is worth mentioning the recent Judgment of Supreme Court of India (TN Godavarman Thirumulpad v. Union of India, division bench of Supreme Court 13, Feb 2012) here.

“Environmental Justice could be achieved only if we drift away from the principle of Anthropocentric to ecocentric. Many of our principles like sustainable development, polluter pays principle, intergenerational equity have their roots in anthropocentric principles. Anthropocentrism is always human interest focused and that non human only instrumental value to humans. In other words, humans take precedence and human responsibilities to non-humans based benefits to humans. Ecocentrism is nature-centered where humans are part of nature and non humans have intrinsic value. In other words, human interest does not take automatic precedence and humans have obligations to non humans independently of human interest. Eco-centrism is therefore life centered, nature centered where nature includes both humans and non humans”.

Water

As churches and faith based organizations affirm water as the cradle and source of life, an expression of God’s grace in perpetuity for the whole of creation. We are called to exercise responsible stewardship for this unique trust, and to preserve and share it for the benefit of humanity and all creation. Further we share the following convictions: that access to water is a fundamental human right, that the protection and control of water resources is a central public responsibility, and that water must not be treated as a commodity but as an essential social good for the present and future generations. We recognise water as a sacred gift of God. We recognise that water is key to the livelihoods for communities, and the entry point for any development. Poverty can never be overcome, if the issue of water and sanitation is not adequately addressed. The Conference raised concerns about ongoing and potential conflicts over water at local, national and inter-state levels.

Rivers

The condition of India’s rivers is a barometer of the state of the environment. The rivers are dying. Most are highly polluted with domestic sewage, industrial effluents and an erratic waterflow. With global warming, the stress levels on the country’s key rivers will only exacerbate. Both, the Centre and the states will have to launch serious drives to revive the ecosystems.

Climate change

Climate change is already causing unpredictable rainfall, prolonged droughts, devastating floods, desertification and drying up of water sources. The existence and future of millions of people is jeopardized. We urge the industrialized countries to take their responsibility, and together with industrializing countries to start immediately to cut the emission of carbon dioxide, to put advanced alternative energy technology at the disposal of affected regions of the Global South. We recognise and affirm

communities' own initiatives, skills and knowledge in dealing with water scarcity, and therefore advocate for technologies that are appropriate and relevant to the cultures and contexts of the people. We further reiterate our commitment to strengthen our support and work with poor rural and urban communities in their endeavours to find sustainable supplies of water, the provision of safe sanitation, and to protect the environment.

Wetland

Wetlands across the country are rich in biodiversity, recharge groundwater, preserve flora and fauna and are a source of livelihood for those who live around them. But these are fast disappearing because of growing urbanisation and industrialisation. They also face the danger of heavy pollution from sewage and industrial units. There is an urgent need to save these water bodies. After making an inventory and assessing their condition, governments must take steps to restore them.

Waste

Reduce the waste of resources in our homes, congregations, and communities by recycling, using recycled products, and reducing consumption. We affirm the concept of sustainable development, as that which seeks to provide an environment that promotes a life of dignity and well-being compatible with the continuation and integrity of supporting ecosystems. The concept includes the concern that material blessings should be available to successive generations as a fundamental God-given right.

We believe that over-consumption in the North can have a debilitating impact on countries of the South. Consumption of non-renewable resources in the North should be significantly reduced, by increasing recycling and reuse of materials, and by encouraging transition to less material-intensive technologies.

Technology transfer

Poor nations and poor individuals have fewer resources available to cope with major challenges and threats. The consequences of global warming will therefore hit the poor the hardest, in part because those areas likely to be significantly affected first are in the poorest regions of the world. Millions of people could die in this century because of climate change, most of them our poorest people. The need of low-income countries, need technology. Uncontrolled development of technologies can ultimately threaten the very existence of humanity. So how do we share regarding climate change? In the developed world our emissions of carbon dioxide are on average about 5 times larger per person than in the developing world - a very unequal situation. First, we must work harder and more urgently to reduce our emissions. We must also assist developing countries as they work to provide carbon free energy. Money, technology and skills that we can provide can help to make this happen..

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immediately to cut the emission of carbon dioxide, to put advanced alternative energy technology at the disposal and to assure funding for mitigation and adaptation measures, as well as in other affected regions of the Global South.

Solar/wind energy

India should collaborate with major countries to build numerous such solar plants across the country. In terms of renewable energy, few can beat the wind, except of course, the sun. Wind power has been growing in India which now stands at around 8,000 MW, making the country the fourth largest producer in the world.

Eco-friendly construction

Faith communities should promote Eco-friendly buildings. Companies are using recycled materials to erect structures. Air conditioners are being fitted with intelligent sensors to regulate cooling according to the number of people in the room. The Governments should promote green buildings.

Green Cover

Plant as much trees to improve the green cover. Forests are one of the most effective carbon sinks and critical for preserving the ecological balance. Besides other plants emphasis will be given in promoting the planting of Vetiver which increase ground water recharge and prevent soil erosion.

Rain water harvesting

Promote the digging of mud pits in all the lands to harvest rain water which will recharge the ground water There is an urgent need to improve water harvesting systems and put the deluge to more productive use.

We request leaders of all faith communities to

1) Preach and teach about care for the earth as a requirement of our faith. *Celebrate Forest Sunday* to talk the symbiotic relationship between humans and trees, how we depend on them as life partners for us. Identify them as our “worship partners” as the Psalm suggests: “Let all creation praise the Lord. Use the occasion to plant the first trees on our land in memory of members who have died.

Celebrate Land Sunday as an opportunity to celebrate the harvest of our large community garden and to offer our produce and monetary gifts to food banks for the hungry in our community. Include a brief ritual that affirms our vocation to be caretakers and stewards of God’s land so that all will benefit from the fruits of the Earth.

Celebrate Wilderness Sunday, displaying many different faces of wilderness and the inhabitants of wilderness. The wilderness shows us that humans are not to dominate the land but know our limits and preserve areas untouched by human exploitation and presence. Provide people with information about laws that protect natural sanctuaries and about organizations such as land trusts and groups that advocate for the preservation of wilderness areas.

Celebrate River Sunday guided by the image from Revelation in which the river of life offers water free of charge so that the poor will not go thirsty. Human trash is despoiling our Earth’s water

2) Establish groups to learn about environmental issues and care for the earth, needed lifestyle changes, reducing wastefulness, recycling and the possibility of establishing a green congregation.

- 3) Join with other local congregations who have an interest in the movement.
- 4) Share everyday examples of green living such as using washable dishes instead of paper products, exploring other energy sources, minimizing use of pesticides and fertilizers use of biodegradable cups and dishes.
- 5) Do an energy audit on building owned by the congregation, explore the use of fluorescent lights, and make necessary changes when and where possible .
- 6) Shop for and use organic fruits and vegetables.
- 7) Participate in clean up endeavors and recycling drives.
- 8) Teach children, even at a very young age what it means to care for the environment. Adults could study a book on the subject.
- 9) Share ideas about what can be done to reduce wastefulness.

Conclusion

We the undersigned pledge to act on the basis of the claims made in this document. We will not only teach the truths communicated here but also seek ways to implement the actions that follow from them. We urge all who read this declaration to join us in this effort.