Resolution #11: Commend and Advance Baptismal Covenant Language that Reflects Our Unity with All Creation

Submitted by: The Baptismal Covenant Working Group
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Resolved, that the 230th Convention of the Diocese of Connecticut receive with appreciation the good work of the Baptismal Covenant Working Group, extend its gratitude to the parishes that participated in the Baptismal Covenant creation language study, and commend the study report (attached) to the Episcopal Church in Connecticut;

And be it further Resolved, that this Convention submit to the 78th General Convention of The Episcopal Church the proposed resolution and explanation contained in the study report:

Resolved, the House of ________ concurring, that the 78th General Convention authorize the trial addition to the Baptismal Covenant of a sixth question concerning our responsibility as baptized Christians to care for God's creation;

And be it further Resolved, that the additional question and response be worded as follows:

“Will you cherish the wondrous works of God, and protect the beauty and integrity of all creation?”

“I will, with God’s help.”;

And be it further Resolved, that use of this additional question and response be authorized for trial use as part of the Baptismal Covenant for the triennium 2016-2018.
Explanation:
Resolution #7, “Develop Baptismal Covenant Language that Reflects Our Unity with All Creation,” passed by the 229th Convention, authorized the Bishops to create a Working Group to: draft liturgical language expanding the Baptismal Covenant; offer it to congregations for study; and consider submitting the proposed language and study report to The Episcopal Church’s Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music. The Working Group hereby presents its report, with the conviction that advancing the proposed resolution directly to General Convention is the best response to the increasingly urgent imperative and longing many congregations expressed to recognize our shared calling to care for creation.

How does this resolution further God’s mission of restoration and reconciliation with all of creation:
By thus expanding the language of the Baptismal Covenant, The Episcopal Church would invite all its members to publicly witness and commit to God’s mission of restoration and reconciliation for all creation.

Statement of Requirements to Implement the Resolution:
Appropriate procedures for referral of the proposed resolution and explanation to the 78th General Convention of The Episcopal Church.
The Baptismal Covenant: Caring for Creation

Report to the 230th Diocesan Convention from the Baptismal Covenant Working Group

Background: In response to Resolution #7, “Develop Baptismal Covenant Language that Reflects our Unity with all Creation,” passed in October 2013 by the 229th Convention of the Diocese of Connecticut, the Bishops were authorized to create a working group to draft liturgical language expanding the Baptismal Covenant with reference to creation and to offer that language to congregations in the Diocese for study. The resolution also called on the 230th convention to consider submitting the proposed language and a report of the study to The Episcopal Church’s Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music.

Procedure: Through study and reflection, the Baptismal Covenant Working Group found that care for creation lies deep within Scripture and is already pervasive throughout the Book of Common Prayer. Adding language to the Baptismal Covenant that addresses just and loving relationships with God’s creation would bring the rite of Holy Baptism into alignment with the multitude of creation-centered references already in the Book of Common Prayer. At the same time it would address a growing concern for the well-being of “…this fragile earth, our island home” (Eucharistic Prayer C, BCP, 370).

The Working Group considered two options: either altering one or more of the five existing questions of the Baptismal Covenant to include language related to creation; or adding a sixth question to the Baptismal Covenant. The Working Group found that the existing questions did not lend themselves to revision in this manner, and that only an additional question could capture the intent.

The Working Group recognized that the shape of the Baptismal Covenant evolved over the course of the decade leading up to the adoption of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer. In Services for Trial Use (1971) only two of the present five questions that follow the threefold recitation of the Apostles’ Creed were included. In Authorized Services (1973) two more questions were added. It was not until the publication of the Draft Proposed Book (1976) that concern over the omission of any reference to sin, repentance and recommitment to Christ was addressed by including the present second question. The Working Group concluded that the inclusion of a question about care for creation would be in keeping with the evolving character of the Baptismal Covenant from 1970 onwards.

The Working Group proceeded to develop language for expanding the Baptismal Covenant by adding a sixth question committing to care for creation. The Working Group authored four possible options for the wording of this question, as well as study materials that included a
theological and ecclesiological rationale, a history of the Baptismal Covenant, a list of references to creation in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer, and a list of suggested additional resources. Diocesan staff created an online reporting form. The Bishops invited all parishes of the Diocese to participate in the study, which asked them to indicate whether or not they supported adding such a sixth question, to choose one of the presented options or to create wording of their own, and to report their conclusions by July 1, 2014.

Feedback came from a variety of parishes within the Diocese. Initially forty-six parishes accepted the invitation to participate in the study. Six later indicated that they were unable to complete the study due to other commitments. Some parishes signed up with the understanding that they were being asked to use the suggested language during a baptismal liturgy. When they discovered they were authorized only to engage in study of the topic, they declined to participate. They are still included among supporters of the effort to amplify the baptismal liturgy.

Twenty parishes actually completed the online reporting form, as requested in the invitation. The twenty responses represented a cross-section of the parishes in Connecticut. Both large and small parishes participated from urban, suburban and rural areas.

The Working Group read carefully all the responses. Most parishes used their Sunday Adult Forum to discuss the suggested wording of the additional question; some created a committee for the study; one had a Vestry discussion; and in at least one parish a sermon was preached on the basic themes. Many also indicated that as part of their study they used the additional materials provided by the Working Group. Of the twenty responses, only one parish opposed the addition of a sixth question.

Twelve parishes offered alternative wording to the four original options. The Working Group read aloud all these alternatives. It was felt necessary to do this in order to get the sense and spirit of the suggestions and to hear how each alternative would fit with the existing questions. It was important to the Working Group that the final offering be completely consistent with the current questions and that it draw from the various parish contributions.

On the basis of these responses and our own discernment, the Working Group is proposing that the following sixth question and response be added to the five baptismal questions:

“Will you cherish the wondrous works of God, and protect the beauty and integrity of all creation?”

“I will, with God’s help.”
This wording draws in part from the biblical language found in Job 37: 14, the “wondrous
works of God.

During this study, the Working Group detected a strong sense of urgency and longing on the part of representatives of the parishes that participated. Many congregations expressed a need to include creation language in the Baptismal Covenant, and the hope to do so immediately. As directed by Resolution #7, The Working Group considered referring its proposed sixth question to The Episcopal Church’s Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music. However, the Working Group believes that such a course of action would create a delay of at least three years when prompt action is imperative. Therefore, the Working Group asks Diocesan Convention to advance this resolution directly to the General Convention of The Episcopal Church, in the hope that the sixth question will be approved for trial use as soon as possible.

Conclusion: In concluding its assignment, the Working Group proposes the following resolution and accompanying explanation in the hope that the 230th Convention of the Diocese of Connecticut will advance it to the 78th General Convention of The Episcopal Church at its meeting in Salt Lake City in the summer of 2015.

RESOLUTION: ADDITION TO THE BAPTISMAL COVENANT OF A QUESTION ABOUT CARE FOR CREATION

Resolved, the House of _______ concurring, that the 78th General Convention authorize the trial addition to the Baptismal Covenant of a sixth question concerning our responsibility as baptized Christians to care for God’s creation; and be it further

Resolved, that the additional question and response be worded as follows:

“Will you cherish the wondrous works of God, and protect the beauty and integrity of all creation?”

“I will, with God’s help.”; and be it further

Resolved, that use of this additional question and response be authorized for trial use as part of the Baptismal Covenant for the triennium 2016-2018.

EXPLANATION: Since the advent of the present Book of Common Prayer, the shape of the Baptismal Covenant has become increasingly familiar to Episcopalians: the Apostles’ Creed affirmed in response to three questions about what we believe, and five further questions about how we live out our baptismal commitment to Christ. Responding to the perceived
needs of the times, the now familiar order and content of these questions evolved over several years prior to the final adoption of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer.

In Services for Trial Use (1971) only two of the present five questions that follow the threefold recitation of the Apostles’ Creed were included. In Authorized Services (1973) two more questions were added. It was not until the publication of the Draft Proposed Book (1976) that concern over the omission of any reference to sin, repentance and recommitment to Christ was addressed by including the present second question. The inclusion of a question about our calling as Christians to care for God’s creation would be in keeping with the evolving character of the Baptismal Covenant from 1970 onwards.

The current ecological crisis and our growing awareness of the interdependence of all of creation point us to the urgent need to rediscover humanity’s place in the web of life and to reconnect to it. The former Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Rowan Williams, has said:

> Every Sunday in the creed, Christians confess their faith in God who created the world we inhabit. It is God’s gift. As stewards of that gift, each of us has a responsibility, both to God and to generations to come, to insure that this remains a sustainable world. Placing environmental concerns at the heart of our Christian worship demonstrates our shared commitment to this end.¹

As the biblical scholar Norman Habel has said, “We are challenged to return to our biblical and theological traditions to recover our intimate connections with creation and with Christ and the Holy Spirit in creation. We return to see ourselves again as part of the very earth from which we are made.”²

The House of Bishops of The Episcopal Church, in September 2011, issued a Pastoral Teaching on the environment that includes the following: “… in order to honor the goodness and sacredness of God’s creation, we, as brothers and sisters in Christ, commit ourselves and urge every Episcopalian” to “lift up prayers in personal and public worship for environmental justice, for sustainable development, and for help in restoring right relations both among humankind

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and between humankind and the rest of creation.” 3 According to the Website of The Episcopal Church, “In the Episcopal Church the baptismal covenant is widely regarded as the normative statement of what it means to follow Christ.” 4 If we take seriously the charge to care for creation, the expansion of the Baptismal Covenant would seem to be the necessary next step.

The proposed additional question, “Will you cherish the wondrous works of God, and protect the beauty and integrity of all creation?”, is consistent in style and format with the existing five questions. It draws in part on biblical language found in Job 37:14, the “wondrous works of God.”

Adding this sixth question to the Baptismal Covenant will address our responsibility as baptized Christians to care for God’s creation. It will bring the rite of Holy Baptism into alignment with the multitude of creation-centered references already permeating the Book of Common Prayer. At the same time it will speak to the growing concern for the well-being of “…this fragile earth, our island home” (Eucharistic Prayer C, BCP, 370).

This concern is leading an increasing number of congregations to add a creation-centered question of their own making to the Baptismal Covenant without any authorization on the part of General Convention. This is a pressing reason for allowing what is proposed here to be used throughout the Church on a trial basis.

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