Statement on Environmental Justice Earth: A Beloved Community

... and God saw everything that God had made, and indeed, it was very good. Gen. 1:31

Naming the problem: As followers of Jesus, called to Beloved Community, we recognize the unfolding destruction of God’s good earth as a mortal sin, a moral challenge, and an injustice connected to every other injustice:

- Mass extinctions are unraveling of web of life on which human life, both physical and spiritual depends, and which is sacred in its own right as God’s creation.
- Climate change induced sea level rise is already drowning coastal and island communities, and marshes critical to wildlife.
- Climate change is causing increasingly erratic weather - stronger and more frequent storms, floods, droughts, and fires. These disrupt natural ecosystems, threaten agriculture, destroy livelihoods, and limit access to food and clean water, exacerbating hunger, poverty, and the spread of disease.
- Climate change is driving regional conflicts and mass migrations of refugees. Women and children, vulnerable to abuse and trafficking, and the old and disabled, are especially impacted.
- Pollution is the number one cause of death globally, especially in the developing world, not including deaths from climate related storms, floods, droughts and fires.
- In the U.S., race is the number one predictor of where to find communities exposed to dangerous levels of toxins. Poverty is second.
- We would need 1.7 planets to sustainably support earth’s 7.6 billion people at current, vastly inequitable levels - four planets if everyone consumed at the rate of the United States. Global population is projected at 11.8 billion by 2100, yet many hold out false promises that those future billions can all one day enjoy our unsustainable developed-world lifestyle.

Our response: A theology, practice, and proclamation of earth justice:

1. We will preach, teach, and live a theology of Beloved Community.

What we preach and teach about God’s relationship to humanity and the earth matters. The dominant global theology entrones a hetero-patriarchal God atop a pyramid of power. Those higher in the chain of divine command may objectify and utilize those below them for their own purposes. Global economies have adopted and secularized this model, turning markets into gods whose worship requires infinite, unregulated, unquestioned growth and consumption on a fragile, finite planet. The deadly results of this idolatry are falling first, and worst, upon women, children, marginal communities, and fragile ecosystems. Those in power suffer the soul-killing consequences of the worship of wealth and influence.

As members of the Alliance of Baptists, we commit ourselves to call each other, our churches, our communities, and our public leaders to repent from this deadly idolatry. We pledge to proclaim the counter-narrative of a God whose relationship to the world and its people is incarnational and liberationist – a Divine Presence embodied in all of creation,
who suffers and rejoices in us, and who brings hope out of despair and life out of death. We will cultivate mindfulness of our inborn interconnection and responsibility to one another, to all living beings, and to The Holy One, in whose image we are made. We will follow our call to preach, teach, and live in ways that communicate the good news of Christ’s Beloved Community, whose expansive solidarity enfolds humanity’s outcasts and the natural world.

2. We will respond pastorally to the fear and grief of climate catastrophe.

The denial of death is pervasive in our culture. In the face of personal mortality, many comfort themselves with thoughts of their children’s children, and life on earth continuing forever, carrying on their hopes, dreams, and DNA. The probability of climate catastrophe – planetary death – is so terrifying and grief inducing that it is no wonder many deny the reality of climate change. As a resurrection people, the Alliance of Baptists accepts our call to the pastoral task of helping people open their hearts to their fears and grief about personal, and planetary mortality, and in community, to cultivate the collective courage and hope necessary to act for a just future, which is the only survivable future.

3. We will engage in personal and corporate spiritual disciplines in the consumption of resources.

Building Beloved Community requires accepting the daunting challenge of significantly reducing our own consumption of resources and advocating for an equitable distribution domestically and globally. It requires putting debates about balancing human population with the survival of the natural world in a context that places primary responsibility on the developed world, rather than blaming the poor. We, in the Alliance of Baptists, accept the challenge of reducing consumption in our personal lives and churches, of advocating for a more equitable distribution of resources, and of engaging in discernment about balancing consumption and population, mindful of our position as alpha consumers.

4. Public Policy

- We reaffirm the commitments made in our 2009 Statement on Climate Change in support of congregational and public policy that reduces carbon emissions, supports vulnerable communities, and assists and welcomes migrants.
- To our 2009 commitments, we add environmental justice impacts not directly caused by climate change, such the siting of toxic emitting industries and dumps in low income and/or communities of color, and the global problems of unsustainable agricultural practices, and of toxic and plastic waste.
- We pledge as individuals, congregations, and as the Alliance of Baptists, to oppose new fossil fuel infrastructure, to support a rapid transition to clean energy, and to consider divestment from fossil fuels.
- We commit to informing ourselves about local, state, and federal energy and environmental policy and to public witness and activism on behalf of earth justice, centering the concerns and leadership of indigenous communities, other communities of color, and impoverished communities.