

Now That the ELCIC Convention Has Passed...

Our church in convention passed three motions relating to the climate crisis. These motions may be found on pages 34 and 35 of the Final Revised Bulletin of Reports, Section F, 05-28-2019.

(<https://elcic.app.box.com/s/ghr8b9rjgpsay5jjdtzepn2mq5zigqgh/file/464889545661>)

The first motion has to do with single use plastics. Respecting that in some cases single use plastics, such as straws, are required, the motion encourages individuals and faith communities to reduce their reliance on single use plastics. But it's the last point of the motion that carries the most weight: The Church "embraces an on going call to be mindful Stewards of Creation and to seek a healthy relationship with the earth."

What might it look like to put this motion into action? Now congregations and faith communities are encouraged to think twice about what is cheap and convenient. What will be used at the next church picnic, banquet, or youth event? Will congregations develop this into a policy required of organizations that rent their space? And how will congregations support families and individuals to make the changes at home? And this is not just about straws! What about those pesky, filmy, hard-to-get-open bags for fruit and veg in the produce aisle? And if this is so important for our homes and congregations, what might churches do to advocate for sustainable packaging at the grocery, hardware store, and pharmacy?

It's that last point that carries the church into the heart of the climate crisis. What does it mean to be a steward of creation? What does that look like in worship, education and public service? How will this engagement affect decisions about sustainable energy, energy efficient housing, sustainable transportation? When is this challenge less about light bulbs and more about justice?

Part of the answer lies in the second motion, to become carbon neutral by 2050. "The National Convention directs the National Church Council to investigate what would be required for the ELCIC to be carbon neutral by 2050, and to report to the 2022 National Convention." What does it mean to be carbon neutral? What does that mean at the congregational level, in the synods, and at the national church office? How will this affect the required board meetings and conventions? And what about our commitments to partnerships with the global church?

The convention three years from now will have an immense challenge before it. But it's the challenge now that matters! 2050? That's a generation from now! And we won't get there if we wait until 2022 to talk about what we might do.

People have this notion that climate change is a gradual thing. It happens slowly. There's lots of time. And some other convention will deal with it and pay for it. Not so.

If our world, politics, and industry alike, is going to meet the goals of the Paris Accord, change has to happen before 2030... the turning point to reduce our increasing carbon crisis is in the next 18 months. 18 months!

So the challenge must go immediately to our synods to provide leadership now. Our congregations and faith groups need resources now – the vision now! Perhaps – and there will be push-back on this – perhaps the funds set aside for mission development need to be freed up and assigned to synods for the implementation of stewardship of creation. Perhaps synodical teams could be established for inter-synodical support, resource sharing and visioning, including stories of successful undertakings. Then

these synodical teams would mobilize local and regional activities for the care of Our Common Home. And accountability would begin three months from now and would continue every three months until 2022.

The church in convention gave us the challenge. Now National Church Council and each of our Synod Councils must provide the resources to meet that challenge.

There's one more motion to be enabled. The National Convention "encourages congregations, faith communities, ministry organizations, areas, and synods to participate in the ELCIC Stewardship of Creation: Greening Faith Communities."

Remember the motion to empower the greening of our congregations? It was made a long time ago. And there was some progress when we had a person assigned to drive it. Careful reading of convention minutes in the ELCIC and ELCA reveal the church has been discussing and making motions for thirty-five years!

I'm thankful for the intention of this motion. But again, I ask, "what now?" Who drives this? And what resources will we put behind this? The convention met July 11-13. At least some of us are still talking about it. We can't let it go. This won't go on the shelf to gather dust and become forgotten.

We cannot ignore the cries of creation and the cries of the poor....