

Tue 3 March 2015



Many people remember the Philippine delegate to the international climate negotiations in Warsaw which were held in November 2013. As the gathering began, the news about the devastating effect of typhoon Haiyan began to come through around the world. The Philippine delegate, Yeb Sano was deeply distressed by the unfolding disaster in his country, and the inadequacy of the international response to climate change.

Watched by the world's media, he announced to the gathered delegates that he was going to fast until the end of the two week conference, or until real progress was made. Sadly, little was achieved, and so he continues to fast on the first day of every month. This was the inspiration for the **Pray and Fast for the Climate movement**, which was launched in England in November 2014. The movement includes many Christian churches and organisations, and has become international.

The urgency behind this is the upcoming climate talks in Paris in September this year. It is widely recognised that this decade is the crucial time when serious and extensive actions to cut fossil fuel emissions must begin, but the series of international negotiations have so far failed to produce the agreements needed. Around the world, faith communities have recognised that human induced climate change is profoundly a faith issue, and are actively working to become responsible stewards of creation. This includes pressuring governments to enact the necessary legislation to support change.

According to Bishop Nicholas Holtam, the Bishop of Salisbury in England, and the Church of England's appointed lead bishop on the environment,

"In October 2009 the then Archbishop of Canterbury hosted a meeting of Faith Leaders and Faith-based community organisations at Lambeth Palace which resulted in the Lambeth Declaration.

"Faith communities have a crucial role to play in pressing for changes in behaviour at every level of society and in every economic sector. We all have a responsibility to learn how to live and develop sustainably in a world of finite resources. The Lambeth Declaration calls on the faith community to:

- build on the examples of local and international action to live and to work together sustainably,*
- share best practice and redouble our efforts to reduce emissions that result from our institutional and individual activities,*
- work with our partners, our sister churches and communities internationally to mitigate the effects of climate change on the poorest and most vulnerable communities in the developing world,*

- *press governments to support that effort.*”

Fasting has a long history as a Christian discipline. We are called to bring our concerns in prayer to our Creator. Fasting strengthens and focusses our prayer, and enables us to participate in a world-wide response to the greatest moral issue of our time. It extends our prayer to include our body, as the incarnate beings we are.

According to Scott McKnight in his book “*Fasting*”, it is a “*natural, inevitable response to a serious, or grievous, sacred moment*”. It is not a manipulative tool to persuade God to answer our prayers. Rather, we fast because we desire something so deeply that we need to express it as fully as possible.

“Fasting in the deep traditions of the Bible is not about what we get but about our response to life’s sacred moments. We fast because the moment we face is so sacred that fasting is the only way for us to bring our entire person before God. We don’t fast to get something from God; we fast to express ourselves to God most completely.” (p142)

There can be nothing more sacred than the whole web of life on this beautiful, bountiful planet.

Fasting also strengthens our commitment to care for creation, to work to bring about justice for all people who share this planet, and to participate in a world-wide movement of people who care passionately for what God has given us in trust for future generations. Making a commitment to fast on the first day of every month - or more often if that is what you feel called to do - includes our bodies in our prayer at a deep level.

There are many resources on the “**Pray and Fast for the Climate**” website. These are suitable for private prayer, or can be a source of inspiration and help for prayer groups who wish to participate in this movement. To quote the website:

Join us if you believe that Christians owe it to future generations and those already impacted by climate change to respond to the climate crisis. We trust that God will use our prayers to influence politicians, build a powerful platform for change, strengthen our campaigning and inspire others.

To finish, a prayer from Bishop Ellinah Wamukoya of Swaziland, the first woman bishop in the Anglican Church of South Africa (from the Resources section of the website):

To be used by people praying and fasting on the first of the month ...

**Loving God,
Blessed be the works of your hands,
Your Spirit inspires trees and birds and waves into song and dance,
It is that same holy wind that you breathed on your disciples and on all creation,
Let your Spirit blow us to creative love and stewardship that shows reverence for your creation.
Blessed be the works of your hands O Holy One, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, One God now and for ever.**

Amen

By **Pamela Phillips**