

**Good News and Bad news**  
**The Anglican Communion Environment Network Meeting**  
**Peru 4 – 10 August 2011**  
**Rev. Ken Gray, Church of the Advent, Colwood, BC**  
**with thanks to Bishop George Browning, ACEN moderator**

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For some years I have been secretary and more recently operations manager for the Anglican Communion Environment Network (ACEN) which has a threefold mandate:

- to advocates for responsible environmental stewardship
- to provide support and leadership to local initiatives to protect the environment
- to educate Anglicans as individuals and as communities to become better stewards of creation

If these sound a bit dry, then I would also consider the Anglican Communion's Five Marks of Mission

- To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
- To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
- To respond to human need by loving service
- To seek to transform unjust structures of society
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth

With these in mind, fifteen representatives (I represent Canada) met in Lima, Peru, where for many years now I have heard of the leadership of its Bishop, Bishop Bill Godfrey. Bishop Bill is a true Anglican, catholic in his theology and formation, evangelistic in his preaching and teaching, and charismatic in his style.

For my part, I was originally sent to South Africa in 2002 because someone else from the Canadian church could not go. Thus began my journey of discovery in what I have described as a ‘second conversion’ that our faith calls us to be stewards of that which does not belong to us. Creation is God’s craft, specially announced in Jesus Christ who was there at the beginning and who will be there at the end.

I am also driven by the discovery that my descendents will inherit a lesser world than the one I inherited and that my personal excesses currently cause human suffering for others in the global south. I am now convinced that some damage is irreversible, but that further damage is unconscionable.

So, today, I bring you good news and bad news.

First the good news. Under the leadership of Bishop Bill the Anglican Church in Peru is healthy and growing. Bishop Bill inherited a Diocese with only four priests. Now there are more than ten times that number. Each priest is expected to grow a new congregation. When 12 adults have been gathered in one place for at least 12 months a new Church community is declared to have been formed. Much of the growth is amongst the poorest communities which have largely been neglected by others. Bishop Bill now has his own seminary.

Interestingly many of his clergy are converts from Roman Catholicism, folk who have been attracted by the Anglican Churches' biblical teaching, evangelistic zeal, and strong commitment to social justice. during our meeting we met many of his clergy and key lay people. The Peruvian church is alive and brimming with spiritual energy.

The conference accepted as a given that care for the environment and care for the poor are the mirror image of the same concern. Poor are increasingly poor because of the degradation of their land, the land becomes further degraded because in poverty folk have limited if any

choice. While food is abundant in Peru, we heard time and again and in almost every circumstance that water is running out, on glaciers, in rivers, and from the tap.

Now, unfortunately, the bad news. The world is in deep trouble. The global economic crisis is matched by an environmental crisis; indeed the two are inextricably linked. The prevailing economic philosophy seems to be predicated on the idea that massive debt *is* manageable, because if enough is dug out, or chopped down, debts of money or environment can be handled because resources are infinite. *God is infinite* but clearly resources are not. Indeed over-exploitation of resources can overturn the balance upon which all life depends.

We heard reports from Argentina and Brazil of large scale destruction. Huge tracks of land are being bought by overseas interests. As soon as the land is secured the bulldozers are brought in; running in parallel a mile apart with a huge anchor chain linked between them they obliterate everything in their path, robbing indigenous communities of their rights and livelihood, creating monocultures and leaving the thin fragile topsoil in danger of erosion by water, or being blown away by wind, all this in order to produce soybeans for cattle feed in China to enrich a Swiss Industrialist.

In another conversation, Timothy, the delegate from Bangladesh asked our Moderator, Australian Bishop George Browning everyday “how many millions of my displaced people will your country take?” George asked in return what steps Bangladesh will take to curb its runaway population explosion (the nation has at least tripled in over sixty years).

Bishop Api of Fiji spoke of the strange sound of water lapping under the houses on Kiribati, and each morning of the women with their coconut palm brooms sweeping away the debris caused by overnight intrusion of the sea.

In Peru we visited a community in the high plateau of the Andes that has been a mining community since the 1920's. Pollution has always been a problem but in recent times the difficulties have escalated causing, at least for a while, the closure of the mine and the nearby smelter. The signs of arsenic poisoning on the vegetation and the discolouration of water in the streams is obvious, what is not visible but equally terrifying is the high level of lead poisoning in the community, especially amongst the children.

And now, actions taken by owners have split the community and rivalries and arguments are constant. This picture of irresponsible mining to maximise profits and minimise responsibility is replicated throughout the developing world. And yes, in La Oroya and in neighbouring Morococha, Canadian companies are involved which in this case is both good news and bad news.

I could go on: these are but a few illustrations of the stress under which God's creation is struggling. All delegates could point to the effects of climate change out of their own knowledge and experience. Awareness that human lifestyle is a major contributor to the problem is accepted as a troubling reality, and a failure of the human vocation by folk, no matter whether they came from in a developing or developed country. That the world community lacks the resolve at this stage to do anything about it, weighed heavily on the minds of all present.

Bishop George had this to say in conclusion:

I do not believe the world is currently experiencing effective government, or the will to deal with the world's most pressing problems; indeed it is my worrying view that we are suffering from a failure of governance, a failure of leadership on a terrifying scale. I am not simply referring to totalitarian governments like Syria, or partisan governments like Sudan, or tribal governments

as exist in most African States. I am referring equally to modern western democracies. The exaggerated adversarial approach of western democracy is not providing for the 'voice of the people;' it is causing us to fall into a dark abyss, it is failing us terribly. Probably the worst examples are the United States of America and Australia. Issues are not debated on their own terms, but in terms of the advantage or disadvantage that can be leveraged to one or other side of politics. In such an environment the first casualty is truth.

As a new parliament forms in Ottawa we shall see what elements of truth will emerge here in Canada. As I see things, we continue to develop our economy on an outmoded, unsustainable and immoral manner, where our historical reliance of fossil fuel use, extraction and processing remains our prime economic foundation. In my Canadian reports I noted concerns around expansion of Tar Sands development with associated pipeline and tanker activity. The losses for land, water, energy and the livelihood of Alberta First Nations is well documented. The distressing thing is that so few Canadians actually seem to care. One wonders how and when our culture will wake up, and what will things look like when it does, if it does?

The conference I designed and implemented orbited around the biblical theme of Sabbath. In terms of the first chapter of Genesis, the world was created in seven days . . . well six actually, because of the seventh day, God rested. There was no need for God to rest, but God chose such a passive stance to make a point. There are limits to life as we experience it; life is not all striving - for profit, fame, influence, dominance - or any other addictive product. In the pauses of life we find not only refreshment, but gratitude. There is a life-giving and

deeply spiritual value in the acceptance, even the welcoming of limits - to development, wealth, growth, and power.

It is time for Christians to increasingly say NO to unsustainable practices in economics and environment. I am rejuvenated in this cause for meeting with my fifteen global colleagues. I hope you can come tonight and see some of the fun pictures I was able to make on what was an amazing spiritual journey. I welcome your comments and questions as creation not only concerns us all, it gives us life and makes all things possible.