

The BP Oil Spill: A Christian Call for Lament and Reconciliation

During the Summer Institute of Duke Divinity School's Center for Reconciliation, Christians from varied denominations, backgrounds, and nations gathered together to explore the work Christ is doing in reconciling all things (Col. 1:15-20). Throughout the institute many of us felt the need to lament our complicity in the destruction of creation as made urgently visible in the Gulf. Through many conversations, we developed the following call for lament and an accompanying litany. It is our hope that this lament will be spread to churches everywhere and that we will join together in mourning the destruction of creation and work together for the reconciliation of all things that Christ is accomplishing.

We are encouraging churches to take June 20, the two month anniversary of the spill, as a fast from as much oil as possible and a time to lament together our dependency on oil and other toxic forms of energy. It is our hope that out of our lament, we will begin to imagine new ways of sharing life together that consume significantly less energy.

Signers of this call to date include:

- Norman Wirzba, Duke Divinity School
- Bill McKibben
- Noel Castellanos, Christian Community Development Assoc.
- Chris Rice, Duke Divinity School Center for Reconciliation
- Shane Claiborne
- Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove

Website: <http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/LamentBPoilspill/>

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As followers of Christ, creator and redeemer of all creation, we mourn the Deepwater Horizon catastrophe and the BP oil spill now polluting the Gulf of Mexico. We mourn the human and animal lives lost, the economies and ecosystems destroyed, and the gifts of God, created from and for his love, squandered and poisoned. Most of all we mourn our complicity and active participation in an economy based on toxic energy that has made such death inevitable.

We find our lives dependent upon the destructive forces that have been made visible in the oil spill, but which have been a sinful and deadly presence in creation for many decades now. We acknowledge that our current lifestyle of convenience and hyper-mobility, which is based on oil and oil-based products is at the root of the problem and that the irresponsibility and hubris of companies such as BP are only outgrowths of this deeper reality. As the prophets of old said, we hear the land witnessing and testifying against us.

Having acknowledged these realities we now make a public confession of the sins against God's creation that we have committed and have been committed on our behalf. We pray for the grace of God to change our lives, and we invite all of our Christian sisters and brothers to join us in this acknowledgement of our sin and culpability, and in working toward a true repentance.

As a sign of this recognition of our sin we commit to:

- Fasting from all food on Fridays except that which has been locally grown with methods that do not rely on petroleum-based fertilizers and pesticides.
- Making every effort to take each Friday as a day when we do not drive but rather walk, bike, ride public transit, or carpool to school or work.
- Praying for the transformation of our lives as individuals and churches toward freedom from fossil fuels and reconciliation with all God's creation.
- Continuing these practices until the oil spill has been cleaned up and the work of restoration of God's creation in the Gulf has begun.

On Sunday June 20, the two month anniversary of the beginning of the spill, we invite all Christians to lament the oil spill with a fast from oil. On that day, we will celebrate the Sabbath as we mourn: abstaining from driving motor vehicles of any kind, avoiding food that was grown and shipped great distances, and reflecting on the aspects of our lives that are so entrenched in the oil economy that we cannot even quit them for one day.

We commit to exploring other appropriate acts of lament in our own church communities.

We hope that on this national day of lament, church communities will gather together for meals prepared of local ingredients and begin to discuss a new future that honors God's creation and seeks to love the world as God does. Out of these discussions we pray that communities will begin to organize farmers markets, encourage alternative modes of transportation, and build a creative hope in their communities.

We are confident in God's grace to give us hope from our lament as we repent and turn from our sin. Now is the time for our turning.

Litany of Lament

We hope to join with our congregations in mourning this disaster by praying together this litany in our churches.

The earth is the LORD's, and all that is in it. (Ps 24:1)

From the depths of our hearts, as from the depths of the seas, let lamentation pour forth over what we have made of this good earth.

In the garden, our first home, you planted two trees, O God: one to feed us, and one to limit us. (Gen 2:16-17)

As Adam and Eve ate what was forbidden to them, we have feasted on the bounty of your creation, but ignored the boundaries you ordained. Forgive us, we pray, and teach us proper restraint.

Oil pours into the sea, a judgment against our destructive pursuit of a life that is cheaper, faster, and easier.

For these sins, the land trembles and the people mourn. (Amos 8:8)

If the people of God are silent, the very stones will shout out! (Lk 19:40)

We confess our silence. This disaster leaves us speechless; Lord, give us the courage to repent with our lips, and with our actions.

The earth is the LORD's, and all that is in it. Hear the cries of your servants, O Lord.

Deliver your creation from this peril, and put a new and right spirit within us. (Ps 51:10)