

ST. THOMAS à BECKET CHURCH  
Care for Our Common Home Ministry  
December 15, 2020 7:00pm Minutes

**OPENING PRAYER:** Carol opened the meeting with an Earth Prayer before a Committee meeting, found on National Catholic Reporter's Earthbeat website.

**PRESENT:** Gloria and David Mog - guests, Ali Althen, Lori Brady, Carol Even, Barbara Ewalt, Harriet Hanlon, Patti Kaiser, Betty Sullivan

**EDUCATION:** David and Gloria Mog were invited to speak about their experiences as environmental activists and as members of Elders Climate Action. Gloria Mog is a retired LCSW and a liturgy coordinator at NOVA Catholic Community, where she and David have been members for 37 years. They are involved with Interfaith Power and Light, and FACS. David has a PhD from Caltech. He taught at the university level and at Sidwell Friends High School., where he worked with the Friends Committee on Legislation where he embraced the Quaker passion for environmental issues and legislation.

Gloria explained that Elders Climate Action (ECA) started about 5 or 6 years ago under the umbrella of Elders Action Network, itself new 7 years ago. Since the start, ECA has spread from California across the Country, growing to 10, 000 members and 14 chapters. ECA lobbies members of Congress to action on climate change and away from fossil fuels. They partner with about one hundred different climate projects nationally and their influence is growing. ECA is committed to increasing elder activism, with the premise that grandparents have special interest in leaving a legacy for their children and grandchildren based on their particular wisdom. David reminded us that grandchildren have the most to gain if fossil fuel use gets under control. So, intergenerational work is important, too.

David began his environmental activism in the 1980s, demonstrating his commitment by bicycling across the United States from Arlington to Seattle in 1989. His two sons joined him on the two-month 4,200 mile journey. The whole family is deeply committed to saving the environment, admittedly going to extremes. David has been instrumental in urging the Sidwell Friends School Board of Trustees to build a LEEDS platinum-rated school building. While teaching, David influenced many young people who have carried the environmental work forward. He has helped organize national meetings where legislators such as Don Beyer and Jamie Raskin have spoken on how to move forward on legislation. Don Beyer made the point that his constituents must become more informed or climate legislation will not get the priority attention it needs. Congress knows that older people vote.

Carol asked David about shoe strikes as a way of reaching the public. David replied that it is wonderful to get engaged in that. He reiterated the hope for a local chapter ECA in Northern Virginia (NoVa) - one that would work with other environmental communities in our area. Presently there are too few members in NoVa. Contact Gloria if we want to join ECA. It is easy to be an individual member – just go to their website. Anyone can be an elder. Gloria and David will send us information about their organizing meeting in January. ECA's budget last year was \$60K. It is growing and has 2 half-time staff members now. The DC/MD/NoVa chapter would like to see a more local chapter, say, a separate chapter just for Northern Virginia.

NOVA Catholic Community - Care for Creation Team pushed ECA to be one of their 32 supported peace and social justice projects. So ECA gets \$100 a month from NOVA. Gloria thinks Faith groups are the way to go, being already organized with moral and spiritual bases. There is a need to bring churches to the environmental movement in a meaningful way.

Carol noted that FACS has increasing numbers of church communities joining lately. Gloria sees the more churches joining VOICE (focusing on housing and evictions), the more they have been able to accomplish.

Harriet spoke about a special call with Al Gore and 350 people. She was glad to note that he was so cheerful. He said that yesterday he spent time with Biden and Kamala. He's thrilled about Kerry as

climate head, since Kerry was among the people at the Paris talks. If we don't get the two senators from Georgia, there will still be a lot of bipartisan work going on. Change needs pushing from bottom up, from organizations locally. Biden will be busy enforcing the laws that are on the book. Every job he creates he will try to have something to do with climate. The EPA will have profound opportunities. Biden will use the government for climate. Bill Murphy, NJ Governor, is divesting from all fossil fuels in NJ and replacing cars and buses with electric. Biden is linking all climate and all organizations with blacks and indigenous people. Gore is so positive. He said "Remember, human civilization is at stake"!

David pointed out that it is not insignificant that Joe Biden and John Kerry are Catholics. So Catholic voices really have an extra impact right now.

**LOCAL LEGISLATION ON BAG TAX AND WASTE RECYCLING:** Ali shared information on the proposed plastic bag tax. In the last Virginia legislative session, January through March 2020, the state legislature passed a bill allowing Fairfax County to authorize a tax of 5 cents per plastic bag for grocery stores, convenience stores and drug stores, with a few exceptions. The hope is to incentivize people to use reusable bags. The State has allowed localities to do this, and now Fairfax County must decide when and how. The County Board wants more guidance from the State, but the State wants assurance that a locality wants in. Of 5 cents, a retailer would keep 2 cents at first, and the rest goes to County to support programs, environmental cleanup, mitigation, public education, and reusable bags for SNAP participants. Other jurisdictions, like DC, have had gradual success with this. Public education is the desired outcome. This tax would not go into effect until after the pandemic, probably in 2022. There is clarification needed as to how it might work. Ali's office probably would be doing direct outreach to groups like ours, to ask what people think, what are their concerns, etc... Although there is some opposition, one case to be made for this tax is waterway protection. Our waterways are a major repository of plastic bags. We have a role in the stewardship of all waterways including the streams that lead to the Bay. There is evidence from other states that this works. Public education and engagement are needed before the ordinance goes into effect.

Carol mentioned the movie we showed at a meeting, "Bag It" brought by Helene Shorr. Ali might be able to use it for public education.

Ali shared about waste composting – a few weeks ago, 2 pilot sites in the County opened for food-waste scraps composting at I95, and Lorton. They accept everything you would compost. Funding is required for the coming year to expand the program. The idea is to enroll residents to have special bins with the same folks as the glass recycling, who know how it works, how to work with vendors.

See <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/publicworks/recycling-trash/food-scrap-composting-drop>

Harriet suggested that we can teach people composting and/or container gardening in a workshop for new gardeners.

**RECYCLING:** Good News! Carol reported that more than 14 million pounds of clean glass have been collected so far in the purple bins in Fairfax County. The Big Blue Machine started out grinding the glass for making materials for road material - to serve as construction aggregates. Now, due to good quality clean glass, the County is selling some of it for re-manufacture into new glass products.

**NEXT MEETING:** Tuesday night, January 5, 7:00pm

**CLOSING POEM:** Christina Rossetti – "In the Bleak Midwinter"