



July 8, 2010

The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail. Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.
Isaiah 58:11-12

As leaders of faith communities in the United States, we write as we prepare, within our community, for the long-term needs of God’s children and God’s Creation in the Gulf Coast. We are watching with distress as the Deepwater Horizon oil spill and tragedy unfolds, but our faith traditions teach us that from within this darkness, we may find light. We are called by God to use the gifts of this earth wisely, to act as stewards of all creation and to care for our neighbors in need. We call on you, our elected leaders, to heed this call to stewardship, justice and love as you begin to address the short and long-term needs of the Gulf Coast.

We confess our own complicity in this disaster. As the dark cloud of crude oil poisons the Gulf’s waters and its fragile coastline; as we grieve over images of oil-soaked birds and oil-drenched workers, all struggling to survive; as we hear the stories of economic calamity befalling coastal people, we understand that we are each to blame for the dependence on oil that has led us to this place. But even as we lament with the people and creatures of the Gulf and confess our own culpability, we turn our attention to the daunting task of restoring the coastline and of caring for devastated communities and ecosystems. As we begin this slow process of healing and rebuilding, we stand in hope.

In this time, we call on you to rise above partisan politics to ensure a comprehensive and effective response to this crisis. You are doubtless receiving many recommendations. We emphasize the following:

- **Work with stakeholders:** As our elected officials, you must be bold in the action you take and you must work with the stakeholders in the region, particularly the affected communities, to develop a response strategy that meets the needs of the people, the creatures and the environment that are suffering as a result of this spill.
- **Hold responsible parties accountable:** BP and other responsible parties must be held fully accountable for this calamity and they must assume responsibility for the economic and environmental repercussions. The federal government should ensure that these responsible parties set aside sufficient resources to respond to the spill and to help communities and ecosystems fully recover.

- Ensure that help reaches those in need: In the short-term, the federal government must ensure that the financial resources from the responsible parties actually reach the people, communities, schools, clinics, small businesses and ecosystems that most need it. Without federal leadership, we fear that many who are suffering from the results of this spill, both directly and indirectly, will not be helped. Further, the social safety net in the region must be strengthened, in order for it to respond to such increased need
- Commit to a long-term recovery: In the long-term, the federal government should ensure that environmental and economic recovery efforts meet the needs of the affected communities and are based on sound science. In addition, the long-term impacts on the Gulf and coastal ecosystems must be scientifically monitored; research and monitoring must be conducted by neutral institutions, not by the oil and gas industry; federal government agencies responsible for monitoring and oversight must be fully funded and fully staffed; the affected community must have effective mechanisms for giving input and feedback, and for participating in monitoring their own living space.
- Take steps to prevent future disasters: The United States government must take steps to ensure that this kind of disaster does not happen again. Examples of such steps include structural changes in the oil and gas permitting process; government regulations that are objective and not unduly influenced by industry; greater transparency and local participation in permitting decisions; increased monitoring and oversight; guaranteed protections for whistleblowers; and increased liability for companies that violate rules or engage in risky behavior.
- Respond to yet-unknown needs: Some needs of the recovery and the affected communities are not yet evident. Government, responsible parties and the nation at large must be attentive to such needs and flexible enough to respond to them as they arise.

The situation that continues to unfold in the Gulf demands a comprehensive, but more importantly, a moral response. The bonds that connect us to one another and to all Creation have been damaged in the Gulf. We have failed as a country to protect not only ourselves but the gifts with which we have been blessed.

As we begin to move forward and prepare as a nation for our recovery from this spill, we urge you to remember God's commitment to us and to Creation, and to honor God's vision of health and wholeness for all.

Sincerely,

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