



REPENTANCE

*What have we
done to the earth
and to ourselves?*

Bearing the Responsibility

By Mary Minette, ELCA Director for Environmental Education and Advocacy

"Some went down to the sea in ships, doing business on the mighty waters..." - Psalm 107:23-24

Humans have done business on God's mighty oceans for millennia, using it for transportation, taking its fish for food, and more recently, drilling under the ocean floor for oil and natural gas.



On April 20, 2010 the Deepwater Horizon oil rig exploded, killing 11 workers and injuring dozens more. In the days and weeks that have followed, millions of gallons of oil have continue to gush into the Gulf of Mexico from leaks in the damaged well.

Initial estimates indicated **5000 barrels of oil** per day (translating to 210,000 gallons) were spilling into the Gulf.

This week **government officials** announced that oil is leaking from the well at rates at least twice the original estimates and that the spill is now the largest in U.S. history. The owner of the well, British Petroleum (BP), continues to look for ways to stop the leaks.

As the oil spill **begins to reach wetlands** along the Louisiana and Mississippi Gulf Coast, many on the coast wonder how long this economic and environmental disaster will continue. Fisheries managers have already closed **some state waters**. More than **a fifth of federal waters** in the Gulf are now closed to fishing. Those waters are not likely to re-open soon, and it may be some time before consumers trust the quality of seafood from the Gulf.

After the Exxon Valdez oil spill in Alaska's Prince William Sound, a similarly productive fishing area, many aspects of the local economy were harmed, including tourism and businesses that were directly and indirectly supported by fishermen (i.e. fish markets, shipping services, marine equipment manufacturers and suppliers).

The economies of Gulf Coast communities, many of which were only just beginning to recover from the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, will likely feel these impacts for years to come.

"And God said, 'Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.' So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves,

of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them, saying, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters of the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.'" - Genesis 1:20-22

God's creatures will also suffer as the oil inundates their habitats. Endangered sea turtles, migratory birds, fish, shellfish and marine mammals such as dolphins will suffer as their habitats are coated in thick oil. State and federal wildlife officials are working to mitigate the damage, but many will not survive.

Fragile coastal wetlands, already disappearing at an alarming rate, will take another hit. These wetlands not only provide habitat for birds, fish and other wildlife, they also provide critical flood protection for coastal cities during the hurricanes and other storms.



The devastating news we see on television and in the newspapers may make us wonder. What can we do to help the people and places of the Gulf Coast to weather this disaster and begin to recover?

- We can look for **opportunities to help** in the clean up effort and provide assistance to those who are suffering the economic consequences of the oil spill.
- We can **pray for the Gulf**, its communities and all of God's creation.
- We can **advocate** for better safety standards for offshore oil drilling rigs, more liability for oil companies that fail to meet them, and long-term economic aid to help the communities on the Gulf Coast survive this disaster and begin to rebuild.

But each of us bears some responsibility for what is occurring on the Gulf Coast. Each of us, when we drive a car, take a plane, or throw away a plastic bottle, makes up a small part of our nation's massive consumption of, and dependence on, oil. We can see the consequences of that addiction in the images on our television screens, and we can pledge now to try and change our patterns of consumption, to think before we buy a bottle of water or take an unnecessary trip to the grocery store.

And as the disaster continues to unfold, you can keep asking yourself, "Am I doing all I can to ensure that this never happens again?"

"The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it; for he has founded it on the seas and established it on the rivers." - Psalm 24: 1-2

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