

## **A Statement on the Gulf Oil Spill**

Alliance of Baptists

2011

As a member communion of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, the Alliance of Baptists has benefited from the ecumenical work of the NCCC-USA EcoJustice Program Office. The Alliance concern for ecological-justice is consistent with the Alliance Covenant and Mission, which states:

*In a time when historic Baptist principles, freedoms, and traditions need a clear voice, and in our personal and corporate response to the call of God in Jesus Christ to be disciples and servants in the world, we commit ourselves to ... the larger body of Jesus Christ, expressed in various Christian traditions and to cooperation with believers everywhere in giving full expression to the Gospel ... and to the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ and the calling of God to all peoples to repentance and faith, reconciliation and hope, social and economic justice. ... To keep faith with our Covenant ... we care for the earth.*

### **Background:**

On April 20, 2010, the Deepwater Horizon drilling rig exploded in the Gulf of Mexico, killing 11 workers and spilling more than five million barrels of crude oil into the Gulf. That explosion was the beginning of an ongoing and continuing environmental disaster for the Gulf of Mexico and its environment. As part of clean-up efforts, 1.8 million gallons of chemical dispersants also were poured into the Gulf, adding to the monumental disaster. (French biologist Philippe Bodin, who studied the effects of the Amoco Cadiz spill in 1978, found the dispersant to be more toxic to marine life than the oil.)

The Deepwater Horizon rig, operated by British Petroleum, was leased from Transocean. Cameron International made the faulty blowout preventer that, had it functioned properly, could have prevented the explosion. Halliburton manufactured the cement casings intended to prevent the leakage of gas from the wellhead.

The leak was capped in July 2010, three months later. Precise locations of the spilled oil are subject to disagreement. However, there is no disagreement that some spilled oil remains on the water surface; some oil has evaporated; and an unknown quantity remains on the Gulf floor.

The damage done to the fishing and tourism industry remains to be determined. Extensive damage was also done to flora, fauna and marine life in the Gulf of Mexico and its environs. Dead baby dolphins have washed ashore on beaches in Mississippi and a submersible that explored the ocean floor near the origin of the spill found a thick layer of oil carpeting the bottom that had killed the filter-feeding organisms, invertebrate worms, corals, and sea fans in and around the Gulf.

We are also aware that the lives lost and the damage done were not due to an unforeseen accident but to decisions made by BP and other corporate actors—not simple negligence, but rather reckless choices to pursue profits instead of safe and careful business practices that would protect human lives and the environment. “A presidential panel named to study the accident called it a preventable one, caused by a series of failures and blunders by the companies involved in drilling the well and the government regulators assigned to police them. In a chapter of its final findings released in early 2011, the panel found that BP, Transocean, Halliburton, and several subcontractors working for them took a series of hazardous and time-saving steps without adequate consideration of the risks involved.”

[http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/subjects/o/oil\\_spills/gulf\\_of\\_mexico\\_2010/index.html](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/subjects/o/oil_spills/gulf_of_mexico_2010/index.html), updated March 2011.

*In July, 2010, in response to the ongoing disaster in the Gulf, members of the National Council of Churches issued a statement that called on government officials to:*

1. Work with stakeholders in the region;
2. Hold responsible parties accountable;
3. Ensure that help reaches those in need;
4. Commit to a long-term recovery based on sound science;
5. Take steps to prevent future disasters; and,
6. Respond to yet-unknown needs

Today we—the Alliance of Baptists—join with other members of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA in calling for our elected officials to respond as requested in the July, 2010 letter. In particular, we call on the government officials to hold the corporate entities responsible for the deaths of the 11 workers, the damage and destruction to the Gulf Coast environment and the damage to the Gulf Coast economy that has impacted so very many people.

We also commit personally to changes in our own lives that will reduce our own consumption of oil. We must drive fuel-efficient cars and avoid unnecessary trips. We must utilize public transportation when it is available and advocate for its creation when it is not. If we are true to our covenant and mission, we must live out our responsibility to care for God's created earth. We must do so for our children and their children, for our communities, for our earth and all her creatures and in loving response to her Creator.

**Therefore, because of our commitment to God's creation, we—the Alliance of Baptists—join other faith leaders in the National Council of Churches of Christ, USA in calling on our elected officials to support the people and the environment of the Gulf region to ensure a comprehensive and effective response to this disaster. In particular, the culpable and responsible corporations and corporate leaders must be held accountable for their reckless decisions that led to this disaster.**

**We pledge to raise our voices in advocacy for God's children and God's dazzling creation in the Gulf of Mexico. We also pledge to examine our own activities and find new ways to reduce our individual use of oil.**

**We call on our Alliance of Baptists congregations to lead in prayer, teaching, and preaching about the biblical, spiritual and moral basis for being watchful and diligent stewards of God's magnificent creation<sup>1</sup>.**

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<sup>1</sup> Resources for congregations are available on the Eco-Justice Programs of the National Council of Churches web site at <http://ncecojustice.org/index.php>