

‘My total perspective on the environment and life in general, was drastically altered’

- The Rev. Dr. Gerald Durley.

“I have, for a number of years, regarded myself as an informed, enlightened, educated and involved human being when it comes to critical issues which negatively impact the lives of people. In college, I became deeply committed to the civil and human rights movements, as we fought for the dignity and equal rights of all who call themselves Americans. Championing the cause for social justice and racial equality virtually consumed my life as I completed my undergraduate and graduate school education.

“Becoming a psychologist and a pastor in the African American community afforded me the opportunity to make a significant, positive difference in this segment of society. I was satisfied that I was completing my calling until I was invited to view a film entitled, “The Great Warming.” As far as I was concerned, the invitation was just another event which was sponsored by a group of “environmental alarmists” attempting to solicit support and raise funds. But, since I was invited by someone I highly respect, I reluctantly consented to attend.

“On May 18, 2006, my total perspective on environmental issues and life in general was drastically altered. I became a concerted devotee of doing everything in my power to speak truth to the issues which can change the man-made, exploitative behavior which is literally destroying the environment which God created for us to live in, enjoy, and have our being.

“What was so EARTH-shattering about that fateful day in May? I learned, for the first time, about the carbon dioxide which is not being absorbed by trees because we have cut them down, therefore less oxygen for healthy air is being emitted. I was shocked to see and hear about our self-serving demands that lead to massive fossil fuel burning. Yet, we continue to dig for more and more coal, rather than seek alternative energy sources. This depleting and defoliating simply fuels our greedy need and malicious overuse of precious natural resources.

“Environmentalists tell us that the world is warming. At the same time, the global appetite for energy is rising rapidly. The U.S. Department of Energy says that global energy consumption will grow by 50 percent during the first quarter of the century, all of which has serious implications for global climate change.

“So, what does all of this mean to an African-American pastor in Atlanta, Georgia, who is concerned every day with the elimination of poverty; curtailing homelessness; improving and providing health care; decreasing unemployment; lessening teenage pregnancy; reducing crime; curbing violence; eliminating racism; and trying to assist people through another day?

“It became crystal clear to me as I watched “The Great Warming” that environmental concerns must become an integrated, active part of the life-sustaining messages in the African-American community. These essential messages must be mandatory teachings throughout all faith traditions, if we are to survive.

“The faith community consistently prides itself on being in the prevention and healing business. Therefore, if we are serious about what we teach and preach, our message must speak clearly and boldly to:

1. What we can do to reduce levels of energy consumption
2. Learn how to effectively join forces with those who are more knowledgeable about improving environmental conditions; and
3. Discuss in sermons, seminars, workshops and lectures about health issues, weather conditions, economic concerns, and the negative impact of global warming which are all connected to how the environment is regarded.

“There is so much that can and must be accomplished when we know what is happening to our environment, and its direct impact on each of our lives. No one person, group or organization can bring about complete awareness and comprehensive change alone. The faith community must become a far-reaching, consistent voice, from pulpits, to exhort the masses to understand, get involved, speak out, and be converted to ‘SAVE OUR WORLD. . . FROM US!’ “

The Rev. Dr. Durley was instrumental in organizing the National African American Earth Day Summit at the Martin Luther King Jr. Interdenominational Chapel, Morehouse College, Atlanta, April 19. It attracted more than 1500 participants of diverse ethnicity, and featured African-American environmental leaders including Charles Jordan, (Chairman of the Board, The Conservation Fund) Jerome Ringo (Immediate Past Chair, The National Wildlife Federation, and President of the Appollo Alliance) and Nia Robinson, (Director of the Environmental Justice Climate Change Initiative.) Rev. Durley was invited to “The Great Warming” by Laura Turner-Seydel, well-known environmental activist. He wrote this letter to members of the Concerned Clergy of Atlanta, of which he is President. The Summit was developed by “Keeping It Wild” a collaboration of community groups in Atlanta under the auspices of the Wilderness Society.