



The slow-motion tragedy of the gulf oil spill lays bare our collective failure as caretakers of God's good creation. While unknown thousands of barrels of oil leak into the rich and diverse ecosystem of the Gulf of Mexico, how are we as Christians called to respond? While it is easy to express anger and cast blame at the companies who owned, operated and profited from the deep sea exploration, we must also reflect on our own complicity through our endless demand for cheap oil.

So much remains unknown: How long will the oil flow into the gulf? How far will the oil slick spread? How damaging will the spill be to fragile wetlands and the flora and fauna in the region? How will the spreading oil slick jeopardize the future of thousands of watermen and those who depend on the Gulf for their livelihoods?

In the face of these uncertainties, we turn to the One who is certain – the One whose creative and recreating power is stronger than any of our human folly. May we heed the call of the Scriptures, humble ourselves and pray that God will forgive our sins and heal the land.

### **PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

Creator God, author of life, source of all meaning, you made a universe of infinite complexity and beauty and entrusted us humans with the care of a tiny jewel called Earth.

With the passing of time we came to believe we were owners, not fellow creature dwellers, of this bountiful planet and its extravagant web of life. We have used God's creation without regard for the impact our rapacity had on the other creatures with whom we share our earthly home. We have acted with craven disregard for complex ecosystems we barely understand. Our self-deception has led us to assume we have the capacity to manage environments we exploit to sustain lifestyles that defy the intrinsic interdependence of all life. Now we face the consequences of our idolatry. We thought we were gods; but our recklessness has brought us to our knees, to ask for your mercy and forgiveness for the chaos we have brought about. We pray for the oceans and all the creatures that dwell in it. We pray for the forests and the abundance of life they nurture. We pray for the very air we breathe, now laden with the toxic gases we produce. We pray for our children whose earthly home we have so imperiled. Loving God, have mercy on us, grant us forgiveness and the strength to make amends.

### **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

God, we come to you today with heavy and humbled hearts. We ask that your healing, comforting and strengthening presence be with all those affected by this unfolding tragedy:

For workers injured, missing and presumed dead from the explosion on the rig and for their families and friends,  
*Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.*

For people working tirelessly to contain the spill and protect fragile ecosystems and communities from its toxic impacts,  
*Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.*

For individuals and communities whose livelihoods depend upon the Gulf of Mexico,  
*Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.*

For your good Creation – from the smallest of sea creatures to the birds of the air – and all your magnificent handiwork at risk of exposure from our human errors,  
*Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.*

For wisdom to understand our dependence on You and strength that we might walk humbly in the path of justice and right-relationships with all Your Creation,  
*Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.*

## **Facts about the Gulf of Mexico**

- The Gulf of Mexico has 1631 miles of coastline and over 16,000 miles of shoreline (including bays and inland waterways). *source: Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)*
- Nearly ½ of all US coastal wetlands – over 5 million acres – are located along the Gulf. *source: EPA*
- The coastal plains of the western Gulf are used by nearly all of the migratory land bird species of the eastern US, as well as many western species. *source: US Geological Survey*
- From New Orleans seafood restaurants to Florida vacation rentals, the Gulf's annual tourist industry is estimated at over \$100 billion. *source: USA Today*
- The Gulf is home to four of the top seven fishing ports in the United States and seven of the top ten seaports. *source: EPA*
- The Gulf is home to an estimated 45,000 bottlenose dolphins. *source: EPA*
- The Gulf waters are home to 73% of the shrimp and 59% of the oysters harvested in the United States each year and a total of 1.3 billion pounds of seafood valued at over \$650 million. *source: EPA*

## **Oil and Gas Exploration in the Gulf of Mexico**

- 1/4 of US domestic natural gas and 1/8 of US oil is extracted from the Gulf. *source: Minerals Management Service (MMS)*
- The offshore oil and gas industry employs 55,000 workers in the Gulf. *source: EPA*
- In 2006, the offshore rigs extracted 470 million barrels of oil. *source: EPA*
- Lease rates paid to MMS: up to \$1million/day *source: MMS*
- Maximum fine MMS can levy for violations: \$35,000 *source: MMS*
- Dollars spent by BP on clean up: \$17.5 million/day. *source: Washington Post*
- BP profits (1<sup>st</sup> quarter 2010): \$93 million/day, and market value: \$156.2 billion. *source: Washington Post (May 11, 2010)*
- Punitive damages for 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill: \$1 billion (settled in 2009, reduced from original \$5 billion). *source: Washington Post*
- Exxon profits (\$19.42 billion in 2009, \$45.2 billion in 2008). *source: Fortune*

## **Our Connection to Offshore Drilling**

- US petroleum consumption: 19.5 million barrels/day – 71% for transportation *source: Energy Information Administration (EIA)*
- Annual consumption of bottled water in the US requires the equivalent of between 32 and 54 million barrels of oil. *source: Pacific Institute*
- 100 billion single-use bags – using 12 million barrels of oil – are used each year in the US. *source: Worldwatch Institute*

## **NCC Resources for Further Reflection**

**[www.nccecojustice.org](http://www.nccecojustice.org)**

- Sacred Oceans and Seas (Earth Day 2005)
- Through the Eye of a Hurricane (Earth Day 2006)
- Tending the Garden: Stewardship of Biodiversity and Endangered Species
- Water Stewards: A Toolkit for Congregational Care of Local Watersheds

## **Further Information and Clean Up Efforts**

NOAA: <http://deepwaterhorizon.noaa.gov/>

EPA: <http://www.epa.gov/bpspill/>

Gulf Restoration Network: <http://www.healthygulf.org/>

Clean Water Network: <http://www.cleanwaternetnetwork.org/>