

June 21, 2017

Secretary Ryan Zinke
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Zinke,

As religious leaders, we write in opposition to expanded oil and gas drilling and seismic testing in public waters off our nation's coasts. Offshore drilling brings unacceptable risks to God's oceans and coastal communities.

God created the oceans with an abundance of life and, as stewards of God's earth, we should work to preserve and protect God's marine creation. As people of faith, we also uphold our duty to love our neighbors. Oceans provide food sources and livelihoods for millions in the U.S. and globally. Drilling not only impacts marine life, but also impacts people who depend upon the oceans for food and jobs.

Expanding drilling into our Arctic, Atlantic, Eastern Gulf of Mexico and Pacific waters—still largely unspoiled by drilling's inherent hazards and harms—would put our coastal residents, businesses, oceans, and climate at grave risk. Exposing the Gulf of Mexico to additional drilling would further burden residents with the pollution and risks that have already caused great, lasting harm to the region. These burdens the faith community knows well since we served as first responders during the crisis.

Expanded drilling threatens the beaches and wildlife that depend on a healthy ocean. It is well known that oil spills can wreak havoc on ecosystems and local businesses and residents alike. Seismic testing that often precedes offshore oil and gas development also harms marine life, including imperiled sea mammals and important fisheries.

Instead of expanded fossil fuel drilling in God's oceans, we should invest in renewable sources such as wind and solar, as well as maximize our energy efficiency. God entrusts the earth to our care. We should honor this sacred duty, not by more extensive drilling for a limited energy source, but by making wiser energy choices. These energy sources are clean, provide good jobs and position our country as a global leader in energy stewardship.

Far more people in the United States want to preserve God's oceans than exploit them for oil and gas. Jeopardizing the health of our oceans for more drilling will only leave us vulnerable to disasters that put God's oceans, beaches, marine life, and livelihoods at risk.

We urge you to join us as God's steward of the oceans and to respect the local residents,

businesses, and millions of Americans who have already made clear their support for preserving, not drilling off our nation's beaches.

Sincerely,

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Presiding Bishop
Communion of Synodal Catholic Churches
Safety Harbor, FL

Rev. Sandy Sorensen
Director
United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries Washington Office

Rabbi Jonah Dov Pesner
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