



Episcopal Bishop Bassoto during her efforts to raise awareness of climate change in jungles of the Amazon.

St. James parishioners urged to embrace sustainable practices

By Barbi Walker-Walsh

On a sweltering 114-degree Saturday morning, July 6th, St. James Episcopal Church in Tempe welcomed the Most Reverend Marinez Santos Bassoto, the first female bishop in South America. Bassoto spoke on Christians' call to be good stewards of the climate and planet.

Christians must also protect the Amazon and the Indigenous people living in the sacred rainforest, she said.

The Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Anglican Church of Brazil, Bishop Bassoto's Tempe visit came as her country prepares to host the crucial United Nations Climate Conference in November 2025.

At the St. James event called "Fighting climate injustice is part of the Gospel!" for the Christian Formation Forum, Bishop Bassoto helped the community deepen its knowledge of global environmental issues.

A cornerstone of the Tempe community for over 35 years, St. James is known for its inclusive spirit and progressive values and is a fitting venue for Bishop Bassoto's impassioned address.

With St. James' iconic red sandstone façade as a backdrop, Bishop Bassoto unveiled the harsh realities of the Amazon rainforest. Her diocese, encompassing vast stretches of the Amazon, is witnessing an alarming surge in deforestation, illegal mining, and the displacement of Indigenous communities.

The bishop, a tireless advocate for Indigenous rights and environmental justice, said that illegal mining, unchecked deforestation and the exploitation of natural resources are not merely distant headlines but a harsh reality for the Indigenous people who call the rainforest home.

She recounted stories of displacement, violence, and the erosion of ancient traditions. Her voice echoed the urgency of their struggle.

She warned that the Amazon is not merely a resource to be exploited but a sacred living ecosystem, and its destruction would be a global crisis with far-reaching consequences.

Despite the improvements in the last couple of years, Bassoto said still more work needs to be done.

In a recent peer-reviewed study published in February in the journal *Nature*, the Amazon forest system is facing a critical tipping point due

to unprecedented strain from climate change, deforestation and other factors, including the increased demand for soy.

According to the European Commission's Joint Research Centre's Science for Policy, the Brazilian Amazon deforestation continues due to soy production.

In 2022 and 2023, the growing global demand, favorable prices and improvements in the infrastructure to transport soy to coastal or river areas for exports gave rise to increased soy production areas in the Amazon.

With the city of Belem, within her diocese, set to host the pivotal COP30, Bishop Bassoto appealed to the St. James congregation and world at large to embrace sustainable practices, advocate for policy changes, and stand in solidarity with the Indigenous defenders of the Amazon.

Bishop Bassoto's visit was a reminder that faith and environmental stewardship are inextricably linked. Her words inspired a renewed commitment among attendees to protect both creation and its most vulnerable inhabitants. As the morning sun streamed through the stained glass, it illuminated a path toward a more sustainable and just future, guided by the powerful voice of a woman who refuses to let the Amazon's cries go unheard.