

# The Cry of Creation



## *A Call for Climate Justice*

**AN INTERFAITH STUDY GUIDE  
ON GLOBAL WARMING**

PREPARED BY EARTH MINISTRY

for the

INTERFAITH CLIMATE AND ENERGY CAMPAIGN

A collaborative effort of the National Council of Churches in Christ  
and The Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life

[www.earthministry.org](http://www.earthministry.org)

[www.protectingcreation.org](http://www.protectingcreation.org)

*Interfaith*  
**CLIMATE CHANGE NETWORK**  
JOINING TOGETHER IN PROTECTING CREATION



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# The Cry of Creation

## *A Call for Climate Justice*

### WELCOME

Welcome to The Interfaith Climate and Energy Campaign's (ICEC) study guide on global warming! The ICEC is excited to offer this resource, and hopes it inspires faith-based communities to take action to curtail climate change.

**The Interfaith Climate & Energy Campaign** is a coalition of religious American leaders, institutions and individuals who for over two years have been working in twenty-one states to educate congregants about the causes and effects of global climate change and to speak out about the religious and moral imperatives to protect God's creation and all of God's children. Through this joint effort of the National Council of Churches in Christ and the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life, over 1,200 leading religious leaders have joined in calling for federal policies for energy conservation and climate justice.

See [www.protectingcreation.org](http://www.protectingcreation.org).

This study guide was edited and compiled by Michael Schut and Tanya Marcovna Barnett at **Earth Ministry** in consultation with Douglas Grace at ICEC. Earth Ministry is an ecumenical, environmental non-profit working to connect faith with care and justice for all creation. To learn more about their many resources and programs visit [www.earthministry.org](http://www.earthministry.org).



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# INTRODUCTION

**BELOW PLEASE FIND A FEW BRIEF GUIDELINES FOR USING THIS STUDY GUIDE.**



## An Important Note

Before you gather for Meeting One, make sure you have read Bill McKibben's "The Comforting Whirlwind" (p. 3) and "Global Warming: The Science and Frequently Asked Questions" (p. 6).

**Three or Four Weeks:** The piece you hold in your hands contains three weeks' worth of readings and meetings. However, you may wish to begin your time together with an excellent video titled "God's Creation and Global Warming." If, in your first meeting you went through the video and its study guide, you could then begin this three-week study the following week. (To order the video, call 202-544-3110 or visit [www.protectingcreation.org](http://www.protectingcreation.org).)

**Design:** This study guide is easy to follow: simply read it from front to back. For example, following this welcome and introduction, two essays appear. Those are the essays you will need to read *before* Meeting One. Meeting One then immediately follows those two essays.

**Facilitator:** The role of Course Facilitator rotates each week; the course does not require an experienced leader or teacher. This should contribute a sense of shared ownership, responsibility, and community to the course. Each week the Facilitator should:

1. Welcome everyone and lead the opening meditation and prayer.
2. Facilitate the flow of discussion.
3. Keep track of time, ensuring that all have adequate time to speak.
4. Make sure a Facilitator is chosen for the next gathering.

**Course Ethos and Guidelines:** This course seeks to value all participants' perspectives. We encourage you to interact with each other and the materials openly. Author Cecile Andrews has a number of helpful guidelines for creating a community-oriented group. Below find a summary of her suggestions (*The Circle of Simplicity: Return to the Good Life*, HarperCollins, 1997):

**No leaders. Be participatory.** This is a circle, not a pyramid, so no one can be a dictator.

**Respond as equals.** In this course we act on the idea that we are all equal.

**Be authentic.** We spend a lot of our lives trying to look successful. No one really gets to know us. In this group, try not to pretend.

**Focus on the heart.** When you communicate from the heart you bring in the whole of yourself: emotions, imagination, spiritual insight, and thoughts.

**View conversations as barn-raising instead of battle.** Ways to do this include:

Listen and focus on understanding. No attacking, dismissing, or denigrating. No persuading. No playing devil's advocate.

**Discover wisdom through stories.** Everyone can tell his or her story and there's no right or wrong interpretation. Ultimately, stories connect people.

Finally, this is your course. Each meeting has suggested questions, but if your group feels led to bring up other issues, feel free to pursue those. Thank you for your interest! Blessings on your time together.



# THE COMFORTING WHIRLWIND

## GOD AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS



A Sermon by Bill McKibben

Bill McKibben is a former staff writer for *The New Yorker*. His books include *The End of Nature*, *The Age of Missing Information*, *Enough*, and *Hope, Human and Wild*. McKibben is a frequent contributor to a wide variety of publications, including *Outside*, *Orion*, and *The New York Times*. He is a Contributing Editor to Earth Ministry's *Earth Letter* journal. He lives with his wife and daughter in the Adirondack Mountains of New York, where he is a Sunday school superintendent of the local Methodist church. His sermon, excerpted here, was delivered at the Unitarian-Universalist First Religious Society in Carlisle, Massachusetts in March 2001 where he reflected on biblical passages from Job 38-39.

**W**ELL GOOD MORNING to you all... I feel called upon to talk to you about questions of the environment, which seem to me to be at the root of the interesting, powerful, profound, spiritual issues of our time.

I wrote a book some years ago called *The Age of Missing Information*. Strange book. I went out and found the largest cable television system in the whole world, which at the time was in Fairfax, Virginia and had 100 channels. I got people in Fairfax to tape everything that came across those 100 channels. I took it home to the Adirondacks and viewed all of it: roughly 2,000 hours of programming. The message, distilled down to its essence, which comes through that television all the time, is simple: "You are the most important thing on earth, the heaviest object in the known universe."

If you had to pick one message that was most effective for building a huge, strong economy that would probably be it. It has worked incredible wonders. We have consumed and produced and raised our standard of living in ways that no one in any previous time or place could even have imagined. We have created what passes in physical terms for a utopia, where we live in comfort and convenience and security.

But if you wanted to create a message that was profoundly troubling from a spiritual point of view and one that made progress on issues of great importance, especially issues of the environment, very difficult, you couldn't pick a better one than "You're the most important thing on earth. You're the center of the planet." This is an old question: where do we stand in relation to everything else.

This seems to me the question that animates Job. All of you probably know the book of Job as well as I do, so forgive me for running over it briefly. Job – prosperous man, good man, always does his bit for the community, treats his family well – one day wakes up and finds himself seemingly cursed by God. His cattle start dying of hoof and mouth disease, his children die, his property is taken from him, he ends up living in a dung heap at the edge of town covered with oozing sores. As one would in such a situation, he begins to question why this has happened to him. His friends come and visit, representing the orthodoxy of the day, and they tell

him it must be because he has sinned. He must have done something and now God is punishing him. This is the standard operating procedure of that day, the standard operating belief.

Job, surprisingly, won't take that for an answer. He keeps saying, "But I didn't do anything that bad. There must be some other explanation," and he audaciously demands an interview with God. Job wants God to justify God's self. Job demands this in increasingly belligerent language and finally God appears. God appears speaking in a voice from a whirlwind. It's an amazing diatribe. Job has stirred up a hornet's nest. God is in a sarcastic mood and keeps asking him, "Well, where were you when I laid this whole thing out? Do you know how to stop the waves from breaking? Do you know where they should go? Do you know where I keep the hail and the snow? Do you hunt game for the lioness?" On and on and on down the whole list. It's a beautiful piece of writing.... Probably the most beautiful and biologically accurate and sexy and crunchy piece of writing we have.

On the one hand its message is clear, I think: Job, and by extension the rest of us, are not at the absolute center of God's universe. We're one small part of a large creation, cut down to size in the course of God's diatribe. But that's not the only message. The other message is that this world of which we are a part is incredibly beautiful, full of meaning and sweetness and beauty.

"Do you show the hawk how to fly stretching his wings to the wind? Do you teach the vulture to soar and build his nest in the clouds? He makes his home on the mountaintop. On the unapproachable crag he sits and scans for prey. From far off his eyes can spot it, his little ones drink its blood. The unburied are his."

These things, which are in some sense most vile to us, are clearly dear to God. This world is not always as we see it through our own particular lenses of justice and rightness. Then God asked Job, "Has God's accuser resigned? Has he swallowed his tongue?" Job simply says, "I am speechless. What can I answer? I put my hand on my mouth. I have said too much already. Now I will speak no more." Which seems like a good answer in this situation.

That has always been one of the profound ways in which human beings have understood their relationship with the world – that there is some force larger than us, perceived in the operations of the physical universe around us. That’s one of the ways we have managed to remind ourselves to keep our hubris within at least some bounds. In our time that answer is changing. That answer is disappearing. Human beings are putting themselves not only at the center in the sort of ways that we always have – in our pride and in our appetite – but also increasingly in the absolute chemical reality of the planet on which we live.

Let’s take the example of climate change. Right about the Industrial Revolution human beings began burning large amounts of coal, gas, and oil, carbon-based fuels. One effect is obviously the kind of pollution we are used to – smog over cities, for example; that’s a minor effect. The major effect is that when you burn those fossil fuels, you release carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) into the atmosphere. A colorless, odorless, non-poisonous gas the concentration of which is higher in this room than it will ever be outdoors, but a gas which by its molecular composition traps heat close to the atmosphere – heat that would otherwise radiate back out to space. The atmospheric concentration of CO<sub>2</sub> was about 275 parts per million before the Industrial Revolution. It is now about 385 parts per million and it will be above 500 parts per million long before the middle of this century unless we do very dramatic things in the next few years to dramatically curtail our use of fossil fuels. If we don’t, we have now been warned by scientists, whose data has grown ever stronger and more robust, exactly what to expect.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, comprised of 1,500 climatologists from around the world, carry out an endless series of research and analysis on this problem. Their last five-year assessment, released in January 2001, reported that in this century we can expect to see the global average temperature increase about 4 to 6 degrees Fahrenheit. That would take it to levels higher than it has ever been in human history, indeed than it has ever been long before human history began. If everything tops out at the upper end of the parameter we could see average global temperature increases as high as 11 degrees Fahrenheit.

Any of those changes are completely unacceptable. We know they are unacceptable because we’ve already increased the temperature about 1 degree Fahrenheit and we’ve begun to see what happens when we do. For instance, the world gets a lot stormier, a lot wetter. That’s because warm air, in the fashion that God designed this planet, holds more vapor than cold air. So to increase the temperature you get a lot more evaporation in arid places and you get a lot more drought. That evaporated water has to come down somewhere, so in places where it’s wet you get a lot more precipitation, a lot more flooding. Severe storms that drop more than two inches of rain in a twenty-four hour period have increased about twenty percent across this continent against the baseline. That’s a very large increase in a basic physical phenomenon.

Consider what is happening to the cryosphere, to the frozen

parts of the planet. Every glacier system in the world is now in rapid retreat, and remember this is just with a one-degree rise in global average temperature. By 2015 the snows of Kilimanjaro will have completely melted. Glacier National Park will have no glaciers by about 2030. The ice cap over the Arctic has thinned forty percent in the last forty years. We have tremendous data on that because we ran nuclear submarines underneath the ice for a long time and we know how thick the ice has been; it’s now almost half melted away. Those are unbelievably large changes in very fundamental elements of this planet in a very, very short time. They come with real consequences.

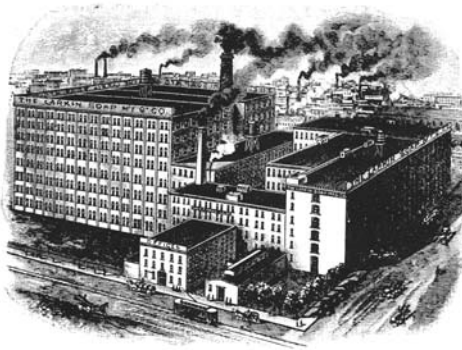
Forgive me for using harsh language for a few minutes, but I’m going to. I have been working on these issues for ten or twelve years and have reached the point where I am unwilling to pussyfoot around them too much longer. These things are happening in large measure because of us. We

in this country create twenty-five percent of the world’s carbon dioxide. It is the affluent lifestyles that we lead that overwhelmingly contribute to this problem. And to call it a problem is to understate what it really is: it is a crime. A crime against the poorest and most marginalized people on this planet. We’ve never figured out, though God knows we’ve tried, a more effective way to destroy their lives. I spent much of last summer in Bangladesh, a wonderful country, vibrant, green, alive – feeds itself

even though there are 130 million people in an area the size of Wisconsin. Amazing place. The biggest problem is that it is low in the Bay of Bengal, it’s a river delta. The Ganges and the Brahmaputra come pouring out of the Himalayas. They flatten and broaden out when they reach Bangladesh. The country is half water. That’s one of the reasons it’s so fertile. Every year the rivers flood and lay this little beautiful layer of silt, and things just pop out of the ground.

But let’s say you raise the level of the Bay of Bengal just a few inches. (By every forecast, we will raise the level of the sea at least a foot in the next fifty years.) Then those waters cascading from the Himalayas have no place to go. They just back up and spread out all over Bangladesh. That’s what happened in 1998. The water was a little higher than usual in the Bay of Bengal and a lot of water was coming down out of the mountains. For about ninety days, about a quarter of the year, two-thirds of the country of Bangladesh was in thigh deep water or worse. That’s just how people lived. They are incredibly adaptable and resourceful and did a heck of a lot better living in thigh deep water than we would have. But they can’t do that year after year after year. Can’t plant the rice crop. They weren’t food self-sufficient that year. And Bangladesh is just one on the list of a hundred places that will be similarly traumatized unless we make significant changes.

It’s a crime against the rest of creation, against all the other interesting corners of God’s brain, against the lion and the antelope and the vulture and you can just go on down the list. Think about coral reefs. I’m sure some of you have taken vacations in the tropics and dived on coral reefs. Enchanting beyond belief.



An ecosystem almost impossible to imagine in its jewel-like beauty and its gentleness. Coral reefs, by current forecasts, will probably disappear as an ecosystem by about 2050. As ocean water temperatures increase, the small animals that create the coral, the reefs, die off. They're bleached, they die. Once those corals begin to die, all the fish populations that they support die off and so on up the chain. In fifty years our only record of this world beneath the waves may be the films and pictures and things that we've made of them.

Imagine the polar bear – this incredible incarnation of the other, fiercest of our brethren, uninterested in us, not scared of us. The polar bears in large parts of the Canadian north are about twenty percent skinnier than they were ten years ago. As the ice pack melts, it becomes incredibly difficult to hunt seals, which is what polar bears do for a living. No pack ice, no hunting, no polar bears.

It's a crime against the future, against everyone who is going to come after us. No one has ever figured out a better way to permanently alter and degrade the world around us than this. To strip mine the future. If we could imagine how we would feel about people who would have done that to us several generations ago, if it had happened then, then we can imagine how people will one day consider us in this regard, unless again, we do something soon.

Though our scientific system has done a tremendous job alerting us to the dimensions of climate change, we are not doing anything meaningful about it. Our political system, our cultural system, so far has yet to respond in any significant way. The reason that it hasn't responded goes back to the question with which we began. As long as we consider ourselves to be inevitably at the center of everything and our immediate comfort and gratification the most important of all tasks, it is extremely unlikely that our leadership will rise to the occasion and demand of us any real change...

In 2001, the United States Administration announced that it was not going to regulate carbon dioxide in any way, that in essence it is going to kill off the Kyoto Treaty, the one attempt internationally to deal with these questions. The reason? Their analysis had indicated that taking any steps would drive up the price of electricity and that would hurt American consumers. Well, they are correct. It is going to cost some money to transition from coal and oil and gas to a renewable energy future. It is going to cost some money and the Administration doesn't think we're going to stand for it. They might well be right and that may be the calculation they're making.

So that's where you and I are right now. How do we get off this dime? How do we learn to stop putting ourselves at the center of everything and help our neighbors, our culture, our country understand the same thing? How do we rise to the obvious challenge that is put before us in our time – the challenge that is just as square faced as the civil rights challenge was a generation ago or the challenge of fascism a generation before that.

I don't have any easy answers for you. In fact, I should probably just stop here, having alarmed you enough. Let me suggest, at the risk of getting in trouble, that there are a few beginning symbolic but powerful things we could start to do. This issue of drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is coming before us today as a country. It has been presented as

wilderness versus oil drilling and it's true that drilling would harm that wilderness. But underneath that wilderness is a big pool of oil. If we bring that oil out and burn it, we release more of that carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. We heat the planet a little bit more. We do a little bit more to contribute to making the Arctic Wildlife Refuge no longer a place of permafrost and caribou, but a place of muskeg swamp where no caribou will tread...

Lets try to bring this as close to home as possible, probably uncomfortably close. It's not just actions in Alaska. It's actions all around us that are important. Symbols all around us. Symbols like the huge houses we are building and do not need. Symbols like, and here's one that I think we can act on quickly, symbols like the sport utility vehicles, SUVs. Now I grew up in Lexington and I was amazed when I'd come back to visit in recent years. I live up in the Adirondacks, where it actually is sort of icy and we have bad roads, but no one has any money, so they just drive cars or maybe pickups. I was amazed to come back to Lexington a few years ago to see my folks and went down to the Stop & Shop to get a few groceries. It looked as if the 8th Armored Infantry had come to Lexington on maneuvers. The only logical conclusion you could possibly have drawn is that Lexington had suddenly been riven by three or four raging rivers one had to cross in order to get groceries. If you drive a normal car and a big SUV the same average distance for a year, in that one year the differential in the amount of energy you use, hence the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> you put in the atmosphere, is the equivalent of opening your refrigerator door and leaving it open for six years.

That's what we're talking about in realistic terms and in symbolic terms. What we're talking about is the endless, gullible elevation of levels of comfort and status and everything else at the complete expense of all around us. It's going to take us a long time to learn how to climb down a little bit from the heights on which we have put ourselves. We've been at this work for a very long time. All the witness of our religious gurus notwithstanding, we've done a good job of paying them lip service and going on about our ways. Now the signals from the physical world, from God's creation, tell us that we have definitively gone too far and it is time to turn around. We will need each other's encouragement and help in doing that.

Our religious communities are deeply important, almost the only institutions left in our society that posit some goal other than accumulation for our existence here on this planet. Take good care of each other, but don't just take good care of each other – push each other a little bit too. This work has to be done fast and it has to be done lovingly, and it has to be done not only with an eye on the temperature around us, but with an eye on the temperature inside of us – on our understanding of who we really are, not who we've been told we are over and over and over again by all the images that flow through the cable or through the billboard or any of the other places that we increasingly have come to find our identity.



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## GLOBAL WARMING

### THE SCIENCE AND FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

This piece was adapted from the website of Climate Solutions, a Washington state based non-profit dedicated to stopping global warming at the earliest possible point. For more information, visit: [www.climatesolutions.org](http://www.climatesolutions.org).

#### THE SCIENCE

**E**ARTH'S ATMOSPHERE is ideally composed for life, with just the right mix of elements to sustain and support plants and animals. This mix includes small traces of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide. Because they are composed of molecules of three atoms or more – CO<sub>2</sub>, CH<sub>4</sub>, NO<sub>2</sub> – they thicken up the atmosphere and help trap incoming sunlight. Without them, the Earth would be a frozen iceball with temperatures hovering around 0 degrees Fahrenheit.

Greenhouse gases are a good thing, but we've all heard about the problems of too much of a good thing and that is clearly the case with greenhouse gases. Human activities are making massive changes in global atmospheric chemistry. Since the dawn of the industrial revolution 250 years ago, carbon dioxide has increased in the atmosphere by 31 percent, methane by 151 percent, and nitrous oxide by 17 percent.... Around three quarters of greenhouse gases come from burning fossil fuels – coal, oil, and natural gas. Most of the rest come from land use changes – primarily deforestation of tropical rainforests.

These changes rank on a geological time scale. Antarctic ice cores hold bubbles of air that perfectly reflect the atmosphere at the time the bubbles were captured. An ice core record going back 420,000 years proves conclusively there is far more carbon dioxide in the atmosphere than at any other time in that record, around 370 parts per million compared to a previous high of 300. Carbon dioxide levels are rising the fastest in at least 20,000 years. Drillings from ancient corals and other ocean sediments show it is highly likely that we are at a twenty million year high for carbon dioxide.

The ice core also reveals that this past 10,000 years, the entire period of human civilization, has seen the most stable climate in 420,000 years. By dramatically increasing greenhouse gases, humanity is threatening to radically destabilize the climate in ways we cannot predict...

We already know the planet has warmed by around 1 degree Fahrenheit in the past century. Most of the ten hottest years on record took place in the past decade, while scientific studies indicate that decade was the hottest in 1,000 years. Meanwhile, severe storms have increased in the United States, while over the past twenty years more areas of the planet have suffered

from drought or flooding. Spring is coming around a week earlier to the Northern hemisphere, while populations of species from butterflies to marine creatures can be observed shifting north as the planet warms. Glaciers are retreating in mountains around the world while the Greenland ice pack has started to melt. In the tropical oceans, corals are suffering and dying from warming waters, threatening the rich biodiversity of these "rainforests of the ocean."

The mounting evidence for global warming caused the world's leading scientific authority on the topic to make its most conclusive statements to date. In 2001, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) stated, "There is new and stronger evidence that most of the warming observed over the last fifty years is attributable to human activities." The panel said temperature could rise by up to 5 degrees Celsius, or 11 degrees Fahrenheit, this century. That would be twice the entire warming after the last ice age 10,000 years ago, and it would take place in 100 years, rather than over thousands, giving the natural world and human civilization little time to adapt.

The American Geophysical Union, the nation's largest earth sciences association, recently stated, "there is no known geologic precedent for the transfer of carbon from the Earth's crust to atmospheric carbon dioxide, in quantities comparable to the burning of fossil fuels, without simultaneous changes in other parts of the carbon cycle and climate system." Any remaining

**EDITORS' NOTE:** In July 2003, 725 scientists from the United States released a letter to the United States Senate. In their letter they state, "We are writing to confirm that the main findings of the [*Climate Change 2001* IPCC report] continue to represent the consensus opinion of the scientific community. Indeed, these findings have been reinforced rather than weakened by research reported since [the report] was released." (Read the letter at [www.climatesolutions.org](http://www.climatesolutions.org).)



scientific uncertainty “does not justify inaction in the mitigation of human-induced climate change and/or the adaptation to it.”

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### What causes global warming?

...Here’s how the greenhouse effect works: The sun’s rays arrive in the atmosphere as ultraviolet radiation, which comes in short waves so it slips right through the atmosphere to the surface. When the rays hit ground and water, they turn into heat, or infrared radiation, which reflects back out into the atmosphere as long waves. Those waves are caught by greenhouse gases, which are all composed of molecules that have three or more atoms. Over ninety-nine percent of the atmosphere is composed of smaller molecules. These “big” three-atom molecules catch the “big” waves of infrared rising into the atmosphere, trapping the heat and warming the planet. The problem now is that human activities are releasing too many three-atom molecules into the atmosphere, enhancing the natural greenhouse effect.

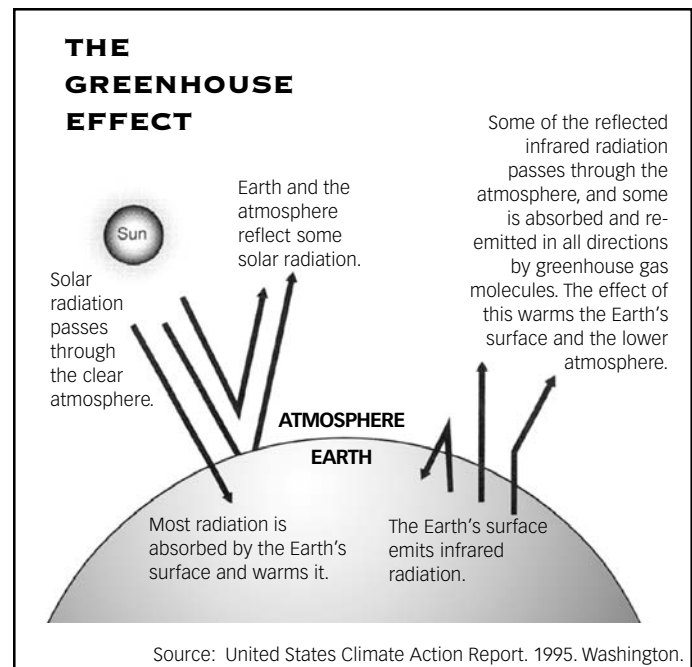
### What are the greenhouse gases and where do they come from?

...The major greenhouse gas that humans are adding to the atmosphere is carbon dioxide,  $\text{CO}_2$ , which remains in the atmosphere a century or more. The second largest greenhouse gas being emitted by humans is methane,  $\text{CH}_4$ , which is around twenty times more powerful than  $\text{CO}_2$ . Much of this comes from agricultural sources such as farm animals and rice paddies.... Roughly three-quarters of human-caused greenhouse warming comes from the burning of fossil fuels – coal, oil, and gas. Most of the remainder comes from deforestation, primarily of the tropical rainforests.

### Why is global warming harmful? Wouldn’t it be pleasant to have milder temperatures, especially in the temperate and frigid zones?

Global warming will have winners and losers, but most of us will be losers. Some of the hardest hit regions will be in the developing nations of the tropics, particularly in Africa, and since this is primarily a result of gases emitted by the rich nations, this is a global justice concern. Other big losers will be inhabitants of tropical islands who could lose their homes to rising seas and the Inuit peoples of the Arctic whose environment will melt right out from underneath them.

But even the richest continent is threatened. That is because one of the results of protracted global warming would be more violent and frequent weather disturbances, including hurricanes, cyclones, and tornados. North America, the continent with the greatest frequency of severe weather, can expect to be ravaged. As well, the heat stresses that accompany hot spells now would



become greater and affect more people. The kind of heat waves that killed hundreds of people in Chicago in 1995 will become more frequent. Those same stresses affect food animals and food plants as well, and would disrupt our efforts to feed ourselves. Drought and flooding are already on the increase and bringing their disruptions to human populations, plants, and animals.

Global warming stresses also lower the resistance of all living beings to disease and infections. Mosquitoes especially would love the increase in their hot humid habitat. Disease-carrying mosquitoes and other parasites would thrive. They are already climbing to higher altitudes and latitudes under the current warming...

### Can we stop global warming?

The best science indicates that to stabilize the climate, we must rapidly reduce human greenhouse emissions on the order of seventy percent.... Because the climate resembles a speeding train that takes a long time to slow, the longer we wait the greater the risk that we will set in motion natural forces we cannot stop...

We can [slow and then stop the train of global warming] by transforming our energy system from one based on fossil fuels to one based on natural, renewable energies including sun, wind, tides, plant growth, and geothermal energy. We have the technology, but applying it will take a large investment by government and business. In shifting to clean energy, we will also eliminate much air pollution, and build new industries and a new basis of sustainable prosperity. If we move quickly to clean energy, stop deforesting the tropics, and move to more sustainable agriculture, we will eliminate most greenhouse gases, and avert climatic catastrophe.... We are well up to the task. We just have to recognize its critical importance to our future.

Excerpted with permission from Climate Solutions: [www.climatesolutions.org](http://www.climatesolutions.org).

# MEETING ONE

## HUMILITY, SCIENCE, AND HUMANITY'S PLACE IN CREATION

### Read Before Meeting One

"Welcome" &  
"Introduction" (pp. 1, 2)

"The Comforting  
Whirlwind,"  
by Bill McKibben (p. 3)

"Global Warming: The  
Science and Frequently  
Asked Questions" (p. 6)

### Introductions

Briefly introduce yourselves. (Soon you will have a chance to say more.)

### Opening Meditation (Facilitator reads aloud.)

McKibben's sermon refers to the biblical story of Job. To begin your time together, read the following excerpt from Job 38:

Then the Lord answered Job out of the storm. God said:

"Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge? Brace yourself... I will question you, and you shall answer me. Where were you when I laid the Earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone – while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?... Have you ever given orders to the morning, or shown the dawn its place?... Who cuts a channel for the torrents of rain, and a path for the thunderstorm, to water a land where no human lives, a desert with no one in it, to satisfy a desolate wasteland and make it sprout with grass?... Do you hunt the prey for the lioness and satisfy the hunger of the lions when they crouch in their dens or lie in wait in the thicket? Who provides food for the raven when its young cry out to God and wander about for lack of food?"

### Opening Prayer (Facilitator reads aloud.)

Creator of the universe, thank you for this opportunity to be together. Thank you for the gift of another day. Remind us of our day-by-day dependence on your creation. May we learn from our own lives, from each other, and from your presence among us. Amen.

### Group Reading (Read the following aloud – we suggest taking turns.)

So, here you are! Beginning a brief course on faith and climate change. In this first meeting, you'll have a chance to tell a piece of your own story, and listen to others. And you'll take time to begin to reflect on the connections between your faith and questions and concerns surrounding global warming.

Hopefully, you have had a chance to read today's readings, including the Welcome and Introduction (pp. 1, 2). The Introduction includes brief guidelines, which are important to follow and should help create community as you meet together.

- ◇ Are there any questions about course format, organization, or leadership?
- ◇ Any questions or comments on the facilitator's role?



◇ Any comments about the “Course Ethos and Guidelines,” summarized in the Introduction?

(For clarification on any of these questions, please refer to the Welcome and Introduction.)

### Further Introductions

Take a few minutes to introduce yourself more fully. Be mindful of leaving sufficient time for others. Some possible questions to get you going:

- ◇ The obvious ones: name, where are you from, your work, your congregation, your family...
- ◇ How did you come to be interested in this course?

### Group Discussion

(If you have other questions besides the ones suggested below, feel free to pursue those.)

1. What especially stood out to you in the readings?
2. Did anything particularly strike you in today’s reading of Job or in Bill McKibben’s comments on Job?
3. McKibben summarizes his sense of the message of Job 38-39 in two ways. First, humans are not at the absolute center of God’s universe. Second, this world is incredibly beautiful, full of meaning and sweetness and beauty. He goes on to say that, “Human beings are putting themselves not only at the center in the sort of ways that we always have – in our pride and in our appetite – but also increasingly in the absolute chemical reality of the planet on which we live.” For you, what is Job’s message for our world today, in the context of global warming?
4. McKibben uses strong language, calling global warming a “crime.” How did you respond to that characterization? What do you think or feel about it now?
5. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s (IPCC) 2001 report states: “There is new and stronger evidence that most of the warming observed over the last fifty years is attributable to human activities. Detection and attribution studies *consistently* find evidence for an anthropogenic signal in the climate record of the last thirty-five to fifty years.”
  - a. What questions and/or uncertainties do you have about climate change?
  - b. What are some of the reasons behind your own or our society’s questions and uncertainties about global warming’s reality?
6. Which of global warming’s impacts (either already underway or potential) most concern you? How do those concerns relate to your faith?

### Closing Prayer (Unison)

Creator of life’s beauty, majesty, and mystery, we thank you for the gift of life – ours and those of all your creation. Teach us what it means to be human, show us our role on this beautiful gift of Earth. Grant that we might embrace our role with both conviction and humility. Amen.

### Reminder

Please designate next meeting’s facilitator.

### Read Before Meeting Two

“The Joseph Strategy,” by David Ehrenfeld (p. 10)

“Religious Voices on Global Warming” (p. 13)

### For Further Study

Climate Solutions:  
[www.climatesolutions.org](http://www.climatesolutions.org)

Union of Concerned Scientists:  
[www.ucsusa.org](http://www.ucsusa.org)

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change:  
[www.ipcc.ch](http://www.ipcc.ch)





## THE JOSEPH STRATEGY

By David Ehrenfeld

David Ehrenfeld teaches biology at Rutgers University. The author of *The Arrogance of Humanism* and *Beginning Again*, he was the founding editor of the journal *Conservation Biology*. His latest book is *Swimming Lessons: Keeping Afloat in the Age of Technology*. This version of “The Joseph Strategy” is an edit of an abridged web version that appeared on OrionOnline under the same title at [www.oriononline.org](http://www.oriononline.org). For the full text of “The Joseph Strategy,” please see the September/October issue of *Orion*, 187 Main Street, Great Barrington, MA 01230, 888/909-6568, [www.oriononline.org](http://www.oriononline.org) (\$35/year for 6 issues).

When people think of the dramatic story of Joseph and his brothers, told in the Book of Genesis in the Bible and in the twelfth sura of the Koran, they think first of the Canaanite family drama – of a brother abused and brought low by his siblings – ending in one of the most moving family reconciliations in all literature. Less often considered is the subplot of the story: Joseph’s accurate prediction of impending environmental catastrophe – drought and famine – and his masterful strategy for avoiding disaster by taking steps while resources were still abundant.

Sold into slavery, Joseph becomes known as a skilled interpreter of dreams, a talent that comes to the ears of Pharaoh, who has been troubled by two dreams that his advisors cannot explain. The dreams are similar: in one, seven fat cows emerge from the Nile to graze, followed by seven emaciated cows which swallow them up; in the other, seven full, healthy heads of grain are eaten up by seven thin, shriveled ones. The repetition of the theme in two dreams was believed a sign that God was about to bring these events to pass. Pharaoh sends for Joseph.

Joseph’s interpretation of the dreams is that there will be seven years of abundant harvest, followed by seven years of famine. Therefore, he suggests to Pharaoh with breathtaking boldness, you should appoint a wise and discreet man who will oversee Egypt, and who will organize the collecting of one-fifth of the grain during the years of plenty, to be stored in granaries in the cities and doled out during the years of famine.

At the heart of Joseph’s strategy was a simple lesson: In a world of changing fortunes, long-term survival of an individual or a country can often be achieved by saving during the good years... This lesson has been ignored in more recent history. In the 1920s, times were good; during the postwar boom many people believed prosperity would last forever, and they spent lavishly on every kind of luxury. Then, in 1929, came the crash, followed by the Great Depression, a shattering experience for millions...

In 2003, a new generation is repeating the mistakes of the '20s. We have a [government]...that countenances with equanimity a rising tide of bankruptcies and unemployment, and a deficit of more than six trillion dollars.... Our party, like the revels of the carefree summer of 1929, is ending, too. Grave troubles concerning the environment, health, security, food, and

water have already begun to arrive. But the mother of them all is the dwindling global supply of cheap energy, upon which modern civilization and global commerce utterly depend. Here is a fundamental problem that will not go away...

The energy expert Richard Duncan has pointed out that global energy production per capita reached its peak in 1979 and has been falling at an average rate of 0.33 percent per year ever since. There is now less energy available for each person on Earth than there was in 1979. Duncan has predicted that world oil production will peak in 2006, and then begin to fall rapidly, even as much of the less developed world is industrializing, and its population growing. This prediction is roughly in accord with those of other prominent oil geologists. If it is correct, Duncan claims, “energy production per capita will fall to its 1930 [level] by 2030.”

This is industrial civilization as we know it, a fast-driving, heavily consuming, self-indulgent civilization that lacks inherent braking mechanisms. If Duncan and other energy analysts are right (they seem fairly conservative), we can expect widespread electricity blackouts in a decade or so, followed by the rapid unraveling of our highly complex, highly interlinked, highly unstable, and highly unpredictable globalized system.

At some point, as the price of energy goes up and the net assets and purchasing power of most Americans continue to wane, it will no longer be feasible to ship large quantities of green peppers from Mexico to Boston in January, or send steel for heavy construction from China to Atlanta...

We have a moral obligation to act, because we in the First World have created this system, which includes not ourselves alone, but those people in Third World nations who have toiled and have polluted and depleted their own resources to feed our consumption.

We are well into the unfolding energy emergency – our dependence on oil from the Middle East, where we have imposed our military and political presence and culture, has spawned increasing



terrorism and tumultuous unrest... Terrorism against a vast, complex, interlinked industrial society such as ours is very cheap and relatively easy to accomplish; defense against terrorism is fabulously expensive, compromises our civil liberties, and is not very effective. The best way to minimize the threat of terrorism is to eliminate our most vulnerable and provocative activities, the first of which is our heavy use of imported oil.

One thing is certain: If we are to reduce energy consumption in a way that preserves the best parts of industrial civilization, we have to start now. Now, while we are still sufficiently energy-rich and material-rich to afford the high costs of technological development and to buy time for the changes we need in public attitudes toward energy use. In other words, the Joseph Strategy.

There are three quite different courses of action that might be taken, each with its advantages and drawbacks.

The first approach is a combination of stockpiling and rationing, a “top-down” tactic that is roughly similar to the one that Joseph used. The energy stockpile most directly analogous to Joseph’s huge granaries in the cities is the national Strategic Petroleum Reserve, in existence since 1977. The capacity of the petroleum reserve is seven hundred million barrels of oil; it is not yet filled completely.

The United States’ consumption of oil is now approximately twenty million barrels per day, a little more than half of which is provided by foreign oil. Thus the reserve could hold a thirty-five-day supply. If the reserve were used to replace only the foreign oil we consume, it would last a little less than seventy days – the slower the drawdown, the longer the supply would last. By no stretch of the imagination, however, could the reserve make a significant contribution to our energy needs for more than a year or two, so stock-piling is not a factor in any long-term energy strategy.

Rationing is a different matter. Joseph kept strict control of the stockpiled grain that was sold to the hungry Egyptians. A rough counterpart was our government’s rationing of gasoline during the Second World War. When voluntary gas rationing proved ineffective, mandatory gas rationing was put in place throughout the country by December 1942. Cars used for “nonessential driving,” the majority, had yellow A stickers on their windshields, and received three to four gallons of gas per week. The sticker hardest to come by, good for unlimited fuel, was the X sticker, offered to VIPs such as members of Congress. In Washington, twelve percent of the city’s population applied for X stickers. Eleanor Roosevelt, the First Lady, conspicuously applied for an A sticker...

Gas rationing worked fairly well; people understood that it was necessary, and an exercise in effective patriotism, though

cars were far less important in the daily lives of Americans in the 1940s than they are today. It seems likely that some form of mandatory energy rationing will be needed again in twenty-first-century America. But in the absence of a national energy catastrophe, the only politically acceptable forms of rationing are likely to be indirect. Imposing strict gas mileage standards on all new vehicles could be a viable equivalent of rationing. Strict regulation of electricity consumption by outdoor advertising, refrigerators, and lighting fixtures would do the same, as would the mandating of ecological design criteria to reduce

energy consumption in new buildings. With such equivalents of rationing in place, we would have the time and money to implement further improvements in our use of energy, and to devote more attention to our many other environmental and social problems.

The second tactic for the precautionary avoidance of energy shortage is technological innovation – like rationing, a top-down approach. Energy-saving technologies are already commercially available and more are being developed.

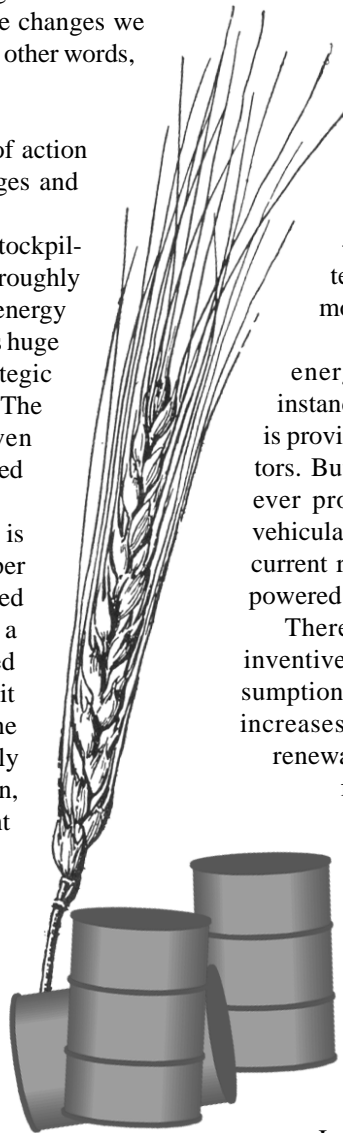
Obviously it would be ideal to couple the new energy-use and energy-generating technologies: for instance, a hydrogen fuel-cell-powered car whose hydrogen is provided by energy from photovoltaic cells or wind generators. But it seems doubtful that truly renewable sources can ever provide even close to enough energy to run all the vehicular and other fuel cells in an industrialized world at the current rate of use. In the foreseeable future, we will still be powered primarily by fossil fuel...

Therefore, however much energy we save through our inventiveness, we will sooner or later have to reduce our consumption. But in the meantime, technological innovation that increases the efficiency of energy use and provides more renewable energy is a great improvement over the wastefulness of traditional practices. It is a crime that our government is only paying lip service to most of this technology, when it should be supporting a research and production effort on the scale of the World War II Manhattan Project, which created the atomic bomb. We should be grateful that a few developments – the compact fluorescent bulb, wind power, and the hybrid car – are moving forward rapidly without much governmental assistance...

There is one serious problem with both rationing and the new energy technologies. In this regard, the

Joseph story has more to tell us. In chapter 47 of Genesis we learn what happened in Egypt after the famine began:

The famine was very severe.... Joseph gathered in all the money that was to be found in the land of Egypt...and brought the money into Pharaoh’s palace. And when the money gave out... Joseph said, “Bring your livestock and I will sell to you against your livestock, if the money is gone....” And the next year [they] said to him... “With all the money and animal stocks consigned to my lord, nothing is left.... Take us and our land in exchange for bread, and we with our land will be serfs to



Pharaoh; provide the seed that we may live and not die, and that the land may not become a waste.” So Joseph gained possession of all the farm land of Egypt for Pharaoh.... Then Joseph said to the people, “...here is seed for you to sow the land. And when harvest comes, you shall give one-fifth to Pharaoh, and four-fifths shall be yours.” And they said, “You have saved our lives! We are grateful to my lord and we shall be serfs to Pharaoh.” (Jewish Publication Society translation.)

Joseph averted overwhelming famine and death, but at a price... The net results of Joseph’s actions were not only the avoidance of terrible famine but the centralization of power in a country where it had previously been dispersed, as well as the loss of liberty for most of its inhabitants. Paradoxically, he also set the stage for the creation of a powerful regime which eventually enslaved his own descendants.

Both rationing on the one hand and technological change on the other leave us vulnerable to this side effect of the Joseph Strategy. In the case of rationing of energy sources and uses, the danger is obvious. In any rationing scheme, some people get more, others less. There is always a potential for favoritism and manipulation.

Technological innovation, like rationing, also leaves us subject to top-down control. With a few exceptions, such as the solar oven, modern technological innovation in this field requires large amounts of capital and large research establishments; and the kinds of organizations that can carry out this research – the federal government and multinational corporations – are not disposed to give up power...

Mandatory rationing and technological innovation are critically necessary but we have to remember that these are top-down approaches. In times of crisis, people tend to accept strong central authority (as after the bombing of the Reichstag in 1933, or after September 11), and often find themselves sacrificing their liberty. In the face of a severe energy shortage, how much of our freedom will we be willing to lose to preserve our current lifestyle? Or can that lifestyle change?

The third proactive tactic for dealing with energy shortage is a largely “bottom-up” approach that does not put us at the mercy of centralized power structures or compromise our freedom. We consume far more than we need to of almost everything: food, space, material goods, and, underlying all other consumption, energy. A popular movement to lower consumption would defuse the energy crisis quickly, at little or no direct cost. Unlike rationing and most technological advances, it would reduce rather than increase centralized control and our indebtedness to energy-giving authority.

Such a movement already exists and is growing, as more and more people take themselves off the consumption treadmill. Consuming less, including much less energy, doesn’t have to mean shutting down. But an energy-sparing life of quality does not come without effort. A thousand economic and cultural obstacles, created by government in league with transnational corporations, make it hard to operate a farm, small business, or a professional practice in a low-consumption way. The spend-and-discard, mall-dwelling lifestyle is easier and more convenient, and requires much less knowledge and commitment. This is why

we should not expect a widespread, dramatic conversion until the true costs of our obscene energy (and other) consumption begin to hit home with skyrocketing gasoline prices,

scattered blackouts, increasing unemployment, and possibly more terrorist attacks. When this point comes, our hope must be that enough people have pioneered low-consumption ways of living to teach survival skills to the refugees who cannot imagine life without low-priced gas, cheap imports, and the produce of factory farms.

Then we will discover that the ability to reduce our own consumption will give us enormous power that cannot be taken away by higher authority. True, military-related contracts, paid by the taxpayers, can be handed out by the government, but the great bulk of buying is under our control. The power not to spend, at least on nonessential goods and services, has not yet been exploited to pressure our political leaders to look beyond materialism for the public good...

A voluntary lowering of consumption – the end of gross materialism – would bring about many beneficial changes in our society. It would improve our health by breaking the stressful spiral of working more to buy more – and to pay the ever-ballooning interest on credit-card debt. It would increase our need and concern for each other as we rediscover that neighbors can share goods and exchange services at great savings and with much joy.

Lowering consumption would also have dramatic effects beyond the industrial world. It would reduce exploitation of children and semi-slave laborers in Third World countries, and would slow depletion of global resources. These countries could then promote a healthy, equitable commerce among themselves by forming regional trading blocs, free of the negative economic and social consequences of depending on Western markets. This in turn would lower the risk of war and international terrorism, and would narrow the now-widening gap between rich and poor everywhere....

The time to start dealing with the energy crisis is now, while we still have the resources and wealth that allow us to act. This is the Joseph Strategy. A modern approach will have the three components, each with advantages and drawbacks. A judicious mix of all three – rationing, investment in technological change, and the voluntary reduction of consumption – will serve us best and do the least harm. These components can work well together – for example, in a less materialistic society, wise rationing of energy would not be onerous. And our willingness to jettison gross materialism may well evoke the kind of adroit and farseeing leadership that Joseph provided, but leadership now more by example than by command.

Perhaps our model should not be Joseph in his royal chariot, but Eleanor Roosevelt in her car with the yellow A sticker on the windshield.



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## RELIGIOUS VOICES ON GLOBAL WARMING

The world's religions have not been silent about global warming. We have gathered below some powerful statements made by religious leaders and ecumenical bodies, including:

- ◇ The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
- ◇ The Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life
- ◇ The World Council of Churches
- ◇ A Letter to Senators from Religious Leaders
- ◇ The Evangelical Environmental Network
- ◇ An Islamic Scholar
- ◇ A Leading Buddhist Monk from Thailand

[See [www.protectingcreation.org](http://www.protectingcreation.org) for declarations made by specific denominations.]

### THE UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

The text for *Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good* was approved for publication by the full body of United States Catholic Bishops at their June 2001 General Meeting. The following is an excerpt:

At its core, global climate change is not about economic theory or political platforms, nor about partisan advantage or interest group pressures. It is about the future of God's creation and the one human family. It is about protecting both "the human environment" and the natural environment. It is about our human stewardship of God's creation and our responsibility to those who come after us...

While our own growing awareness of this problem has come in part from scientific research and the public debate about the human contribution to climate change, we are also responding to the appeals of the Church in other parts of the world. Along with Pope John Paul II, church leaders in developing countries – who fear that affluent nations will mute their voices and ignore their needs – have expressed their concerns about how this global challenge will affect their people and their environment...

Therefore, we especially want to focus on the needs of the poor, the weak, and the vulnerable in a debate often dominated by more powerful interests. Inaction and inadequate or misguided responses to climate change will likely place even greater burdens on already desperately poor peoples. Action to mitigate global climate change must be built upon a foundation of social and economic justice that does not put the poor at greater risk or place disproportionate and unfair burdens on developing nations.



### A LETTER TO SENATORS, SIGNED BY 1,200 RELIGIOUS LEADERS

At the end of this excerpt, from [www.protectingcreation.org](http://www.protectingcreation.org), find a sample of the diversity of signatories.

February 26, 2002

Dear Senator:

As leaders of major faith communities, we write to you, our senators, at a moment of great moral urgency for our nation and the planet – God's children and God's creation. We caution Congress not to adopt an energy policy based on short-term regard for long term solutions. On May 18, 2001, forty-one heads of major denominations and senior religious leaders joined in issuing "Let There Be Light: An Interfaith Call for Energy Conservation and Climate Justice." In this document, they lifted up the moral stakes of a sustainable energy policy:

"At stake are: the future of God's creation on earth; the nature and durability of our economy; our public health and public lands; the environment and quality of life we bequeath our children and grandchildren. We are being called to consider national purpose not just policy."

Drawing upon scripture, the statement affirmed the importance of considering long-standing principles of faith and values concerning all of creation – stewardship, covenant, justice, prudence, solidarity, and intergenerational equity. Today, more than ever, these precepts should guide our action. Recent events remind us of the intimate link between the safety of people and the reliability of our energy system. Efforts to preserve the environment are ever more clearly necessary in order to protect human life. Security and sustainability are inextricably linked...

We have established Interfaith Climate and Energy Campaigns in twenty-one states that are educating congregations on the link between energy conservation and renewable energy sources that benefit climate change reduction.

We strongly oppose policies that would allow drilling or min-



ing in our nation's dwindling wild lands and places important to the traditional cultures of indigenous peoples. We specifically oppose drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Conservation is a morally superior alternative to drilling in such places. Furthermore, conservation is also more effective, providing much greater benefits that are more permanent, rather than a modest and short-lived increase in oil supply...

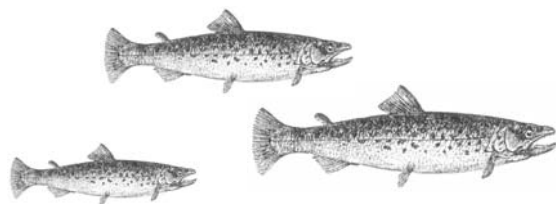
Now is the time to embrace energy conservation and efficiency and alternative energy development as the central strategies of our nation's energy policy. The energy policies we adopt in the coming debate must reflect our resolve as a nation to be faithful to our values and to fulfill our obligations at a time of national crisis.

God calls humans to strive toward peace, justice, and harmony for all of creation. We have called on our congregants and communities to practice energy conservation as part of our values. Now we urgently call on the United States Congress and the Administration. As this critical issue comes forward for legislative action, we call upon our senators to reflect and act as God's stewards. The same energy policies that will help achieve peace for humankind by reducing our dependence on oil will create greater harmony within creation by protecting the environment...

Yours faithfully,

1,200 signatories, including leaders of:

Academy for Jewish Religion, African Methodist Episcopal Church, Alliance of Baptists, American Baptist Churches, Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, Aleph: Alliance for Jewish Renewal, Central Conference of American Rabbis, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Church of the Brethren, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, The Episcopal Church, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, Korean Presbyterian Church in America, Mennonite Church, Moravian Church, Northern Province National Council of Jewish Women, Presbyterian Church USA, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, Rabbinical Assembly, Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association, Reformed Church in America, Roman Catholic Church: Brother David Andrews, 2 Bishops and 1 Archbishop, Tony Campolo Ministries, Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch, United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, United Church of Christ, United Methodist Church, Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations...



## JUDAISM & ENERGY

From the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life,  
by Rabbi Fred Scherlinder Dobb.

### Energy Conservation is an Ancient Commandment

Rav Zutra, in the Talmud (Shabbat 67b), mandates fuel efficiency, saying that those who burn more fuel than necessary violate the law of not wasting (*bal tashchit*). And a 13<sup>th</sup> century German pietistic text, *Sefer HaChinuch* (529), suggests that:

“*Tzadikim* (righteous) people of good deeds...do not waste in this world even a mustard seed. They become sorrowful with every wasteful and destructive act that they see, and if they can they use all their strength to save everything possible from destruction. But the *rasha'im* (wicked) are not thus; they are like demons. They rejoice in the destruction of the world, just as they destroy themselves.”

Given what we know today, where human-induced climate change is underway, what decisions – the mileage our vehicles get, for example – make us a *tzadik* or a *rasha*?

### Shabbat Puts the Weekly Brakes on Consumption

Across the spectrum of Jewish observance, Shabbat is central – it's the weekly celebration of the completion of Creation. Shabbat stands for something more important than producing and consuming, more sacred than “economic growth” as the end-all-and-be-all. In place of consumerism's energy use and pollution, Shabbat holds out community, learning, prayer, food, rest, music, love, and friendship as our ideal. These values are infinitely sustainable and grow-able, unlike the cars and chemicals and day-trading of the workaday week.

Shabbat extends still further: we withdraw from the economic & energy-consuming rat-race not just one day a week, but also one year every seven, through the Sabbatical. And that's not counting festivals, or the jubilee every 50<sup>th</sup> year. So more than two-sevenths of our lives, at least, should be spent away from an obsessive focus on production, consumption, and growth.

### Our Energy Consumption Leaves Too Little for the Rest of Creation

Though created in the Divine Image, humans are not the purpose of creation. As Maimonides (12<sup>th</sup> C Egypt, *Guide to the Perplexed*, 3:13) said: “It should not be believed that all beings exist for the sake of humanity's existence ... [rather] all the other beings too have been intended for their own sakes.”

Emissions from our fossil-fuel energy consumption – air and water pollution, poisonous mercury, smog-forming ozone, and carbon dioxide – endanger all of Creation, and threaten to push overstressed species over the brink. Yet “even those creatures you deem superfluous in this world – like flies, fleas, and gnats – nevertheless have their allotted task in the scheme of Creation” (Midrash, from about the 8<sup>th</sup> century – *Exodus Rabbah* 10:1).

Furthermore, not all of humanity is endangering the rest of Creation. With only 4.5% of the world's population, Americans produce over 25% of its greenhouse gases. This is an



issue of justice, as in “justice, justice, you shall pursue, in order that you and your children may live” (Deuteronomy 16:20). Rising seas from global warming will affect Tuvalu and Bangladesh more quickly than New York or Los Angeles; new vectors for tropical disease will especially hurt those who can’t afford health care; and so on. “Do not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor... love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:16, 19:18).

### **The Precautionary Principle**

Judaism (like logic!) teaches us to act warily. No law or value is more important than *Pikuach Nefesh*, the saving of a life. Deuteronomy 22:8 tells us, “when you build a new house, you shall make a parapet for your roof” – we submit to the extra construction expense not because someone *will* fall off the roof otherwise, but because someone *might*. The same must apply to the enormous gamble we’re now taking with God’s creation, and with our own descendants.

## **THE EVANGELICAL ENVIRONMENTAL NETWORK**

The following excerpt comes from the Evangelical Environmental Network’s educational campaign, “What Would Jesus Drive?”

Jesus is concerned about what we drive because pollution from vehicles has a major impact on human health and the rest of God’s creation. It contributes significantly to the threat of global warming. And our reliance on imported oil from unstable regions threatens peace and security. Making transportation choices that threaten millions of human beings violates Jesus’ Great Commandments to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” and “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:30-31), as well as the Golden Rule to “Do to others as you would have them do to you” (Luke 6:31).

... “What Would Jesus Drive?” is a question all Christians should ponder seriously. Obeying Jesus in our transportation choices is one of the great Christian obligations and opportunities of the 21st century.

## **WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES**

A statement made at the UN Climate Conference in The Hague, January 2003.

We feel strongly that the climate change negotiations should refocus on the option that meets the criteria of environmental effectiveness, equity, responsibility and economic efficiency, with the priority being emissions reduction strategies in the high per capita polluting countries. All humankind is made in the image and likeness of God and all nature bears the marks of God. God’s inheritance is for the communal body, a concept that includes all of nature.

## **AN ISLAMIC POSITION ON CLIMATE CHANGE**

A statement by Professor Ahmed L. Khamlichi, an Islamic scholar from the Royal Moroccan Palace.

“The Koran states that God allows human beings to enjoy everything necessary to satisfy their desires, such as food, clothing, housing, transport and every other ornament or means of enjoyment – but with balance and moderation and no excess or overuse.” For Khamlichi, maintaining balance is also existentially important for the earth’s climate, for the earth was created as a balanced system. To counteract climate change, every individual must contribute actively to restoring and maintaining this balance. For, as he said, “each generation will only live for an allotted time. The environment is not something that can be owned by anyone here and now. The environment and the climate belong to coming generations.”

## **BUDDHISM ON CLIMATE CHANGE**

By Sulak Sivaraksa and Aubrey Meyer. Sulak Sivaraksa is a Buddhist master and activist from Thailand, where he has initiated the ordination of ancient trees as Buddhist monks in order to save rainforest from being cut down. Aubrey Meyer is a violinist and climate scientist.

### **The Four Noble Truths Applied**

#### **1. The Existence of Suffering**

Climate change is a reality. It is the source of flooding and drought, desertification and loss of land. The global biosphere has been suffering at the hands of humanity throughout history, no more so than in the last century. As a consequence, this and future generations are also suffering.

#### **2. The Source of Suffering**

Climate change is caused by over-consumption of fossil fuels, loss of soil, and mass keeping of livestock. Individual over-consumption in the global North is an expression of greed and fear of losing out. Fear and greed are root causes of all suffering. Capitalism thrives on individual fear and greed.

#### **3. Overcoming Suffering**

The climate we have to change is the climate of greed and fear, in which consumerism and profiteering can thrive.

#### **4. The Way to Overcome Suffering**

Start at home, with yourself. Ask yourself: Where can I cut down my consumption? How can I repay my carbon debt to my children’s children? Plant trees. Don’t fly. Eat local and organic.



## MEETING TWO

### DO WE HAVE THE ENERGY? RELIGIOUS VOICES AND ENERGY POLICY



“Religions can help us to recapture a sense of the sacredness of creation, for nature mirrors the beauty and love of God.”

—Stefan Edman, Swedish delegate to the World Council of Churches

#### Opening Meditation (Read aloud the following.)

Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” (Genesis 1:26)

The Lord took the human and put the human in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it. (Genesis 2:15)

Significantly, the Hebrew word translated as “till” in Genesis 2:15 is *abad*. *Abad*, most accurately translated, means serve. The same word appears in Joshua 24:15: “...But as for me and my household we will serve (*abad*) the Lord.” We were placed in the garden to (literally translated) “serve and keep” the garden.

“Dominion does not mean license to exploit. In ancient Hebrew thought, it means a responsibility. If a ruler...fails in this righteous rule of dominion, then that person forfeits the right to rule. That [incorrect] theological focus has isolated a good part of the faith community from the care of creation and [from] those themes you find in every major world tradition.” (Dean Freudenberger, Professor of Social Ethics Emeritus, Claremont School of Theology, in the *Los Angeles Times*, October 16, 1999.)

As part of your meditation, you may wish to comment on these verses and quotes. Do you have any thoughts on why Genesis 1:26 is more well-known than Genesis 2:15? What is your understanding of humanity’s role within creation?

#### Opening Prayer (Facilitator reads aloud.)

Creator, thank you again for our time together. We pray for wisdom and ask for humility in the face of creation’s complexity. We ask that all creation may share in Earth’s bounty, that all will be fed. We pray with hope, and in faith. Amen.



#### Small Group Discussion (In groups of two or three.)

1. Consider the various statements from religious traditions. Take some time as a small group to discuss them. Did anything especially resonate with you? Did you find yourself disagreeing with certain statements or perspectives? If so, why? Did you find your own perspectives on the connections between faith and global warming (or other environmental concerns) shifting as you considered them?

## Group Discussion

1. Feel free to report back from the discussion in your small groups.
2. Did anything in particular stand out to you in the readings?
3. Many of the statements from various religious traditions emphasized global warming as a justice issue. Similarly, the IPCC's 2001 Synthesis Report stated that, "Those with the least resources have the least capacity to adapt and are the most vulnerable. The poor are expected to disproportionately bear the burden of future changes in climate extremes." How do such statements affect your perception of your faith's connection to climate change?

## Group Reading (We suggest taking turns reading aloud.)

On the political level, recent debates around United States' energy policy have focused on our Administration's push to open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling, on providing access (for drilling) to other public lands, and on tax breaks for expanded oil production. In addition, the legislative branch continues to be unable to pass higher Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) standards for automobiles. Finally, in spite of pressure from around the world, the current Administration has withdrawn the United States from the Kyoto Protocol, an international treaty designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

"The Future of Energy Policy", an article in the July/August 2003 journal *Foreign Affairs*, called the current state of energy policy debate "stale." The essay, written by Timothy Wirth, a former Colorado Senator, C. Boyden Gray, former Counsel to President George H.W. Bush, and John Podesta, former President Bill Clinton's Chief of Staff, states that:

The staleness of the (energy) policy dialogue reflects a failure...to address three great challenges. The first is the danger to political and economic security posed by the world's dependence on oil. Next is the risk to the global environment from climate change, caused primarily by the combustion of fossil fuels. Finally, the lack of access by the world's poor to modern energy services, agricultural opportunities, and other basics needed for economic advancement is a deep concern.

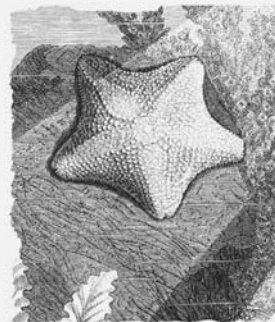
The authors go on to make the following twenty-five-year goals. (Keep in mind that the authors come from both Republican and Democratic parties.) First, America should cut its oil consumption by a third in order to reduce its oil-dependency and break "the grip of the global oil cartel." Second, to address the dangers facing the world climate, the U.S. should cut its carbon emissions by a third. Third, the U.S. should "develop, deploy, and disseminate clean energy technologies" and increase "the access of poor people... to modern energy services and agricultural markets."

## Group Discussion

4. What do you think of the three twenty-five-year policy goals suggested by Wirth, Gray, and Podesta? What specific policies or actions would you suggest we take as a country to reach those goals? (Think creatively, your ideas do not necessarily need to emanate from policies with which you have some familiarity.)

"The industrial nations are practicing a new kind of colonialism with the stratosphere and we have to put a stop to that."

—Stefan Edman



## Reminder

Please designate next meeting's facilitator.



## Read Before

### Meeting Three

"Paper or Plastic, Cloth or Disposable? – Effective, Focused Actions That Make a Difference" (p. 19)

"Congregational Stories" (p. 21)

## For Further Study

For further information on the precautionary principle, see:  
[www.biotech-info.net/precaution-ary.html](http://www.biotech-info.net/precaution-ary.html).

The Interfaith Climate Change Network:  
[www.protectingcreation.org](http://www.protectingcreation.org)

The National Religious Partnership for the Environment:  
[www.nrpe.org](http://www.nrpe.org).

Earth Ministry:  
[www.earthministry.org](http://www.earthministry.org)

Web of Creation:  
[www.webofcreation.org](http://www.webofcreation.org)

5. The first of the great challenges our energy policy must take into account (according to Wirth, Gray, and Podesta) is the "danger to political and economic security posed by the world's dependence on oil." Many see strong connections between Gulf Wars I and II and our reliance on oil. Do you agree with these perspectives? Would you feel more secure if we, as a country, were not so dependent on oil?

6. Principle #15 of the United Nations Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (1992), reads: "In order to protect the environment, the **precautionary approach** shall be widely applied...Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation" (emphasis added).

The word "precaution" comes from the German word, *Vorsorge*, which translates as "forecaring." Precaution indicates affirmative, caring actions that one can take today to prepare for and/or prevent greater damage tomorrow.

Ehrenfeld's application of the "Joseph Strategy" to the energy crisis (and by extension, to the crisis of global warming) is a good illustration of the precautionary approach. Please take some time now to (1) review the three tactics (pp. 11) of the Joseph Strategy:

1. Stockpiling and rationing
2. Proactive technological innovation
3. Reducing consumption

and (2) discuss how these tactics might provide tools for forecaring for a future marked by increasing energy instability and global warming.

7. If you could design U.S. energy policy, what priorities would you push? Why? How?

## Closing Prayer (Unison)

Thank you for the gift of life. You open your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing, giving them their food in due season. We thank you for sustaining such a rich and bountiful Earth, our home. Encourage us in our assumption of appropriate responsibility in its care. Grant us continued gratitude at the richness you provide. Amen.





## **PAPER OR PLASTIC, CLOTH OR DISPOSABLE? EFFECTIVE, FOCUSED ACTIONS THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE**

You've just unloaded your groceries onto the checkout stand. Paper or plastic? – the inevitable question. For those concerned about environmental impacts, there's not an easy answer.

Faced with this and other similar questions at every turn, it's easy to begin to feel disempowered or overwhelmed. Which is precisely why the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) wrote their excellent book *The Consumer's Guide to Effective Environmental Choices*. Some choices have a huge impact on the environment while others are of negligible importance. The book informs consumers about those everyday decisions that most significantly affect the environment.

After conducting extensive research, UCS identified the following "Priority Actions for American Consumers":

### **Transportation**

1. Choose a place to live that reduces the need to drive.
2. Think twice before purchasing another car.
3. Choose a fuel-efficient, low-polluting car.
4. Set concrete goals for reducing your travel.
5. Whenever practical, walk, bicycle, or take public transportation.

### **Food**

6. Eat less meat.
7. Buy certified organic produce.

### **Household Operations**

8. Choose your home carefully.
9. Reduce the environmental costs of heating and hot water.
10. Install efficient lighting and appliances.
11. Choose an electricity supplier offering renewable energy.

—*The Consumer's Guide to Effective Environmental Choices: Practical Advice from the Union of Concerned Scientists*; Michael Brower and Warren Leon, p. 85.

The authors go on to point out (p. 52) that "Just three of the household activity areas – food, household operations, and transportation – account for the majority of our environmental impact. The reason is not simply that people spend

more money in these areas than in others. We spend as much on medical care and personal items as we do on household operations, yet the latter produce six times the emissions of greenhouse gases. Rather, something about the way these services are provided or used results in a much greater impact on the environment."

That "something about the way these services are provided or used" is often related to how energy is used. In our current fossil-fuel based energy system, energy use is a *primary* contributor to global warming.

### **A CONTINUUM OF ACTIONS: DO WHAT YOU CAN, NOT WHAT YOU CAN'T**

Even with the UCS' help in prioritizing those actions most effective in reducing our impact on the environment, those eleven actions can still seem daunting. This may seem obvious, but simply start with where you are.

Take transportation. Where are you on the continuum, say, of driving alone wherever you go, to not owning a car? Can you imagine taking one step (in the direction of driving less) along the continuum? Perhaps car pool to work once a week. Or, offer the Earth a kind of Sabbath – rest your automobile by carpooling, biking, or walking to your place of worship.

Or, take food choices. Can you consider eating one less meal of meat every week? Try purchasing locally grown produce, or locally raised meat: both actions directly decrease your impact, because the average piece of food today travels 1,200 miles simply to reach your plate.

To assist you in the process of taking small steps, you might find the following helpful:

◇ First, for a very helpful article which fully describes steps along an actual "food choices continuum," see [www.earthministry.org/food\\_and\\_farming.htm](http://www.earthministry.org/food_and_farming.htm) and click on "The Great Hunter-Gatherer Continuum." Or check out the book *Food and Faith: Justice, Joy, and Daily Bread*, edited by Earth Ministry's Michael Schut.

◇ Second, The Center for a New American Dream's website, [www.newdream.org](http://www.newdream.org), features a program called "Turn the Tide." Turn the Tide highlights nine personal actions to protect the environment – complete with web-based calculators that tally and track individual and collective impact, giving you quantitative feedback.



◇ Finally, an overarching theme that can prove especially helpful in focusing on the actions most important to a sustainable future is the concept of “zero emissions design” (ZED). Zero emissions in terms of the amount of carbon dioxide released in the following three areas: transportation, food miles (the distance food travels to reach our plates), and housing design and operations. Just for starters, check out the following websites for further information: [www.zedfactory.com](http://www.zedfactory.com); the Rocky Mountain Institute at [www.rmi.org](http://www.rmi.org).

## POLITICAL ACTIVISM

The UCS’s book guides *individuals*, emphasizing how “consumer behavior” impacts the environment. Just as important as individuals adjusting their consumer behavior, however, is the need for individuals to work together to advocate for the kind of society where those consumer choices are not as environmentally damaging. We must not overlook the importance of political activism – leading to systemic change.

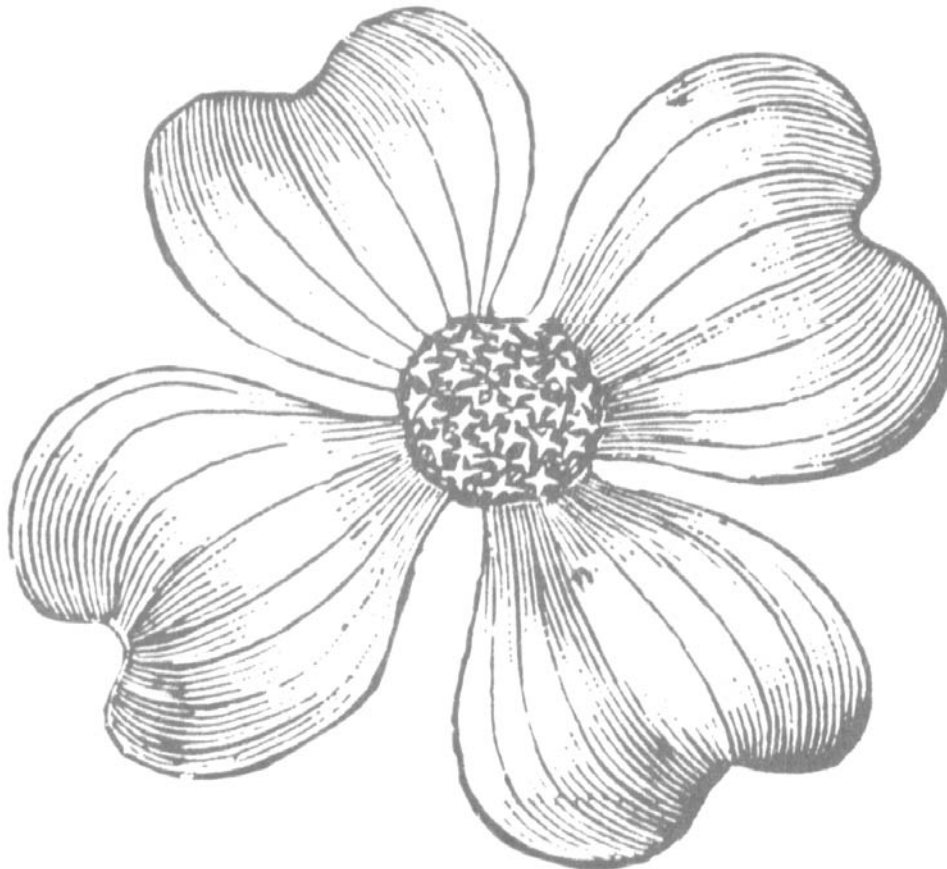
When we speak out as advocates, we join the long history within faith traditions of lending our voice to the voiceless, addressing those who hold power. The prophets of the Hebrew Bible, Jesus, and other prophetic figures, all voiced their dis-

may over those lands polluted and harmed under human greed and warfare. Within the Christian tradition, the Spirit is known as the “Advocate” who “helps us in our weakness...that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words” (Romans 8:26). We who hold power (as consumers) and have access to power (via political leaders or corporations) must join our voices with those human and nonhuman voices that have been overpowered.

Both individual and systemic changes are essential; to debate which is the more effective seems pointless. So, consider your transportation, food, and housing alternatives. *And*, use the power of your voice as a citizen – vote, write letters to elected officials, support and join with organizations advocating for the kinds of systemic changes you support.

## PAPER OR PLASTIC?

Back at the grocery checkout stand. Ideally, you’ve brought your cloth bags. If not, though, with the help of the Union of Concerned Scientists, you can now see that the more important questions are: “How did you get to the store: efficient automobile, walking, bussing?” and “Where did the food you are purchasing come from, and was it grown organically?”





## CONGREGATIONAL STORIES

The Interfaith Climate & Energy Campaign (ICEC) is a coalition of religious American leaders, institutions, and individuals who for over two years have been working in twenty-one states to educate congregants about the causes and effects of global climate change and to speak out about the religious and moral imperatives to protect God's creation and all of God's children. ICEC is a joint effort of the National Council of Churches in Christ and the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life. Below are three stories of congregational actions stemming from the campaign. (For more information on the Interfaith Climate & Energy Campaign go to [www.protectingcreation.org](http://www.protectingcreation.org).)

### CAFÉ DAY “GO THE EXTRA MILE” – NOVEMBER 10, 2002

Sponsored by the West Virginia Interfaith  
Global Climate Change Campaign

By Marcia Leitch

How do people of faith connect their faith's teachings with their lifestyles and the choices they make and thus become witnesses of living faithfully? Our Campaign network, in cooperation with and supported by the National Religious Partnership for the Environment, focused on fuel efficient, low emissions vehicles as an example of responsible purchasing and a way to embody the values of justice, equity, stewardship, and caring for future generations.

CAFÉ DAY “Go The Extra Mile” events were held in four cities and involved representatives from many congregations and faith groups. At all locations, electric-hybrid cars and other fuel-efficient vehicles were prominently displayed following worship.

A brochure was made available to participants/worshippers, which read in part, “As members of the industrialized world, our oil dependence is violating our covenant with God and our stewardship of creation. Our share of greenhouse gases is causing global warming, and we must take steps to reverse this trend. One place to begin is with the cars we drive. Through

our shared commitment to curb global warming, we fulfill our role as keepers of God's garden and hold true to the ethical values that define and guide our stewardship of creation.” The day of learning was part of a growing national trend among people of faith to view global climate change as a moral issue.

In Shepherdstown, the event was co-sponsored by the Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church, the Town Council and the Shepherdstown Ministerial Association. The vehicles were displayed on a city street, blocked off in front of the Town Hall for the occasion. Inspired by the event, a city council member challenged Shepherdstown to become “Kyoto-compliant”! Three other communities participated in CAFÉ DAY: both a Presbyterian and Lutheran church in Morgantown; and a Unitarian Universalist fellowship in Charleston.

CAFÉ DAY events received excellent media coverage, including four television stations, twelve newspapers, and one radio story. The campaign's effective press release was titled: “Strong Message to Detroit Automakers: Building Clean Cars is a Moral Choice.” The release included quotes from lay and clergy including the following:

“In our day and age, being a ‘Good Samaritan’ requires us to look at the larger picture – not just in our own community but also how our lifestyle choices impact the larger world.”

—Father Christopher Bender, Assumption Greek  
Orthodox Church, Morgantown



## **ST. ELIZABETH ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH: A CONGREGATION'S STORY**

**Submitted by the Michigan Interfaith Global Climate Change Campaign**

By Kim Winchell

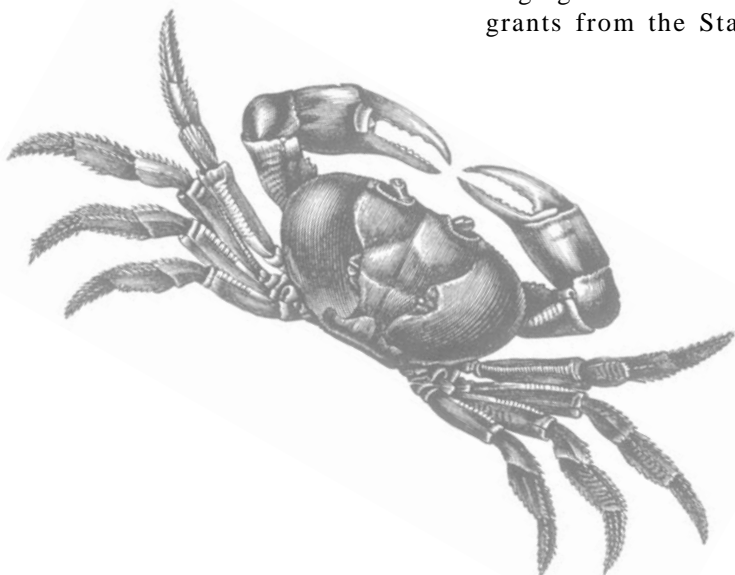
The parish of St. Elizabeth Church, in a community just south of Detroit, has truly exemplified what it means to care for Earth by addressing the problems of climate change and energy use.

Their congregational "Stewards of God's Creation" group began in 1994, with the enthusiastic support of their pastor, the Rev. Charles Morris. Initially, they focused on environmental 'fairs' and other programs to raise awareness in the parish at large. In 1997, they carried out an energy audit of their facilities (church, school, and rectory) and, based upon the information gathered in the audit, the congregation committed to various efficiency measures, ultimately saving them thousands of dollars in utility bills.

After attending the 1999 kick-off conference for the Michigan Interfaith Climate Change Campaign, Rev. Morris led a congregational bible study based upon the National Council of Churches' resource, "It's God's World: Christians, Care for Creation and Global Warming." The actions of the parish were also featured during a "Living on Earth" National Public Radio segment later that year.

What stands out about this parish is that they didn't stop there, but moved on to promote alternative energy sources by installing a small wind turbine and solar panels on the rectory's roof. During a wonderful interfaith press conference in June 2001, Rev. Morris climbed a ladder (three floors up!) to the rooftop and blessed both the solar panels and windmill, with special prayers composed for the day. No one there will soon forget how the blades of the wind turbine caught a puff of wind and began to move at the very moment they were blessed!

Since that time, the blessings and example of St. Elizabeth have continued: the congregation has received grants from the State of



Michigan to add to their clean energy and efficiency capabilities as a 'demonstration site' for schools and other civic groups. The media attention they have received helps to spread the message and raise awareness well beyond the religious community.

## **FALCON HEIGHTS UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

**The Minnesota Interfaith Global Climate Change Campaign**

By Jack Chandler and Cindy Kennedy

Cindy Kennedy serves as state coordinator for the Minnesota Interfaith Global Climate Change Campaign. Her story highlights the efforts of Jack Chandler from Falcon Heights United Church of Christ. Because of Jack's strong conviction that climate change is a matter of faith, he has worked tirelessly in his own church as well as actively engaging in the Campaign's work with the Public Utilities Commission on "green pricing" in Minnesota.

One of Jack's first moves was to speak with his Senior Minister, offering to facilitate global warming presentations. The minister welcomed the idea. Jack began by showing the excellent video "God's Creation and Global Warming" in the adult education class. He also divided the National Council of Churches' piece "Global Warming: A Religious Issue" into six sections, which subsequently ran in the church newsletter.

The adult education class invited three very well-received speakers from environmental organizations. Jack notes that prior to their presentations, the church determined that each speaker was in alignment with the goals of the Interfaith Climate Change Campaign.

The Senior Minister continued his support, offering a sermon on global warming and challenging the church to "do its part" through participation in the Minnesota Wind Energy Program.

Significantly, therefore, this congregation did not stop at providing educational opportunities, but challenged itself to apply its theology and concerns in a very practical way: specifically, supporting wind energy. The wind energy program received visibility through bulletin announcements and posters. The Executive Board approved the wind energy proposal after hearing a presentation highlighting:

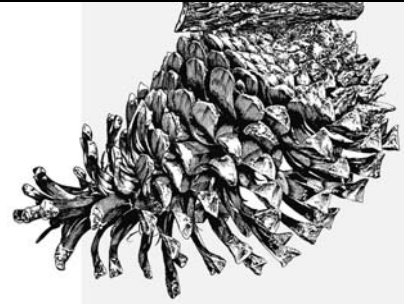
1. Global warming is real and impacts Minnesota.
2. The church's electricity use produces pollutants that damage our air, water, and climate.
3. The financial costs and environmental benefits of wind energy.

The Executive Board then created an environmental committee, which included the church Treasurer. The committee ensured that the wind energy program was included in the budget and then shepherded the proposal through budget hearings and congregational budget approval. Falcon Heights UCC has now signed up for fifty 100 kilowatt hour blocks of wind energy!



# MEETING THREE

## ENERGY AND GLOBAL WARMING: WHAT YOU CAN DO



### Opening Prayer (Facilitator reads aloud.)

Creator, help us to see you in each other — and all around us. May we become people able to treat ourselves with compassion and offer that to all our neighbors. Amen.

### Small Group Discussion (In groups of two, so that everyone has a chance to speak, discuss the following questions.)

1. Today's reading suggested imagining a continuum of choices available to us when grocery shopping, when meeting our transportation needs, etc. Do you feel ready to experiment with a certain step along one of those continua? If so, talk about that. Does it seem like a fairly doable step? What will you have to change in order to take that step? How might you support one another in doing so?

2. Consider the list of "Priority Actions for American Consumers" as described in today's reading (p. 19). Are you particularly concerned about any one of these issues (food choices, transportation, housing...)? Are there any actions you have taken that you feel particularly good about?

3. Today's reading emphasized the need for both individual change and political action. Are you more naturally drawn to one or the other? Are you involved with any organizations carrying out effective political action? What issues do you feel passionate about? Does that passion find expression politically?

"Preventing catastrophic climate change is, at its core, an energy challenge."

—Wirth, Gray, and  
Podesta.  
*Foreign Affairs*,  
July/Aug 2003, p. 136.

### Group Discussion

1. Anything you want to report back from your small group discussions?

2. What particularly struck you in today's readings?

3. To return to the Union of Concerned Scientists' book *The Consumer's Guide to Effective Environmental Choices*, below find the authors' summary of those consumer activities most harmful to the environment.

#### Most Harmful Consumer Activities:

- a. Cars and light trucks
- b. Meat and poultry
- c. Fruit, vegetables, and grains
- d. Home heating, hot water, and air conditioning
- e. Household appliances and lighting



- f. Home construction
- g. Household water and sewage

(*The Consumer's Guide to Effective Environmental Choices*, Brower and Leon, p. 50.)

A brief explanatory note about these seven activities might be helpful. The first highlights that the kinds of automobiles and number of miles we drive is currently the most harmful activity in which we all engage. The second and third reveal that the everyday act of eating carries with it a significant environmental impact. There are many reasons for this including: the average bite of food in the United States travels 1,200 miles to reach our plates; the majority of our fruits, vegetables, and grains are grown non-organically, contributing to soil and groundwater contamination; most farm animals are now raised in factory farms which require intensive water use, antibiotics, and grain, and where manure contaminates groundwater and local rivers. The last four “most harmful consumer activities” focus attention on the energy, water, and materials used in constructing and maintaining our homes.

- ◇ Do any of these surprise you?
- ◇ Hearing what others are doing to address these impacts can be especially encouraging and instructive. Tell of some of your experiences and ideas for doing so.

4. McKibben, at the end of his sermon (which you read before Meeting One) encourages us to “push one another a bit.” Does your faith community currently challenge you in regards to global warming or other environmental justice issues? What would you like to see happen?

5. Did the congregational stories inspire ideas you would like to pursue in your own house of worship? Share those with the group.

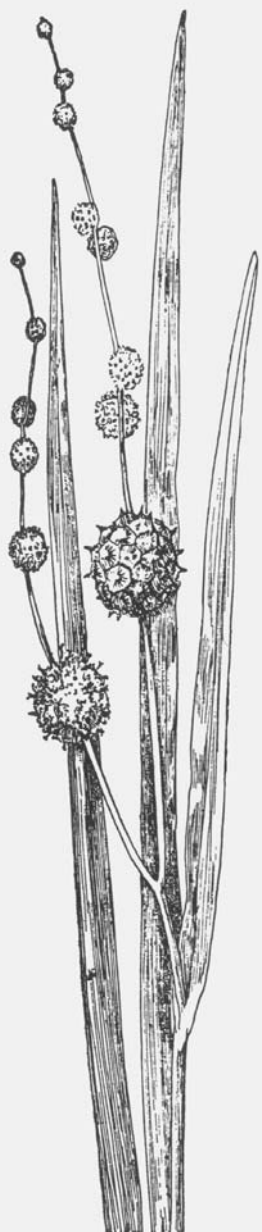
#### Group Reading and Wrap Up (Read the following out loud.)

In a short amount of time this study guide has begun to explore a fair bit of territory:

- ◇ The science of climate change.
- ◇ Policies designed to address global warming – especially energy policy.
- ◇ Diverse religious voices speaking out in support of decreasing humanity’s impact on God’s creation.
- ◇ Those individual choices we make that most contribute to climate change.
- ◇ Stories from various congregations.

In closing, let’s return to our starting point, to Bill McKibben’s sermon. About midway through, McKibben warns that he is no longer willing to “pussyfoot” around the issues connected to global warming when he states:

“We in this country create twenty-five percent of the world’s carbon dioxide. It is the affluent lifestyles that we lead that overwhelmingly contribute to this problem. And to call it a problem is to understate what it really is: it is a crime. A crime against the poorest and most marginalized people on this planet.... It’s a crime against the rest of creation, against all the other interesting corners of God’s brain, against the lion and the antelope and the vulture and you can just go on down the list.... It’s a crime against the future, against everyone who is going to come after us.... As long as we consider our-



selves to be enviably at the center of everything and our immediate comfort and gratification the most important of all tasks, it is extremely unlikely that our leadership will rise to the occasion and demand of us any real change.”

McKibben’s words quickly remind us of the fundamentally spiritual question before us – will we continue to see ourselves “enviably at the center of everything?” So, at the end of this time together, consider your own spirituality, the faith you desire to express in your life. What are its values, its hopes and visions?

Because, ultimately, addressing global warming is *not first and foremost* a list of dos and don’ts – don’t drive gas-guzzlers, don’t satiate your hunger with foods from the far-away; do take public transportation, do eat locally – just as our faiths are not best seen or lived out as a list of dos and don’ts. Rather, addressing global warming gets to the heart of our faith traditions and what they call us to. And all faith traditions call us to stand opposed to crimes “against the poorest and most marginalized people...against the rest of creation...and against the future,” as McKibben puts it.

All faiths call us to sing the fourfold song, so eloquently summarized by Michal Smart in the video “God’s Creation and Global Warming.” The first song is the “song of one’s own life.” In the second song, the singer leaves the circle of the individual self and sings the song of his or her community – “grieving in her afflictions and delighting in her hopes.” The circle expands and, in the third song, the singer picks up the melody of all humanity. Finally, the fourth song, where the musician’s voice unites with all existence – with all God’s creatures. And the song is at once one of endless praise, prayer, lamentation, and hope\*. Our faith traditions call us to inhabit the fourfold song, where the circle of our compassion extends to all God’s creation.

**Closing Reflections:** Before the closing prayer, take time to share final reflections on your time together, on how your own faith’s visions and hopes connect to addressing global warming, on what has particularly struck you or those ideas you have found most memorable, and so on. You may also wish to consider continuing to meet together, using other resources (see below and sidebar) to facilitate your discussions. Having the support of others is one of the most necessary ingredients in change-making: whether in individual lifestyles, political activism or working within a faith community.

Blessings; go in peace.

### Closing Prayer (Unison)

Creator, this is such a beautiful world, both fragile and resilient. Forgive us when we act as if this world belongs to us, rather than to you. May our desire to love all of life grow; may our ability to act lovingly toward all of life grow.

Thank you for these people and this time together. Help us to continue to support one another in our journeys; use us to bring about a world more compassionate and just, where all people and all creation enjoy and share in life’s bounty. Amen.

**Further Study on Climate Change:** In addition to the Earth Ministry resources referenced in the sidebar, the National Council of Churches of Christ has published a curriculum titled: *It’s God’s World – Christians, the Environment, and Climate Change*. This five-session course can be ordered by calling 800-762-0968.

### For Further Study

*Simpler Living,*  
*Compassionate Life: A*  
*Christian Perspective*  
edited by Michael Schut

*Food and Faith: Justice,*  
*Joy, and Daily Bread*  
edited by Michael Schut

*Greening Congregations*  
*Handbook: Stories, Ideas,*  
*and Resources for*  
*Cultivating Creation*  
*Awareness and Care in*  
*Your Congregation*  
edited by  
Tanya Marcovna Barnett

Order all three through  
Earth Ministry:  
206-632-2426;  
[www.earthministry.org/  
store.htm](http://www.earthministry.org/store.htm).

\* The Fourfold Song was written by Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak HaCohen Kook, the first Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Palestine, 1919-1935.



# FURTHER RESOURCES

## WEBSITES

### For scientific information, visit:

1. The National Academy of Sciences: [www4.nationalacademies.org/nas/nashome.nsf](http://www4.nationalacademies.org/nas/nashome.nsf)
2. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change: [www.ipcc.ch](http://www.ipcc.ch)
3. Union of Concerned Scientists: [www.ucsusa.org](http://www.ucsusa.org)
4. Climate Solutions: [www.climatesolutions.org](http://www.climatesolutions.org)

### For information on connecting faith and care for Earth, check out the following organizations:

1. The Interfaith Climate and Energy Campaign (a joint project of the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life and the National Council of Churches of Christ): [www.protectingcreation.org](http://www.protectingcreation.org)
2. The National Religious Partnership for the Environment: [www.nrpe.org](http://www.nrpe.org)
3. Earth Ministry: [www.earthministry.org](http://www.earthministry.org)
4. Web of Creation: [www.webofcreation.org](http://www.webofcreation.org)
5. The Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life: [www.coejl.org](http://www.coejl.org)
6. The National Council of Churches of Christ: [www.webofcreation.org/ncc](http://www.webofcreation.org/ncc)
7. The Evangelical Environmental Network: [www.creationcare.org](http://www.creationcare.org)
8. United States Catholic Conference: [www.nccbuscc.org/sdwp/ejp](http://www.nccbuscc.org/sdwp/ejp)
9. Partners for Environmental Quality: [www.peqnj.org](http://www.peqnj.org)
10. Eco-Justice Ministries: [www.eco-justice.org](http://www.eco-justice.org)

## BOOKS, ARTICLES, AND VIDEOS

*God's Creation and Global Warming*, an excellent twelve-minute video, produced by the National Council of Churches of Christ's Eco-Justice Working Group. To order, go to [www.webofcreation.org/ncc/climatechange/warmvid.html](http://www.webofcreation.org/ncc/climatechange/warmvid.html) or call 800-762-0968 and ask for EJ 0017.

*The Consumer's Guide to Effective Environmental Choices: Practical Advice from The Union of Concerned Scientists*, by Michael Brower and Warren Leon, Three River Press, New York, 1999.

*The Heat Is On: The Climate Crisis, The Cover-Up, The Prescription*, by Ross Gelbspan, Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Inc., 1997.

*Foreign Affairs'* July/August 2003 issue featured a recommended article titled: "The Future of Energy Policy." Written by prominent leaders of both Republican and Democratic parties, find it at your local library or [www.foreignaffairs.org](http://www.foreignaffairs.org), and click on "Back Issues."

