

# FAITH LEADERS' CLIMATE ROUNDTABLE RECOMMENDATIONS REPORT

November 14, 2022

## Introduction & Overview

Sixteen national denomination leaders participated in a historic roundtable convened by ecoAmerica's Blessed Tomorrow program at Auburn Seminary on November 14, 2022, to collaborate on a new era of faith climate action. The leaders focused first on the impacts and urgency of the climate crisis and then on the opportunities for the faith community to lead, prioritizing justice and inclusion for people historically excluded and oppressed. The discussions focused on comprehensive creation care engagement of congregations and clergy to broaden participation beyond the activists, and collaborating as denominations and major faith organizations for collective impact.

This recommendations report summarizes the conclusions of that day. We need to engage, equip, and support clergy and lay leaders to lead on climate to expand participation from few to many, and talk to action. We need to lead by example and guide action, inclusion and advocacy in their congregations, neighborhoods, workplaces, communities and with policy makers. We need a common campaign to achieve the necessary synergy and scale to make a difference. We and our clergy and lay leaders need to be visible and vocal role models, living out our faith grounded in holy scripture, and prioritizing the inclusion of our neighbors who are marginalized and vulnerable.

Our next step is a broader gathering of faith leaders on climate which will be held on February 16, 2023 in Washington, DC at the National City Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). We will spend the day turning priorities into plans and solidifying a coalition to guide the work. Success will yield a healthier, thriving, more equitable future for all of us. Please join us.

**"It is a magnificent thing to be alive in a moment that matters so much."**

*- All We Can Save*

## Session I: Climate Considerations

**Addressing climate change is our calling as faith leaders.** Climate change impacts everything we care about. If we take care of creation and protect the most vulnerable among us, we will stop climate change.

**We're living in the era of climate consequences.** In the U.S., we have gone from 3- or 4-billion-dollar weather disasters a year to averaging one every three weeks. Floods, wildfires, droughts, and severe weather have impacted over 90% of Americans. We're experiencing record-breaking heat events, and this year may be the *coldest* for the rest of our children's lives. Nearly every child in the world will experience climate disasters and the impacts are greatest for the most vulnerable.

**The solution is simple in theory.** We just need to rapidly stop burning (50% by 2030), restore nature, and begin removing carbon at scale.

**We know how to do it. We can do it. And the benefits of clean energy are massive.** If we hit 50% clean by 2030 and 100% by 2050, we will save 78 trillion dollars from transitioning from coal alone.<sup>1</sup> The co-benefits are also massive – healthy, thriving people and nature, greater equity and justice. It was practically impossible to solve climate change ten years ago because it was too expensive, but the costs of clean energy technology (wind, solar, batteries) are now lower than fossil fuels. The projection is that solar panels are going to cost 10% less than what natural gas and methane cost now, making clean energy affordable for all.

**We're moving in the right direction.** New energy coming online in the US and the world was 80% fossil fuels a decade ago, now it's 80% clean. The Biden Administration has passed four major spending bills (Omnibus, Bi-partisan Infrastructure, Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), CHIPS Act) that have enormous funding (\$789 billion) for climate solutions. The Bi-partisan Infrastructure bill has \$90 billion for public

transportation, and \$65 billion for the grid. These bills move the U.S. toward 50% reduction by 2050.

**Special Benefit:** The IRA now makes churches eligible for 30% rebates for energy efficiency (insulation, lighting...) and renewable energy.

**Climate is a justice issue.** We must explicitly stand in solidarity with all people historically marginalized. They have suffered the consequences of our pollution and solutions must put them first. When we solve for justice, we solve for climate.

**We have the wind at our backs now, but it will still take many more of us** to ensure a just and habitable planet for our children and future generations. The difference is in and with people. We need more public support for solutions, we need to get many more people involved.

**We must be visible leaders for climate action,** making it a priority nationally and in our congregations. We must **reduce our impact** (e.g., insulate churches), and we need to be prepared – to adapt and help the community by ensuring our houses of worship can offer sanctuary during severe weather, and serve as places to gather to talk about climate change impacts and solutions.

**The most powerful thing by far we can do is advocacy.** Advocacy is inspiring your family and neighborhood to participate in solutions, it's preaching and teaching in your congregation, it's talking to the people in your workplace and community, and it's urging policy makers to bring about just and equitable climate solutions.

<sup>1</sup> [International Monetary Fund, 2022](#)

## Session II: Climate & Faith

**Congregations and communities are being directly impacted by climate disasters now** including:

- **financial impacts**, damaged property, loss of jobs, loss of property values;
- **health impacts** including injuries and sickness, heat related illnesses, and vector-borne diseases;
- **mental health issues** including trauma, anxiety, depression, and exhaustion for society as a whole and for our young people in particular;
- **spiritual issues** including questioning the Divine and faith, and fewer opportunities to connect with the Holy in nature, and;
- **injustice grows**. Poor and marginalized communities have contributed the least to climate change, but are impacted first and worst, and receive disproportionately less aid than wealthy communities.

At the end of the book, *All We Can Save*, authors Ayana Elizabeth Johnson and Katharine Wilkinson state, **“It is a magnificent thing to be alive in a moment that matters so much.” This is our time for the faith community** to rise to this challenge and lead. We are more powerful together.

**People of faith are leading on climate**, by reducing their pollution and carbon, by advocating for climate justice, by divesting from fossil fuels and investing in green funds, by providing sanctuary and refuge during and after disasters, and by repairing and restoring creation.

Similar to Joseph’s interpretation of the Pharaoh’s dream, the next seven years are our years of plenty and opportunity. **We have 7 years** to reduce carbon emissions to half of 2010 levels. We know what needs to be done and people of faith are doing it but we need all hands – not just some of us – to act. We need to educate, support, and empower all clergy and faith leaders to live out their faiths by leading on climate.

## Session III: Engaging Clergy & Congregations

Building on the information shared in the first sessions, leaders shared how their denominations are leading on climate and brainstormed on ways to support and engage clergy and congregations on climate solutions centered in justice.

**Recommendations included:**

### Clergy

- **Creation care and climate solutions should be visible on national denomination websites and visibly embedded in all the work** of the national leaders, demonstrating the intersectionality of climate to all faith issues. National leaders might provide a statement to clergy on the importance of preaching and teaching on climate justice, reframing the issue as an opportunity for congregational revitalization. Clergy could be encouraged to sign a covenant committing to climate action as a means of accountability.

- **Clergy should be provided opportunities for climate education centered in scripture and theology** through seminaries and other reputable sources, such as Blessed Tomorrow Ambassador training, that empower them to action. Training should teach the intersectionality of climate with all justice issues and provide apolitical topics such as food justice on which clergy can develop sermons and teachings.
- **Clergy should be provided with many tangible avenues for engaging and leading** on climate (energy conservation, gardens, hunger & food programs, water, racial justice, disaster response programs, immigration programs and more).
- **Younger clergy and faith leaders should be empowered to lead** and given platforms to speak out and engage creatively, using platforms such as TikTok.
- **Self-care and self-compassion should be encouraged** for clergy. Rest and renewal opportunities and ways to connect with other clergy on climate should be offered.

### Congregations

- **National denominations should increase awareness and engagement of local congregations on climate by participating in collective impact such as a climate campaign (e.g., 7 years) with a shared symbol (e.g., green star).** The campaign can provide a framework for educational and engagement opportunities for clergy and congregations and prioritize and elevate climate justice, providing theological grounding, as well as relevant and practical solutions that are mindful of financial and other means.
- **Creation care programs for local congregations (e.g., Green Chalice) and denominational national programs (e.g., Green Ramadan) should be offered** as ways to grow climate awareness, impact reduction, and engagement, and connect congregations to each other.
- **Creation care should be ritualized throughout regular worship and the celebration** and observance of holy days.
- **Personally-relevant educational opportunities and resources should be offered in English and other languages where helpful** for congregants and congregations to help people see the relevance of climate change to their personal lives and their responsibility to act and advocate because of their faith. These resources should provide practical and accessible actions they can take in their daily lives.
- **Funding and grant opportunities for congregational mitigation and resiliency efforts should be researched and shared.** Awards and incentives should be offered to congregations for climate education, engagement, and leadership.
- **Youth and young adults should be central** to climate education, engagement, and leadership on climate.
- **Ministries, such as disaster response and recovery, should be connected to creation care** and climate justice.

### Collective Impact

National leaders divided into three groups to imagine ways to collaborate for multi-faith visible collective action on climate. Each group shared their prioritized ideas, then the

whole group ranked all ideas. All the ideas are woven below into top ideas shown in ranked order:

- **All faith denominations and organizations should be invited to visibly stand together on climate in a multi-faith campaign.** This campaign should have clear objectives and an inspirational message, and be the organizational container of the following: joint statements, national gatherings, joint study of sacred texts, and national and local actions. Sabbath weekends could be named for all people of faith to pray for and offer healing services and rituals for the earth.
- **A central virtual repository should be created to support the campaign and for resource sharing** that includes clergy and congregational resources as well as opportunities for grants and other funding. This may also include denominations and congregations offering to lend resources and support each other (human, financial, technical, programmatic).
- **Youth and young adults should be empowered** and given a platform to connect with each other and to lead. It is their future, adults must listen.
- **National leaders should lead on advocacy and provide opportunities for clergy and lay leaders to be engaged** and influence action, programs and policy nationally and locally.
- **People who have been historically marginalized and oppressed should be empowered** to engage and lead, and prioritized in the creation and participation of education and resource materials on climate and faith.

## Moving Forward

We can ensure a just and habitable climate future if we all do our part.

The numbers of clergy and congregations who are active on climate are growing, but still far too few. There is a false perception that congregants are not concerned and that climate action involves partisanship. But we see a new dawn for climate solutions in America, with new hope and opportunities to inspire action based on meeting people where they are, offering relevant, accessible opportunities to engage, and ensuring our neighbors on the margins are included, considered, and supported.

About 70%<sup>2</sup> of Americans identify as people of faith. Majorities of Americans are concerned (75%)<sup>3</sup> about climate, and 65%<sup>4</sup> say climate solutions are a high or top priority for our nation. Clergy are particularly positioned to be effective leaders on climate who preach and teach weekly, are involved in their communities, and provide pastoral support and counseling.

**Together we can create a denomination-led campaign for visible and collective climate action to educate, activate, and empower all people of faith on climate solutions.** The recommendations of the Faith Leaders Climate Roundtable, solidified in the upcoming Faith Forum and launched in 2023, will be a seven-year effort to engage and empower all clergy, congregations and their communities through traditions, supported by ecoAmerica.

The number seven is prominent in sacred texts and important in faith traditions – signifying holiness, perfection and completion – offering a profound opportunity to elevate visible climate leadership and engagement nationally, and in congregations nationwide.

National denominations and faith organizations can support their members through visible climate commitments and active creation care programs. We can engage the broader world through collaborative national action. We can build the necessary physical and spiritual resiliency and be inspired and empowered, in climate solutions. With resource, training, and fellowship, congregations can act on climate solutions engage people in the pews via preaching, teaching, communications, and opportunities to participate.

**To help create or participate in this campaign, please contact [Rev. Carol Devine](#), Director, Blessed Tomorrow at ecoAmerica.**

<sup>2</sup> “[The Rise of Religious Nones](#),” Pew Research, 2022

<sup>3</sup> American Climate Perspectives Survey 2022, [Vol I](#), ecoAmerica

<sup>4</sup> American Climate Perspectives Survey 2022, [Vol V](#), ecoAmerica

## Appendix

### Invitees

**Tamar Anitai:** Director of Strategic Communications, Central Conference of American Rabbis

**Rev. Dr. Terence Baz:** Priest, Diocese of New York and New Jersey, The Orthodox Church in America

**Rev. Fr. Christopher Bender:** Chair of the N.C.C. Justice and Advocacy Commission, St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Cathedral, Pittsburgh, PA

**Bishop Thomas Bickerton:** President Council of Bishops, United Methodist Church

**Rabbi Jacob Blumenthal:** Chief Executive Officer, United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism

**Kenneth Bowers:** Secretary-General, National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States

**Bishop Ronnie Brailsford:** Bishop, African Methodist Episcopal Church

**Rabbi Nina Beth Cardin:** Co-Chair, Masorti Movement Sustainability Roundtable

**Rev. Tom Carr:** Chair, ABC- USA Creation Justice, American Baptist Churches USA

**Carole Collins:** Co-Executive Director, Alliance of Baptists

**Rev. Michael Curry:** Presiding Bishop, The Episcopal Church

**Rev. Dr. John Dorhauer:** General Minister and President, United Church of Christ

**Jackie Dupont-Walker:** Director AME Social Action Commission, African Methodist Episcopal Church

**Bishop Sally Dyck:** Ecumenical Officer, Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church

**Bishop Elizabeth Eaton:** Presiding Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

**Rev. Dr. Susan Frederick-Gray:** General Minister and President, Unitarian Universalist Association

**Dr. Willie Gable:** Pastor, Chair of the Housing and Economic Development Commission of the National Baptist Convention USA, Progressive Baptists

**Minister Glen Guyton:** Executive Director, Mennonite Church USA

**Bishop Anne Henning Byfield:** Chair of the Social Action Commission, African Methodist Episcopal Church

**Rev. Dr. Susan Henry-Crowe:** General Secretary, General Board of Church and Society of The United Methodist Church

**Dr. Betty Holley:** Academic Dean, Payne Theological Seminary

**Rev. Terri Hord Owens:** General Minister and President, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

**The Rev. Dr. Alvin Jackson:** Executive Director, Poor People's Campaign

**Rabbi Rick Jacobs:** President, Union for Reform Judaism

**Sergei Kapral:** Proto Deacon, Orthodox Church in America

**Dr. Tony Kireopoulos:** Associate General Secretary, National Council of Churches

**Rabbi Ashira Konigsburg:** Chief Operating Officer, The Rabbinical Assembly of Conservative Rabbis

**Imam Mohamed Magid:** Former President, Islamic Society of North America

**Bishop Vashti McKenzie:** Interim General Minister and President, National Council of Churches

**Carl Murrell:** Principal United Nations Representative, National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States

**Rev. Dr. J. Herbert Nelson, II:** Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church (USA)

**Father Nicholas Livingston:** Parish Priest, Greek Orthodox Metropolis Of Boston

**Bishop Bruce Ough:** Ecumenical Officer,  
Council of Bishops of The United Methodist  
Church

**Rabbi Hara Person:** Chief Executive of CCAR,  
Central Conf of American Rabbis

**Rabbi Jonah Pesner:** Director, Religious  
Action Center of Reform Judaism

**Bishop Dennis Proctor:** Presiding Bishop,  
African Methodist Episcopal Zion

**Bishop David Rice:** The Right Reverend  
(Bishop), The Episcopal Diocese of San  
Joaquin

**Basharat Saleem:** Executive Director, Islamic  
Society of North America

**Rev. Dr. Carmelo Santos:** Director for  
Theological Diversity and Theological and  
Inter-Religious Engagement, Office of the  
Presiding Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran  
Church in America

**Dr. Shuly Rubin Schwartz:** Chancellor and  
Irving Lehrman Research Professor of  
American Jewish History, Jewish Theological  
Seminary

**The Rev. Canon Stephanie Spellers:** Canon  
to the Presiding Bishop, The Episcopal Church

**Brunhilda Williams-Curington:** Program  
Assistant to the Stated Clerk, Presbyterian  
Church (USA)

**Dr. Jeff Woods:** General Secretary, American  
Baptist Churches USA

**Rev. Elijah Zehyoue:** Co-Executive Director,  
Alliance of Baptists