

# Resources for Preaching and Speaking on Climate Change from Hoosier Interfaith Power and Light



Below you will find resources developed here in Indiana for speaking and preaching about climate change:

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## Twelve Reasons to Preach on Climate Change

by Dr. Patricia Tull, biblical scholar, H-IPL's Affiliate Developer, and member of First Presbyterian Church, Jeffersonville

1. Because religious leaders set the agenda for what congregations talk about, and care about. If it is important enough to be said aloud to the whole congregation, it's important enough for members to be concerned with.
2. Because there are few other places where so many with diverse skills and backgrounds gather. People from every profession are needed in this effort: teachers, farmers, scientists, business owners, engineers, medical professionals, writers, attorneys, corporate employees, politicians, social workers—everyone has a role to play, and they look to religious leaders for guidance.
3. Because few people besides clergy regularly get 10, 20, 30 minutes every week to speak what is true. People expect their clergy to speak forthrightly about their deepest commitments.
4. Because some, whether honestly or cynically, still deny that climate change is happening. We have to change the conversation. If religious leaders model the courage to name the issues, others will follow.
5. Because climate change makes people so anxious that they deny until they can no longer do so—and then they jump to despair. If their deepest fears can be named aloud, healing and hope can begin. That's what faith does well.
6. Because some in every congregation—including many young people—long to hear about the human relationship to the natural world, and about religion's relationship to science, and will be deeply grateful. And because some in every congregation hope to keep others from discussing climate change—and we can't let them set the agenda.

7. Because it's a matter of international environmental justice. Nations that have contributed the least to carbon pollution are already suffering the most from its effects—such as the Philippines, where typhoon after typhoon is occurring, and Syria, where drought contributed to the country's political destabilization, with tragic effects. People of faith care about international injustice.
8. Because people of faith also care about justice at home. The poor among us can least afford increasing utility bills, energy-efficiency changes, and disaster clean-up. According to a recent survey, members of historically disadvantaged groups such as African-Americans and Latinos were more likely to hear about climate change from their religious leaders than white people, and more likely to believe that it is happening and needs to be addressed. It's time for those who consider themselves less vulnerable to catch up.
9. Because faith teaches concern for future generations, whose quality of life will be robbed if we continue business as usual. We owe our religious faith to ancestors centuries in the past, and we were taught to “leave the campsite better than we found it.” And we love our children.
10. Because faith communities need to build resilience now to be prepared to name, understand, and respond to the effects of the climate crisis as they unfold. Prayer, local actions, and advocacy are needed, and congregations are prime centers for organizing these important responses.
11. Because it's hard to be spiritually healthy when living on a planet that is sick.
12. Because it's faith that change human priorities. Science can give us information, but who we believe we are guides our motivations and actions. Faith offers hope, strength, and trust to change the world, or in Jim Wallis's words, to “believe despite the evidence, and to watch the evidence change.”

## **Ten Facts from Climate Scientists**

Notes from our own Dr. Ben Brabson, Indiana University Climate Scientist and member of Trinity Episcopal Church, Bloomington

### **1. The Temperature Record**

Numerous proxies, or indicators, including trees, ice cores, corals, lake and marine sediments, and historical documents give us centuries and even millennia of evidence that, until the beginning of the industrial revolution, when fossil fuel burning began, natural forcing from solar radiation and volcanoes dominated temperature changes. But since then, especially in recent decades, the world's atmospheric temperature, measured at many points around the world, has risen dramatically. 2014 was the hottest year on record worldwide, and the ten hottest years in history have been since 1998.

## **2. Greenhouse Gas Concentration**

According to a 2013 report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC): “The atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), methane, and nitrous oxide have increased to levels unprecedented in at least the last 800,000 years. CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations have increased by 43% since pre-industrial times, primarily from fossil fuel emissions and secondarily from net land use change emissions.” Before the industrial era, CO<sub>2</sub> levels in the atmosphere were 260-280 ppm (parts per million). Now they are 400 ppm, half again as high. Climate scientists estimate that the maximum “safe” level is 350 ppm.

## **3. Sources of Carbon Emissions**

88% of human carbon emissions come from burning fossil fuels and manufacturing cement (which burns calcium carbonate to produce lime, with CO<sub>2</sub> as a by-product). The other 12% comes from deforestation and other land use changes.

## **4. Where Humanity’s Carbon Goes**

27% is absorbed by the land (especially by trees). 26% is absorbed by oceans, acidifying them with carbonic acid. 47% stays in the atmosphere, warming it. During the last 15 years, oceans have taken up much of the heat from the atmosphere, partly because of La Nina. This warmer water creates more powerful typhoons and hurricanes.

## **5. Sea Level Rise**

The rate of sea level rise has been greater since the mid-19th century than during the previous two millennia. As water warms, it expands. Melting glaciers also increase the ocean’s volume.

## **6. Arctic Sea Ice**

In September 2012, ice in the Arctic Sea reached its record minimum. This creates a “positive feedback loop” accelerating melt, since a dark ocean absorbs more heat than white ice.

## **7. Effect on Crop Production**

Corn yields are sensitive to high temperatures, especially during the pollination and grain filling period, according to the Federal Advisory Committee Draft Climate Assessment Report of Jan 14, 2013. The same holds true for soybeans. As the summers grow hotter, production decreases.

## **8. The Future**

The IPCC estimates that if greenhouse gas pollution continues at the present rate: 1) sea levels will rise by 50 to 100 cm by 2100; 2) the Arctic will be mostly ice-free by 2050; 3) the world will warm by more than 1.5°-2.0°C by 2100, and 2°C is widely recognized as a “danger level,” above which society suffers serious consequences; and 4) extreme weather events will intensify.

## **9. What We Can Do**

The gap between where we are now heading and where we need to go can be closed first and most importantly by conservation and energy efficiency (50%). Wind, solar, biomass, geothermal, and other non-emitting technologies can close the gap. Green architecture and recycling of reusable materials are two keys to energy efficiency and conservation.

## **10. Policy Changes**

The U.S.-China agreement in November to limit greenhouse gas production with defined targets is a significant step forward that helped promote the success of the U.N. COP 20 meeting in Lima in December. There all the nations agreed to hammer out national goals for greenhouse gas reduction, which they will bring to the COP 21 meeting in Paris in December 2015. This is a critical year for each nation to determine what it can do to change the future.

## **Ben Brabson's Conclusion**

We are obliged to move away from our own non-sustainable and climate-damaging fossil fuel use as quickly as possible and we are clever enough to figure out how to do that.

# **Ten Biblical Themes Related to Climate Change**

by Dr. Patricia Tull

NOTE: These themes come primarily from the Hebrew Bible and New Testament. However, it is hoped that leaders in other religious groups will find inspiration for drawing attention to similar themes in their own traditions.

## **1. Creation Narratives**

Biblical readers have isolated Gen 1:26-28's "dominion" idea as the total of the biblical word about humans and creation. But Genesis 1 mostly concerns the rest of creation: heavenly bodies, earth, oceans, plants, and every kind of animal—and the Sabbath. Genesis 2 says humans were formed from the earth's soil, and our role is to "till and keep," or more directly translated, to "serve and preserve" the earth. Adam and Eve retained this job even when they left the garden.

## **2. God's First Covenant**

Interpreters of Gen 9:8-17 tend to emphasize God's promise never again to destroy the earth with a flood. Some readers erroneously think this is a divine pledge that life won't be destroyed by human activity, so we need not be concerned about climate change. But what is often overlooked is that the covenant God makes here is not just with humans, but with all living creatures. In these ten verses, God's pledge to "all flesh" and "all creatures" is repeated six times. Humans are bound up in covenant with creation's other living creatures.

### **3. Future Generations**

Scripture emphasizes divine concern for unborn generations, even the thousandth generation (Exod 34:6-7). In a world that doesn't look past the next election or quarterly report, the idea of descendants looking back at us from a thousand generations hence seems remarkable. But we look back to Abraham from even farther away in time. We won't live to see our distant descendants, but we have to hope they will have reason to remember us with gratitude.

### **4. Environmental Justice as Economic Justice**

Scripture has no knowledge of modern pollution. But it often discusses land justice. 1 Kings 21 tells of King Ahab, who wanted his neighbor Naboth's inherited land for a vegetable garden. When Naboth refused, Ahab's wife Jezebel forced the town's elders to accuse Naboth of treason, find him guilty, and execute him, using the legal system as a murder weapon to satisfy greed. Exploitation continues today in battles over land and mineral rights, the extraction of which often leaves behind devastation and waste. Isaiah also spoke of land infringement in Isa 5:8, and condemned those who create laws to benefit the wealthy and harm the poor in Isa 10:1-2.

### **5. Water and Land Pollution**

Environmental justice is also discussed by Ezekiel, who imagined the strong as sheep who tread down good pasture and muddy clear waters with their feet, spoiling land and stream so that others can no longer eat or drink (Ezek 34:17-19).

### **6. Prophetic Warnings of Unthinkable Destruction**

Just before the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem in 587 BCE, many prophets kept promising that nothing bad could happen. But Jeremiah said these prophets "treated the wounds of my people carelessly, saying 'Peace, peace' when there is no peace" (Jer 6:14). Prophets who tell us what we want to hear are often wrong. Faithful prophets tell the truth, as Jeremiah did.

### **7. Creation's Fearsome Power**

Time after time in Scripture, human enemies are compared to violent natural forces, especially the roaring sea (see for instance Jer 6:22-23). Even though they were a tiny nation surrounded by powerful empires, ancient Judeans imagined human enemies as being only *almost* as dangerous as nature (see also Isa 5:30; Isa 17:12-13; Ps 107:23-32). But today, even though a single typhoon such as Haiyan last year can kill more than 6000 people at once, the U.S. spends 25 times more on our fear of human enemies than on climate security. Do we have our priorities straight?

### **8. Courage in Unprecedented Times**

Scripture and history are both filled with stories of brave individuals and groups who faced danger with faith and fortitude. The uncertain times we live in today offer us opportunities for courage equal to theirs. Stories of Noah, of Ruth, of Esther, of Ananias and Paul in the book of Acts, exemplify valor in unprecedented situations. And as the prophet said in God's name to Judeans considering

rebuilding Jerusalem after its destruction, “I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand” (Isa 41:9-10).

### **9. Hope for the Sower of Seeds**

The parable of the sower in Matt 13:3-8 encourages us not to expect every seed we sow to grow to maturity. Some will fall in unfruitful places—on paths, among thorns, in the rocks. But those seeds that do fall on fruitful soil more than make up for others, yielding up to a hundred fold. When we are called to work for the thriving of creation, we can sow our seeds as profligately as the sower did. We don’t know which ones will bear fruit, but we believe God gives the growth.

### **10. The Pearl of Great Price**

The merchant Jesus described in Matt 13:45-46 might have been considered foolish for selling everything for one pearl. But Jesus commends him for knowing what is priceless. In Jesus’ estimation, the kingdom of heaven is the one thing for which a rational person might give everything. Jesus also made clear that this kingdom of heaven is not somewhere else, not in the sky, nor across the sea, but here among us (Luke 17:21). He demonstrated his commitment to the reign of God on earth exactly as the merchant had done, by giving all he possessed, life itself, for its sake. Today we find ourselves contemplating a jewel resembling a sapphire more than a pearl, the exquisite blue earth that astronauts have photographed for us. If we are as shrewd as that merchant, as wise as Jesus himself, we will not waste our lives calculating whether another jewel will come along later. This is the one in which we will invest ourselves.

## **Three Stumbling Blocks for Faith Leaders, and Strategies to Overcome Them**

by the Rev. Wyatt Watkins, Pastor of Cumberland Avenue Baptist Church, Indianapolis and Leader of Indianapolis Eastside Creation Care Network

### **The Problem of Anxiety**

Faith leaders and congregations are stymied by the highly politicized issue of climate change / ecological crisis. We live at a moment .of extreme cultural polarization, fueled by powerful special interest groups and media over-saturation, and characterized by cultural status competition that belies consensus building

### **The Problem of Attention**

In a climate of religious transition and decline, congregations are overwhelmed with institutional and congregational life concerns that leave little time or energy to focus on creation care, much less profound ecological crisis.

## **The Problem of Apathy**

The ecological crisis still appears remote and distant in the minds and concerns of many Americans and people of faith; moreover, those who do manage to confront it easily grow overwhelmed and paralyzed, eroding hope and action.

## **Addressing the Problem of Anxiety**

- Claim a rich theology of Earth care
  - Believe in the quiet, cumulative effect of faithful preaching
  - Approach the challenge with passion!
- From Sojourners creation care campaign:
  - Share Your Testimony: Telling the story of how you came to care about God's creation is an authentic and powerful way of sharing with others the importance of combating climate change.
  - Start with Common Values: It's important to start with places of shared belief that builds trust and also shows that your concern around climate change comes from the same building blocks.
  - Illustrate Concern for "The Least of These": Care for the environment is often pitted against care for our neighbors when in fact they can and should be one in the same.
- Don't assume an information gap: It is not primarily a failure of understanding science that has held back action on climate change, but a failure to build a moral framework to create and sustain action.
- Foster congregational dialogue about the priority of profound faith commitments (e.g. love of creation, love of neighbor, the pursuit of justice, as opposed to the politics of division)

## **Addressing the Problem of Attention**

- Cultivate space for earth care in worship and faith formation. Trust the steady, cumulative effect of faithful educating. People and cultures do shift when presented with a sensitive and persistent witness.
- Find connection points between ongoing ministries and creation care ministries. For example:
  - Explore how the mission work we support, particularly abroad, is affected by climate disruption.
  - Implement use strategies that both cut costs and save energy.

## **Addressing the Problem of Apathy**

Join with others. Become a part of a H-IPL affiliate or start one, because the energy of hope and creativity resides in numbers! It is harder to be apathetic when we are exposed to a bigger world of passion, ideas and action. Apathy is dispelled when confronted with the energy of purpose. The energy of hope resides in practical partnerships.

## Resource List—Print Resources

Archer, David, and Stefan Rahmstorf. *The Climate Crisis: An Introductory Guide to Climate Change*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Bingham, Sally G., ed. *Love God, Heal Earth*. Pittsburgh: St. Lynn's Press, 2009.

Cohen-Kiener, Andrea. *Claiming Earth as Common Ground: The Ecological Crisis through the Lens of Faith*. Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2009.

Dessler, Andrew, and Edward A. Parson. *The Science and Politics of Global Climate Change: A Guide to the Debate*. 2nd ed. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Hosenfeld, Charlene, *Ecofaith: Creating and Sustaining Green Congregations*. Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2009.

Moore, Kathleen Dean, and Michael P. Nelson, eds. *Moral Ground: Ethical Action for a Planet in Peril*. Trinity University Press, 2011.

Moseley, Lyndsay, ed. *Holy Ground: A Gathering of Voices on Caring for Creation*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 2008.

Tull, Patricia K. *Inhabiting Eden: Christians, the Bible, and the Ecological Crisis*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2013. (Workbook and Leader's Guide also available)

The Union of Concerned Scientists. *Cooler Smarter: Practical Steps for Low-Carbon Living*. Washington, DC: Island Press, 2012.

## Online Resources

[Interfaith Power and Light Preach-In Resources](#). See especially “Sermons by Faith.”

[Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change](#) Fifth Assessment Report, 2014 and other reports and videos are available here.

[Webinar and guide](#): “Connecting on Climate: A Guide to Effective Climate Change Communication.” Center for Research on Environmental Decisions. Earth Institute and Columbia University, 2014.

[Season of Creation preaching and worship resources](#).

[Let All Creation Praise worship resources](#).

[GreenFaith resources on divestment from fossil fuels and reinvestment in renewable energy](#).