

Guest column: People of faith should be leaders in protecting the environment



August 8, 2014

By Rev. Doug Van Doren, Plymouth United Church of Christ



Last week, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) held public hearings in four cities to discuss the Clean Power Plan, a proposed set of guidelines to reduce dangerous carbon pollution. Many people of faith have testified at these hearings, giving voice to our moral obligation to care for the earth and one another.

This ground-breaking rule is important for Michigan, where we get more than half of our electricity from burning coal. The dangerous pollution that comes from burning coal pollutes our air, land, and water; worsens air quality; and causes asthma attacks and respiratory disease. The Clean Power Plan will reduce the pollution that threatens our abundant, precious natural resources and harms public health, especially children and seniors.

At the congregation I serve, Plymouth United Church of Christ, we have channeled our concern for earth care into a plan to install solar panels when we replace the roof on our sanctuary later next year. The congregation has been enthusiastic about this project because it will not only improve our building, it will also allow us to better steward financial and natural resources in service to our faith.

We expect that the panels will offset about 25 percent of our electricity usage, save us thousands of dollars a year, and drastically reduce our carbon footprint. We are excited for the panels to be up and running by the end of next summer, when they will be a public testament to our commitment to caring for creation.

While our local efforts will make a big difference, the risk to our health and community is too great not to take larger steps that will protect us now and into the future. The Clean Power Plan will also help smooth our transition to cleaner, renewable sources of energy, like wind and solar, and enable other houses of worship, households, and businesses to take advantage of the falling prices of these technologies.

I ask that the community join me in supporting this EPA rule, which helps us to be better stewards of the earth and care for the most vulnerable among us. It's our moral obligation.

If you would like to submit a guest column to MLive Grand Rapids Press, please email community engagement specialist Zane McMillin at zmcmilli@mlive.com.