

NATIONAL CLIMATE AND FAITH LEADERSHIP FORUM 2018

Committing to Climate Action and Advocacy

Auburn Seminary, New York, NY



OVERVIEW

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Key Insights

This past May, Blessed Tomorrow and Auburn Seminary co-hosted the **2018 National Climate and Faith Leadership Forum**, exploring opportunities to increase climate change mitigation and advocacy within and through faith communities across the country. Nearly 50 leaders from a variety of faith institutions and faith-based organizations convened in New York City to share best practices and discuss how to catalyze new, bolder and broader efforts such as committing to 100% clean energy.

- **More and more faith organizations and leaders are adopting climate change as a formal priority**, embracing care for God’s creation as part of their faith identity and moral responsibility. This includes bold and audacious commitments to climate mitigation and advocacy like the [2017 Christian Church \(Disciples of Christ\) resolution](#) to be carbon positive by 2035.
- **Currently, only 13% of Americans acknowledge climate change as a “faith” issue**, but there is [growing trust in faith leaders](#) to bridge this divide, amplify the connection between faith and climate, and empower communities of faith to act on climate solutions.
- **Disadvantaged communities and youth will be disproportionately impacted by climate change.** They can also be among the best advocates for advancing and optimizing solutions. Faith communities must lead efforts to support and engage with these groups whose voices are so critical to the climate movement.
- **Faith communities need support for mitigation activities**, including clear and easy-to-use guides, training support, and financial support at the congregational level.
- **There is a desire among the Blessed Tomorrow coalition to build and sustain a faith movement on climate solutions** which will require ongoing opportunities for discussion, honest storytelling, collaboration, and support.
- **In order to make bold commitments, faith organizations can identify the best pathway to an organization-wide commitment within their own institutions** and then decide how to walk that path in the coming months and years.

STATE OF CLIMATE AND FAITH AND OUR CALL TO ACTION



Bob Berkowitz
President and Founder of ecoAmerica



Rev. Mariama White-Hammond
Ecological Minister with Bethel AME Church



Alex Loznak
Plaintiff with Our Children's Trust

State of Climate and Faith

After a welcome and introduction by Auburn Seminary President Rev. Dr. Katharine Rhodes Henderson, ecoAmerica President Bob Perkowitz reviewed the state of climate change, solutions, and social impact. Both presentations were calls to action — to engage every congregation in America — in mitigation and solutions advocacy efforts. Bob's presentation is shared along with this report and can be provided upon request.

Our Call: Climate Justice

We are called by our faiths to seek justice with communities directly and disproportionately impacted by climate change, including future generations, communities of color, and other vulnerable populations. Our keynote speakers, Alex Loznak and Rev. Mariama White-Hammond, grounded our strategy discussions in this moral calling by sharing their personal experiences and calls to action.

Alex Loznak, Plaintiff with Our Children's Trust:

"I want to comment on youth: I occasionally go to a meeting or speak at an event, and people ask me 'how are we going to reach and educate the youth?' I think a more important question is, 'How do we elevate the voice of youth?' Most people I know are already crying out. We are sick and tired of a government who is not hearing our cry and not responding to our needs. We need to focus on ensuring that our voices are at the table, especially on issues that are affecting us the most."

MITIGATING OUR CLIMATE IMPACT



From Left:

Dan Misleh
Executive Director of Catholic Climate
Covenant

Juan Guttierrez
EPA Energy Star Coordinator

Dr. Eric Gopelrud
Chairperson of Faith Alliance for Climate
Solutions

How best can communities of faith stop the dangerous pollution that damages our health and causes climate change? With facilitation by the Rev. Amy Reumann, Advocacy Director with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, panelists shared concrete examples of mitigation efforts and strategies, challenges, and recommendations on mitigation activities. After the panel, the group discussed how to mitigate through use of 100% clean energy (CE) in denominations, congregations, and communities.

Local Congregations in Action: Dr. Eric Gopelrud,

highlighted the success of his local congregation, the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Fairfax (UUCF), in mitigating climate pollution by starting with a resolution to reach “net zero” emissions by 2050. The congregation reduced emissions by over 25% with a series of mitigation activities including LED lighting and low-E, double-pane glass. Learn more about UUCF’s effort [here](#). It includes a Carbon Footprint game to help families reduce energy use at home and other implementation resources. The work of the Climate Action group inspired Dr. Gopelrud and others to form the [Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions](#) to assist other congregations to mitigate climate impacts and advocate at the local, state and national levels.

Building a National Mitigation Support System: Dan Misleh,

Executive Director of Catholic Climate Covenant, shared [Catholic Energies](#), a new program designed to help Catholic campuses, including parishes, schools, and healthcare facilities take meaningful and measurable steps to reduce energy consumption and costs. Catholic Energies provides support in four key areas: Energy Procurement, Energy Efficiency (including lighting, HVAC), Renewable Energy, and Energy Storage.

MITIGATING OUR CLIMATE IMPACT

Energy Star Tools To Help Congregations Take Action: **Juan Gutierrez**, with EPA Energy Star shared his work with congregations in the New York region using the [Energy Star Guide for Congregations and Portfolio Manager](#). The guide has 7 steps to reducing energy use with concrete recommendations and examples: 1. Make a commitment, 2. Assess Performance, 3. Set Goals, 4. Create an Action Plan, 5. Implement the plan, 6. Evaluate Progress, and 7. Recognize Achievements. New York City [reported](#) a 21% improvement in their average building Energy Star score between 2010 and 2016 following municipally mandated benchmarking of its buildings.

Mitigation Resource Recommendations from Participants:

- Stay tuned! New Blessed Tomorrow “Moving Forward” guide
- [Interfaith Power and Light Cool Congregations Program](#)
- [Energy Star Guide for Congregations](#) and [Portfolio Manager](#)
- [Catholic Climate Covenant Reduce Your Carbon Footprint Tools](#)
- [Hazon Seal of Sustainability Program](#)
- [United Methodist Women \(UMW\) 13 Steps to Sustainability](#)
- [Case Studies](#)

Next Steps Identified by Participants:

- Identify a way to create and sustain a revolving fund for greening congregations
- Continue to create communication/teaching tools to overcome theological barriers to action
- Create more opportunities to collectively amplify faith voices that encourage mitigation
- Center the voices and needs of impacted communities and people of color in mitigation work
- Be honest — acknowledge barriers/challenges to change and work to find solutions
- Identify ways to build organizing and support capacity for individual, local action
- Tell powerful, honest, and hopeful stories about climate mitigation as a part of our moral calling

ADVOCACY MATTERS: ELEVATING OUR VOICES FOR CLIMATE SOLUTIONS



From Left:

Rabbi Daniel Swartz
Executive Director of COEJL

Colin Christopher
Director of ISNA's Office of Interfaith and
Community Alliances

Rev. Susan Hendershot Guy
President of Interfaith Power and Light

John Hill
Assistant General Secretary for Advocacy
and Grassroots Organizing, Director of
Economic and Environmental Justice with
the United Methodist Church — General
Board of Church and Society

How can faith leaders and institutions move society — our congregations, communities, states, and nation — toward definitive climate solutions? Experts shared highlights from successful efforts and offered guidance on elevating inclusive climate advocacy.

Interfaith Power and Light (IPL): For 16 years, IPL has been helping congregations address climate change by being better stewards of energy and bringing the voice of the faith community into the policy-making arena. IPL's president, Susan Hendershot Guy, talked about building a movement within the faith community to advocate for climate solutions through deepened engagement, long-term relationships and trust, and honesty about what's working, and what's not.

Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL):

An initiative of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, COEJL deepens and broadens the Jewish community's commitment to stewardship and protection of the Earth through outreach, activism and Jewish learning. Through a network of Jewish leaders, institutions and individuals, COEJL is mobilizing the Jewish community to advocate for policies that increase energy efficiency and security. Executive Director Rabbi Daniel Swartz specifically called on the importance of people of faith delivering messages of hope on climate change and listening to impacted communities when engaging in advocacy efforts.

Islamic Society of North America Office of Interfaith and Community Alliances (IOICA):

With community outreach and interfaith programs, the IOICA functions as an outreach resource for those engaged in public policy. Climate change is a key priority for IOICA, and they are working with Blessed Tomorrow to launch a reinvigorated engagement program for the Muslim community to act on climate solutions. Director Colin Christopher discussed the importance of engagement through storytelling and giving space to personal narratives in places and platforms of power that encourage people to talk about their personal drive to act on climate in response to visibly damaging climate impacts.

ADVOCACY MATTERS: ELEVATING OUR VOICES FOR CLIMATE SOLUTIONS

Advocacy Resource Recommendations from Participants:

- [IPL's Climate Advocacy Toolkit](#)
- Jim Antal's new book, [Climate Church, Climate World](#)
- UMW's [Climate Justice Resources and Actions](#)
- [Justice for Each Generation](#): Call for 1000 sermons in support of youth plaintiffs in *Juliana vs. US*

Next Steps Identified by Participants:

- Strive to advocate differently — we cannot keep doing the same thing we have always done
- Fold advocacy into everyday resources for congregations (scripture studies, communications)
- Use the procurement and investment power of faith communities to put pressure on companies
- Personalize climate through storytelling with voices from the intended audience
- Channel “anger” about climate impacts and make it a productive emotion to catalyze action
- Consider messaging on youth and future as a motivating message
- Work as a coalition to remove rivalries and silos in our advocacy work and lift up successes
- Capitalize on the opportunity to communicate when climate crises occur, productively using the anger and frustration that these experiences create to motivate individuals to act
- Increase opportunities for theological training about how you engage in advocacy
- Create opportunities for congregations to talk about advocacy and how to engage
- Use urgent language to relay the “fierce urgency of now”

COMMITMENTS TO CLIMATE MITIGATION AND ADVOCACY

There's real power in moving from talking to taking a stand. Participants discussed how organizations have made and can continue to make specific commitments to goals like 100% clean energy, while identifying an interest in a joint commitment across faith traditions for those who are ready to act.

Committing to Climate Change as a Priority:

Denominations can identify a starting point on their path to commitment to climate solutions. Bishop Staccato Powell discussed the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church's commitment to pursue a partnership with Blessed Tomorrow as a first step toward embracing climate change as a priority for the church.

Divesting from Fossil Fuels:

In 2013, the United Church of Christ (UCC) became the first US denomination to pass a resolution to divest from fossil fuels. Rev. Brooks Berndt discussed the effort and the Church's movement towards mitigating climate impacts in the coming year. [Read more](#) about the UCC divestment from fossil fuels and shareholder activism.

“Make specific commitments to goals like 100% clean energy, while identifying an interest in a joint commitment across faith traditions for those who are ready to act.”

Making Bold Commitments to Mitigate and Use Clean Energy:

Setting a goal to strive towards will increase individual and collective action. The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) passed an audacious resolution in 2017 to commit the church to become climate neutral by 2030 and carbon positive by 2035. Rev. Carol Devine discussed how they are currently working with Blessed Tomorrow and others to implement training programs and support tools to help congregations reach this goal. Learn more about this exciting resolution and the tools produced to implement it [here](#).

FORUM NEXT STEPS

1. **ecoAmerica will work with Blessed Tomorrow partners in the coming months to support each partner** in identifying the pathway to a visible commitment and provide support along the way toward implementation.
2. **New Resource Guide:** Blessed Tomorrow will produce a new mitigation and advocacy engagement resource guide to support congregations in committing to, implementing, and acting on climate mitigation and advocacy efforts. The guide will be accompanied by trainings, webinars, and promotional resources.
3. **New Blessed Tomorrow Ambassadors Program:** Blessed Tomorrow will release a new faith-based training program later in 2018 to equip faith leaders with knowledge, hands-on experience, and resources to speak and act confidently on climate change and solutions. By training a cohort of like-minded leaders, faith leaders will be able to engage their congregations and congregants, colleagues, the public, and policymakers.
4. **New Draft Mitigation Roadmap:** As a direct result of the robust discussion from the Faith Forum in May, ecoAmerica developed a new draft roadmap to 100% clean energy. This new draft was shared along with this report, will be incorporated into the new guide, and can be provided upon request.
5. **Pathways to Commitment:** As requested by participants, Blessed Tomorrow will work to support each of the Blessed Tomorrow partners in identifying a pathway to commitment to mitigate and advocate for solutions, such as setting a goal for 100% clean energy. A subgroup of the participants also agreed to convene an effort to coordinate faith communications on the connection to natural disasters and climate change as a way to take advantage of tangible and urgent experiences.
6. **Youth-Focused Messaging:** A key theme throughout the meeting was the importance of catalyzing actions within the faith community through coordinated messaging on the impacts to our children and youth. ecoAmerica's June Talking Points focus on children's health impacts and we continue to explore opportunities to build messaging and action around this theme across all of our sector programs.



Additional Resources

Included with the report communications and available upon request:

- Agenda & Participant List
- Path to Positive Vision, Principles, and Commitments
- Forum Guide: Preparing for a Robust Discussion
- Draft Roadmap to 100% Clean Energy
- ecoAmerica State of Faith and Climate Presentation
- [Children's Health Talking Points](#)

Thank you

Thank you to all participants, speakers, supporting organizations, and to Auburn Seminary for hosting us. We look forward to ongoing collaboration as we increase climate mitigation and advocacy in 2018 and beyond!

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