

THE CLIMATE CHANGE CRISIS: WHAT'S A CHRISTIAN TO DO?

We are regularly confronted with new evidence that a great ecological crisis is upon us: unprecedented droughts; record-setting wildfires; Super Storm Sandy. Migration routes for insects and birds are being altered. Ice in the Arctic and at the South Pole is receding. Our mountain glaciers are gone or nearly so. And we have just experienced the year of the highest average temperatures since such records have been kept.

And yet, industrial nations continue to pump greenhouse gases into the atmosphere as if there are no consequences. And yet, while 167 nations – including the U.S. - signed an agreement in 2009 endorsing the scientific view that global warming must be held under 2 degrees Celsius (about 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) to avoid catastrophe, little has been accomplished among the world's greatest carbon emitters to meet this standard. So far the average temperature of the planet has increased by just under .8 degrees Celsius and has caused far more damage than most scientists expected. And yet, alarmingly, the world's fossil-fuel energy companies and the countries that act like energy companies are poised to extract and burn in the foreseeable future an amount of oil, gas, and coal that is five times the amount that climate scientists agree is safe to burn if we are to keep within the limit of 2 degrees Celsius. And yet, our government, meanwhile, is stuck in a gridlock preventing it from doing anything about this crisis (or any other) and the loudest voices from Washington seem to be of those who deny that climate change and global warming are real.

So, what role do people of faith play in this crisis? Beyond repenting for our contributions to and complicity in bringing about global warming, what can and should Christian individuals and congregations be doing in response to this looming catastrophe? These and other hard questions are among those being addressed in "The Ecology of Grace and Justice," a course that we – Gerry Grover and Willard Kniep – have been part of, meeting monthly since September at Central Lutheran Church in Portland and, beginning in February, at St. Andrew Lutheran Church in Beaverton. The course is an offering of EcoFaith Recovery, an organization with offices at St. Andrew whose mission centers on building a network of faith-based people and institutions within the Christian tradition in the Pacific Northwest who are waking up to the ecological-economic-spiritual crisis before us.

The principal leadership for the course has been provided by Lutheran pastors Solveig Nilsen-Goodin and Robyn Hartwig and retired community organizer Dick Harmon. With the other twenty-eight participants in the course we have been attempting to understand the root causes of this great ecological and economic crisis and its impact on our families, congregations, institutions, and the planet. We are seeking alternative local responses to this crisis grounded in the vast scriptural, theological, and spiritual resources available to us. We realize that this may be the great work of our time.

And now, to get it down to the level of St. James and its families and community, we are eager to extend the conversation about this crisis. We want to share what we have experienced with others in the congregation. Accordingly, we are planning, with Christine Doidge, to host several Open Space discussions on this topic later in the Spring. And if there is sufficient interest and energy, perhaps to launch a St. James study and action group focused on the crisis of climate change.

**St. James Lutheran Bulletin Item, prepared
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