

**THE EARTH IS SACRED - NOT OURS TO WRECK
IMPERATIVES FOR A NEW MORAL ERA**
Submitted by the Sacred Earth Matters group of the Love and Justice Ministry of
University Congregational United Church of Christ

SUMMARY

The realities of climate change require prophetic and strategic action by people of faith, seeking to be faithful to the everlasting covenant God has made with every living creature and with all future generations. The Sacred Earth Matters group believes that God is calling the church to become a leading religious voice on climate change and environmental racism. This leadership requires us to state our conviction as people of faith, recognizing that the earth is sacred, and it falls upon our generation to embrace the imperatives set forth in this resolution - imperatives that constitute a new moral era. We view the current climate crisis as an opportunity for which the church was born.

This resolution seeks to inspire and accelerate an unswerving commitment to the co-creation of a just and sustainable world as made manifest in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL RATIONALE

The actions this resolution recommends are rooted in and an expression of several of our most foundational theological and biblical principles.

In Genesis 9, God makes a covenant not only with Noah, but with all of humanity, with every living creature alive today, and with all future generations. As covenant partners God calls us to do likewise. It is now clear that the past few generations of humans have burned so much of the earth's energy reserves that we are on the verge of rendering the earth inhospitable for life as we have known it for all of recorded history. By any measure this is a violation of covenant.

We live out God's inclusive love by following the most basic moral instruction of both the New Testament and Hebrew scriptures (Mark 12:31; Mathew 22:39, Luke 10:27, Leviticus 19:18) We are called to love our neighbors as ourselves. In keeping with God's covenant, and because our actions will have significant consequences for future generations, we must recognize that future generations are no less our neighbors than those who live next door to us today.

BACKGROUND

WHAT IS THE SCIENCE OF CLIMATE CHANGE?

Since the beginning of human civilization up until about 200 years ago, our atmosphere contained about 275 parts per million of carbon dioxide. The discovery of oil, the beginning of the industrial age, and rapidly increasing population growth brought increased energy demands and improved techniques to tap into the earth's carbon reserves (oil, coal, gas), reserves which took nature hundreds of millions of years to create. These are the major factors causing the amount of carbon in the atmosphere to rise to its current level (2019) of 410.8 ppm of CO₂. Climate scientists agree that 350ppm of CO₂ is the safe upper limit for CO₂ in earth's atmosphere

Because CO₂ traps heat in our atmosphere, this rise in CO₂ has resulted in a global temperature rise of 1 degree Celsius causing far more damage than most scientists expected.

(A third of summer sea ice in the Arctic is gone, the oceans are 30 percent more acidic, and since warm air holds more water vapor than cold, the atmosphere over the oceans is a shocking five percent wetter, loading the dice for devastating floods.) 2017 marked the 41st consecutive year with global land and ocean temperatures at least nominally above the 20th century average. What must also be taken into consideration is that previously released carbon continues to overheat the atmosphere. Thus, climate models calculate that even if we stopped increasing CO₂ now, the temperature would likely still rise another 0.8 degrees Celsius.

Having raised the global thermometer almost 1° Celsius, we've experienced extreme weather events such as the worst drought since the dust bowl, damages from massive hurricanes, Arctic sea ice disappearing much faster than any scientific model has predicted, and deadly wildfires scorching Greece and California, just to name a few.

If an increase of less than 1° Celsius has resulted in such devastations, it's hard to comprehend what life will be like when we reach 2° Celsius. And yet, over the past several years, as climate models improve, the predictions developed by climate scientists have become more and more dire. Many scientists now believe that before the end of the century, CO₂ will reach 866ppm, and global temperature will rise over 5° Celsius.

One thing is for sure: it is critically important for humanity to leave as much of the earth's carbon reserves as possible in the ground. The math is simple. As Bill McKibben indicated in 2012, we can release up to 565 more gigatons of carbon dioxide by burning fossil fuels and stay below 2°C of warming. If we burn more than that, we risk catastrophe for life on earth. The problem is that fossil fuel corporations now have 2,795 gigatons in their reserves – five times the safe amount. (See the Carbon Tracking Initiative) If fossil fuel companies simply carry out their stated missions by utilizing the known reserves they currently own or have rights to, the earth will become inhospitable to life as we know it.

TEXT OF THE MOTION

WHEREAS, because we are a covenant people and affirm Jesus' call to love our neighbors as ourselves, we join God in recognizing our moral obligation to take into account how our decisions and activities affect all of creation now and into the future; and

WHEREAS, even though God loved the world and called it very good, humanity's normal, everyday activity is putting our world in jeopardy; and

WHEREAS, the Core Purpose of the United Church of Christ states (in part): "... we serve God in the co-creation of a just and sustainable world as made manifest in the Gospel of Jesus Christ," and

WHEREAS, the earth temperature has been rising exponentially since the industrial revolution and

WHEREAS, 99% of scientists attribute much of this rise to human activities and the use of fossil fuels, and

WHEREAS, as University Congregational United Church of Christ is one of the largest UCC churches in the Pacific Northwest Conference it is thereby considered a leader, and

WHEREAS, the Sacred Earth Matters group, as an action team of the Love and Justice Ministry at University Congregational United Church of Christ, has been promoting through education, advocacy, and example the reduction of individuals' carbon footprint, and the church building's carbon footprint through installation of solar panels, low energy lights, improvements to the heating and cooling systems, installation of energy efficient windows, and other positive improvements, and

WHEREAS, as a faith community, University Congregational United Church of Christ must be an example to other churches in the Pacific Northwest Conference of UCC, and the community at large, and

WHEREAS, the Thirty-first General Synod of the UCC passed a resolution that calls local churches and clergy to accept the moral mantle of leadership. Now is the time for clergy to speak from the pulpits about the moral obligation of our generation to protect God's creation. Let the world know that whatever the current American administration may say or do, we who follow Jesus will not back away from God's call to protect our common home

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that University Congregational United Church of Christ raises its prophetic voice regarding the urgency of healing the climate of the earth, our sacred home, for the future of all life.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that University Congregational United Church of Christ, as a church, and as individual members of the congregation commits to making decisions of integrity in our energy choices, even as we commit to hold our political leaders accountable to do the same. The following are examples of actions that can be taken:

- Educating members about the perils of climate change and actions that they as individuals can take to reduce carbon emissions
- Advocating for State and Federal action that will promote the use of alternative fuels
- Committing to resist all expansion of fossil fuel infrastructure and demand new sources of renewable energy that are accessible to all
- Investing all UCUCCE Endowment funds in the Beyond Fossil Fuels Balance Funds of the United Church Funds, or equivalent funds with screens so the investments are free of companies exploring for or producing fossil fuels.
- Accepting that combatting global warming is a moral imperative and that it is up to us - we the people- whether in the streets, at the State House, in the halls of power, with our phones and emails, or by committing our time, financial resources and prayers, to bend the moral arc of justice, with joy in our hearts, beauty in our sights, and hope for the children.

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that University Congregational United Church of Christ remains profoundly concerned about the disproportionate impact climate change is already having on those least responsible for the emissions of greenhouse gasses, such as those living in poverty, the elderly, children and people living in the least developed countries, and recognizes the moral mandate for humanity to shift to a sustainable energy plan in a way that is both just and compassionate.