

Lazarus, Come Out: A Shared Statement of Hope in the Face of Climate Change

As people of the Resurrection, our hope is grounded in the promise of renewal and restoration for all of God's Creation, which gives us energy and strength to respond to the accelerating threat of climate change.

As the National Climate Assessment 2014 documents, the scientific data is overwhelming. We know that climate instability is reaching a dangerous point. Now is the time to slow the rate of catastrophic climate change. Unless we take action now, our children and our children's children will live in a world of increasingly unexpected and dangerous climate events. Climate change already affects the ability to grow crops to feed the growing world population, creating significant concern for food security. The poorest among us are becoming even more vulnerable. Biodiversity in many regions of the world is being destroyed, and species are becoming extinct at alarming rates.

Yet even in the face of these truths, there is denial and a deafening silence from too many of our political leaders. Gridlock and science deniers undermine even the smallest efforts to accomplish legislative or policy changes that could reduce carbon emissions, increase energy conservation and efficiency, and help set this country on a path to sustainability.

It is essential that we, as religious and spiritual leaders, speak up, because climate change is a moral and social justice issue. The choices and actions of human beings are at least partially responsible for driving climate change, and all of us need repentance and conversion. We can no longer remain blind to the fact that our treatment of creation, driven too often by greed and lack of concern for our sisters and brothers, are at the center of this crisis.

As Christians we are called, just as Lazarus was called, to receive God's power, to come out of the tomb, and to lead transformed lives. We are called to come out of the tomb of selfishness and to acknowledge our individual *and* communal responsibility. We are called to take up our calling as followers of the Risen Christ: to strengthen the faint-hearted, to rouse the careless, to comfort those burdened by grief and fear, and to join the search and the struggle to create a more life-giving society.

We are called in a variety of ways and actions to be a prophetic witness for eco-justice in the public sphere and in our pulpits. We are called to join the rapidly growing environmental sustainability movement of young and old that demands an end to our dependence on fossil fuel, on oil subsidies, and on environmentally risky projects that jeopardize and pollute ecosystems. We are called to engage in a more intense political and economic effort to make safe, clean, renewable energy a top energy and public policy priority.

Finally, we recognize that words are not enough, and that the Holy Spirit leads us to respond to the climate crisis prophetically and prayerfully. The strategies we favor are various, but we are united in our shared commitment to the Risen Christ, who bids us to rise with him from the tyranny of suffering and death. We are united in our conviction that just as Lazarus was called to act by stepping out of the tomb and into the light, so we, too, are called by God to take action.

Therefore, as The Grand Forks United Church of Christ we will:

1) Advocate for national and international policies and regulations that enable a swift transition from dependence on fossil fuels to clean, safe, renewable energy, and for economic systems that are fair and just. At the same time, we commit to encouraging our faith communities to engage in public witness about climate change through advocacy at the local, national, and international levels.

2) Initiate and sustain an interfaith, regional and national conversation around climate change and social justice.

3) Invite our communities to prayerfully consider how their own actions and lifestyle choices affect the environment. We commit to offering our communities continued opportunities to learn about climate change and the universal Church's response to this crisis.

4) Foster a prayerful response to our changing world as we recognize that communal prayer is at the heart of shared faith life. We invite all of our congregations to share in the following prayer (whose imagery is drawn from Psalm 104) as part of their worship:

May God give us the grace to heed Jeremiah's prophetic warning "How long will the land mourn, and the grass of every field wither?" May we accept the gracious invitation of the incarnate Word to live a life of grace for the world, so that the earth may be restored and humanity filled with hope. O Lord, send us forth by your Spirit to renew the face of the earth, that the world may once again be filled with your good things: the trees watered abundantly, springs flowing between the hills and in verdant valleys, all the earth made fruitful, and birds, beasts, and humans alike quenching their thirst and receiving their nourishment from you once again in due season. Amen.

Respectfully,