

Here is an excerpt of a story Rev. Sharon Watkins, General Minister and President, shared on the "Let's Talk Faith and Climate" webinar on 1/25/17, illustrating how to use this guidance. See the recorded webinar at www.blessedtomorrow.org.



Each day, we start with a new beginning. For God's people in Deut. 30, their new beginning comes after 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. At the border of the Promised Land, Moses, their leader, sits them down to talk about how to live in this beautiful land. "You have a choice," he says. "Choose life, so that you and your descendants may live!"

Today – as in Moses' time – choosing life has something to do with caring for the beauty of creation that God has brought us to live in. In Genesis 1:26 – the very beginning of the Bible! – we read that God created human beings to have dominion over all other living things. We have a moral responsibility to "choose life" not only for ourselves but for all God's creatures.

Today, when we talk about choosing life, and care for the earth, we see the need in our own backyards. I sat with a woman in an international Bible study a few years back who described how her island nation is disappearing as ocean levels rise. Closer to home, our very food costs more due to prolonged drought.

Even if we don't agree fully on cause, we can agree on solutions. We can make a difference! Lighting alone has 70% of the environmental impact as automobiles. Changing our lightbulbs can be the beginning of a journey that helps us care for God's creation.

A church in Indianapolis has walked such a journey. A handful of devoted people at Downey Avenue Christian Church started a Creation Care team. "We started with a bunch of super simple steps," they said, "like changing lightbulbs and remembering to turn out the lights." They moved on to programmable thermostats and motion detectors to use only the lights they actually needed for the space when occupied. Their "small changes" saved them \$2,300+ per year in utility bills!

From there, they installed solar panels and now generate enough electricity to sell back to the electric company—giving more income to the church.

The circle of impact is growing. Members of the congregation are choosing life at home, too! Making super simple changes that are benefiting the earth and saving the family money on utility bills. Choosing life! for all.

Any one of us can be part of this same circle. We can jump in at so many different places: taking recycling seriously, planting our own gardens, supporting local efforts to move toward clean energy use.

As people of faith, we are called to choose life! for ourselves and our descendants- for all of creation. Moses' call still echoes today. Let's choose life! Where will you begin?

WATCH THE FAITH IN ACTION VIDEO:

Midway Christian Church in Kentucky is living out God's call to love our neighbors and care for creation by implementing solutions that foster relationships, deepen faith, save money, and foster a thriving, outward-looking church community.

Share this video with your congregation to inspire engagement and action. Download the video at greenchalice.org.



FAITH AND CLIMATE COMMUNICATION GUIDANCE



WHY OUR FAITH LEADS US TO ACT ON CLIMATE

As a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world, Disciples have a strong tradition of providing the hope, inspiration and action we need to create a better, safer world. Today we are called to bring our leadership to a new moral challenge – climate change. Damage to our climate puts the health of children and elderly at risk, hurts the least of us and diminishes God's creation. As followers of Christ, we can engage others in solutions that will create healthy and safe communities for our families, leave a thriving world for future generations and protect God's creation.

Americans of faith agree on many aspects of climate leadership, particularly when climate solutions are presented in faith-based terms. They believe that doing something about climate change now will protect God's creation and that we should use more clean energy sources like solar and wind power.

COMMUNICATION GUIDANCE

The following tips and guidance are taken from the *Let's Talk Faith and Climate Guide*. They include messages, words and phrases that will be effective in your communications on climate with your congregation, community, other faith leaders, policy makers, and your family. Download the full guide at blessedtomorrow.org.



Successful Message

Climate is presented as a moral responsibility to God, our children, our neighbors, future generations, the "least of us," and to all of creation.

They use familiar and resonant faith language and metaphors, such as the "Golden Rule."

They embrace the good intentions and aspirations of people of faith and limit expressions of blame and fear.

We have a moral responsibility to be good stewards of God's creation. God so loved us that He created for us a pure, clean home here on earth, vibrant with healthy nature to provide for our needs. He also gave us the free will to choose how we care for that earth. Let's follow the Golden Rule and do unto others and our earth as we would have done unto ourselves and our children. For too long, the priorities of a greedy few have forced our climate out of balance, degrading God's creation; damaging our land, water, and air; and harming us all - especially the least among us. We must care more fully for creation and walk more gently upon His earth.

Embrace and Replace: Words + Phrases*

Consult the table below that contains tested words and phrases which have been proven effective in discussing faith and climate.

Embrace	Replace	Because...
Good steward	Disobedience	Some people believe that climate change is not intentional and therefore feel that they did not directly break a moral law.
Create healthy and safe communities for our families	Stop/mitigate/slow down climate change	Focus on the positive outcomes and personal benefits that provide solutions for families and communities.
Moral responsibility	Moral obligation	Responsibility is more empowering and leaves room for choice.

*Note: the full guide contains more examples that can be refined to help you communicate with broader audiences about climate change and how it relates to the values and concerns of our tradition.

STEPS TO CREATE A PERSONALIZED CLIMATE MESSAGE

COMMUNICATIONS: 15 STEPS BREAKDOWN

These steps outline a sequential process for creating and delivering effective climate communication. Refer to the *Let's Talk Faith & Climate: Communication Guidance for Faith Leaders* at blessedtomorrow.org for more information.

BUILD RAPPORT

1. Start with people, stay with people
2. Connect on common values
3. Acknowledge ambivalence
4. Make it real



INSPIRE & EMPOWER

5. Emphasize solutions
6. Inspire and empower
7. Focus on personal benefit
8. End with your "ask"
9. Sequence matters



STRENGTHEN MESSAGE

10. Describe, don't label
11. Have at least one powerful fact from a trusted messenger
12. Ditch doom and gloom
13. Use stories to strengthen engagement
14. Stay above the fray
15. Message discipline is critical



The following is a hypothetical example of how Reverend Eva Taylor used the 15 steps to craft a sermon on faith and climate to engage her congregation. Additional sermon resources can be found at greenchalice.org.

Brothers and sisters,

Step 1: Start with people, stay with people
There is no mention of climate change within this sermon's first few sentences.

Step 2: Connect on common values
Beginning with a scriptural reference grounds the discussion in a shared belief.

Step 3: Acknowledge ambivalence
Rev. Taylor acknowledges that members of the congregation have issues that require their immediate attention at home.

Step 13: Use stories to strengthen engagement
A narrative arc is used throughout the sermon, referencing relevant and personal climate impacts.

Step 4: Make it real
People of faith care deeply for the health of their family members. Linking climate to their community's welfare motivates people to act.

Step 11: Have at least one fact from a trusted messenger
Rather than weigh the sermon down with numbers, Rev. Taylor states one powerful fact about how America's children and elderly are suffering from respiratory illnesses.

Step 5: Emphasize solutions
Rev. Taylor acknowledges the challenge of climate change, but quickly pivots to solutions and provides a real example that can be visualized.

We, as a congregation, have experienced a great deal together. Through good times and bad, we know that it is "God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ" (2 Corinthians 1:21). With God's love, there's no obstacle we cannot overcome together. When our church needed a new roof, we made it happen. When members of our congregation needed sponsorship to embark on a mission trip, we rallied together and sent them. Today, I invite us to come together again to face another challenge.

For some of us, the term "climate change" conjures thoughts of something over there, happening in a faraway land to someone else—maybe not a problem for *us*. But we can all see the damage that is being done to the climate and the impact that this damage is having on us, negatively affecting our health and wellbeing. My godson's asthma put him in the emergency room last month. And when you add these health impacts to the damage that severe weather and storms have caused to our community over this past year, it is clear that our changing climate is changing us.

Right now, more than 300 million people around the world suffer from asthma and other respiratory diseases, 25 million of whom reside right here in the United States of America. That's 1 in every 12 people according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Those who are most likely to be afflicted are our children and grandparents. Our families and God's beautiful creation are being impacted by the world we've created.

The good news is that there is something that I, you, and all of us can do about it. We are starting a creation care committee here at the church to work on projects that will restore the gift we have been given to its intended glory. What we do locally impacts us all globally. The creation care

committee will not only work toward curbing damage done to the climate, it will also find energy-efficient practices to implement here at the church, saving us money right now. Every week, our collection plate is full, for which the church is extremely grateful—but think about how much further that collection could go if we reduced the cost of operating our sanctuary. We can achieve this vision by studying these practices through exploratory committees that will investigate clean energy options, evaluate wind and solar programs, and uncover ways in which we can collaborate with our city. I spoke to Rabbi Schmidt at the synagogue across the street, and he said that their creation care committee has helped their temple implement solar power systems, energy-efficient lighting, and recycling programs that have already saved them over \$1,000 a month—money they have put toward helping families in need. If Rabbi Schmidt can achieve this kind of success, so can we.

As you leave here today, our deacons will be waiting outside, ready to sign you up for our first creation care committee meeting this Wednesday evening at 7 p.m. I need as many of your voices as possible to help us organize, engage, and move forward on this exciting project that will glorify God's name.

Together, we can make this happen and do our part to help erase the environmental impacts that are hurting our community. We can reduce our pollution levels and serve as a role model for congregations across America. Together, we can care for "our common home" and the least of us who inhabit God's creation, as Pope Francis has urged us to do.

Climate change is having a real impact on our communities. God has given us the profound responsibility of stewarding His creation and creating a better world, together. We can do just that. It is time that we rise above the arguments and move together as one unified voice, carrying His message forward and demonstrating it through our actions.

God bless all of you, and please, don't forget to sign up for our first-ever creation care committee meeting.

Step 6: Inspire and empower
Rev. Taylor motivates the congregation by conveying the success of a solution that has already been adopted.

Step 7: Focus on personal benefit
A never-ending issue for faith communities is funding. Rev. Taylor demonstrates how climate solutions will save them money.

Step 10: Describe, don't label
Rev. Taylor uses language that is familiar to her audience and avoids technical terms like "mitigation" and "renewable energy."

Step 8: End with your ask
Rev. Taylor gives her congregation something specific they can do and makes the first task an easy one. Asking for an opinion is a good way of getting people involved, as it instills a sense of responsibility for the project.

Step 9: Sequence matters
Rev. Taylor has followed Steps 1–8 in order to build rapport and make climate impacts and solutions personally relevant to the congregation.

Step 12: Ditch doom and gloom
Rev. Taylor mentions health-related climate impacts in her sermon but quickly shifts to highlighting the opportunity to fulfill one's role as a steward of God's creation.

Step 14: Stay above the fray
Rev. Taylor demonstrates how climate solutions will raise the congregation above the trivial by speaking to the values that matter to them most.

Step 15: Message discipline is critical
Rev. Taylor has remained consistent in conveying a personal relevance to climate impacts and the benefits of its solutions. Inspirational language makes it easy for the audience to understand, remember, and share her message.