

**Task Force on Climate Justice:
Background to the document "Gentle With the Earth 2016"**

"Love is the motive, but justice is the instrument."
Reinhold Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*

At the congregational meeting of Mount Olive on June 5, 2016, the community was called to act on a proposal to install solar panels on the roof of the parish house. Several questions were raised about durability, maintenance, and replacement, among other concerns: those kinds of questions indicate that *we sense that when it comes to climate change, we are at the beginning of an effort which will require commitment for the extended future.*

The urgent need for climate justice

Our response to climate change is more than just one of the many significant issues which both society and church must engage, for example: poverty, racism, homelessness, immigration, globalization. Climate change is broad-- involving the entire planet, and it is deep-- requiring a fundamental reorientation of our way of living as humans in relation to life on earth. It is not too much to say that climate change, and our response to it, is and will be *the issue* for the rest of the 21st century.

The Lutheran World Federation's (LWF) stance on climate justice

"Science detects human influence in the warming of the atmosphere and the ocean, in changes in the global water cycle, in reductions in snow and ice, in global mean sea level rise, and in changes in some climate extremes. This evidence for human influence has increased since Assessment Report 4 in 2007. It is therefore extremely likely that human influence has been the

dominant cause of scientifically observed warming since the mid-20th century. (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 10.3-10.6, 10.9)

It seems that many aspects of climate change will persist for centuries even if we succeed in halting the increase in CO2 emissions. This presents the need to create a long-term, multi-century Climate Change commitment as a result of past, present and future emissions of CO2 gases.

(Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, p. 27)

As a result of these reports, the LWF understands that:

- Climate change is real and influenced by human actions;
- Increasingly severe impacts are already being experienced on every continent, with growing economic and social costs;
- If we act now it will still be possible to keep global warming below the internationally agreed danger-threshold of an increase of 2 degrees Celsius. To achieve this, carbon pollution must be reduced quickly; and
- **Climate change is a matter of social and economic justice, as it most affects the poorest people and displaces the most vulnerable.**" (emphasis added)

(Lutheran World Federation, *Statement on Climate Justice*, 2014; see Appendix A)

It is not just for us

In the Middle East there is a saying, "Are we planting olive trees for the generations to come?" It is well understood that olive trees are slow growing and take many years to produce abundant fruit. So it is, that with commitment to life and hope for the future, one plants an olive tree, not for one's self, but for one's grandchildren. It is with a sense of urgency that the tree is planted, because if that is not done the grandchildren may have no future at all. The Iroquois, over 400 years ago, required that all decisions be shaped by the question, "How will this affect the next seven generations to come?" Our sisters and brothers in the Orthodox Christian Church frame all decisions by the question, "Is this beautiful?"

Recommendations

Reorientation of decisions to include creation

It would be faithful and wise for us as people connected to and shaped by Christ's incarnation, death and resurrection to shape our decisions in this place, at Mount Olive, and in our personal lives around the questions:

- ❖ Is this beautiful?
- ❖ Is this a gift to the next generations?
- ❖ How will this affect the earth, the water, the air, all creatures, those who are poor, disenfranchised, those who have no voice or power?

Paris Pledge and an ongoing committee

In light of the urgent need for a reorientation of human life toward climate justice, the Task Force on Climate Justice recommends that

- ❖ the community at Mount Olive Lutheran Church **adopt the statement, "Gentle With the Earth 2016"**;
- ❖ Mount Olive make a commitment to the guidelines of the **Paris Pledge**, to strive to reduce carbon emissions in this place by 50% by 2030 and to strive to be carbon neutral by 2050;
- ❖ the Vestry of Mount Olive establish an **ongoing Advisory Committee for Care of the Earth/Climate Justice** to guide and provide resources for the church, its committees, and for the people who gather here (see Appendix B).

God of love, show us our place in this world
as channels of your love
for all the creatures of this earth,
for not one of them is forgotten in your sight.
Enlighten those who possess power and money

that they may avoid the sin of indifference,
that they may love the common good, advance the weak,
and care for this world in which we live.

The poor and the earth are crying out.
O Lord, seize us with your power and light,
help us to protect all life,
to prepare for a better future,
for the coming of your Kingdom
of justice, peace, love and beauty.
Praise be to you!

Amen.

(from *Laudato sí*, encyclical of Pope Francis I)

July 25, 2016

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Gentle With the Earth 2016

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"We, the members and friends of Mount Olive, live in the presence of the Triune God, experiencing God's graceful resurrection love for the world."

(Vision Statement, Mount Olive Lutheran Church)

God is the Creator of life and that which sustains life: light, water, air, earth. In worship we give God our thanks and praise for the gift of life, both ours and that of all on planet Earth, both great and small, along with the heavens, the universes and galaxies. We are grateful because "...the earth is the LORD'S and all that is in it." (Psalm 24:1)

"The fire of the Holy Spirit we experience in our worship in this place transforms us into the Body of Christ and flows through our lives as faithful service..."

We believe that in the act of worship we are transformed by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ to serve God and neighbor. Worship propels us into the world as changed people to love and to serve.

The world we serve is not just the people of the earth: it is also the world in which humans live, the environment - earth air, water, soil. God's creation includes all creatures: our sisters and brothers the plants, the rocks, the atmosphere, the animals, other humans. To serve

God in the world is to preserve and care for all that God has created, to work together with God to sustain life, out of honor and love for God and for all that God has made.

Created by God, baptized into Christ, transformed by the Spirit, the people of Mount Olive Lutheran Church, desiring to live out a more conscious and intentional service to and love of God's creation, will strive to lovingly and consciously evaluate all aspects of our life together and how our life as the body of Christ can be a blessing to earth.

To this end, we at Mount Olive Lutheran Church commit:

- 1) to take as a first step a pledge, known as the **Paris Pledge**, to strive to reduce the carbon emissions in this place by 50% by the year 2030, and to be carbon neutral by the year 2050;
- 2) to establish an **ongoing Advisory Committee for Care of the Earth/Climate Justice**, to guide and provide resources for the church, its committees, and for the people who gather here (see Appendix B);
- 3) to **pass our decisions through the sieve of the questions**: Is this beautiful? How will this affect the earth, those who have no voice or power, and the next generations?

All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe
and in the smallest of your creatures.

You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.

Pour out upon us the power of your love,
that we may protect life and beauty.

Fill us with peace, that we may live
as brothers and sisters, harming no one.

O God of the poor,

help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth,
so precious in your eyes.
Bring healing to our lives,
that we may protect the world and not prey on it,
that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction.
Touch the hearts
of those who look only for gain
at the expense of the poor and the earth.
Teach us to discover the worth of each thing,
to be filled with awe and contemplation,
to recognize that we are profoundly united
with every creature
as we journey towards your infinite light.
We thank you for being with us each day.
Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle
for justice, love and peace.
Amen

(from *Laudato sí*, encyclical of Pope Francis I)

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Appendix A

Church Statements on Climate Justice

World Council of Churches - *Economy of Life, Justice, and Peace for All: A Call To Action* (2012)

<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/public-witness-addressing-power-affirming-peace/poverty-wealth-and-ecology/neoliberal-paradigm/agape-call-for-action-2012>

Lutheran World Federation - *Statement on Climate Justice 2014*

https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/Council2014-PublicStatement_ClimateJustice.pdf

"A Pastoral Message on Climate Change" (2014)

Anglican/Episcopal/Lutheran

<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bishop-katharine-jefferts-schori/a-pastoral-message-on-climate-change-2014-05-26/index.html>

Anglican Church - *The World Is Our Host: A Call To Urgent Action For Climate Justice* (2015)

<http://acen.anglicancommunion.org/media/148818/The-World-is-our-Host-FINAL-TEXT.pdf>

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America - *Caring For the Earth* (1993)

http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Environment/S.pdf?_ga=1.66686893.266301771.1465511486

Presbyterian Church -USA - *The Power To Change: U.S. Energy Policy and Global Warming* (2008)

https://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/acswp/pdf/energyreport.pdf

Roman Catholic Church - Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato si* (2015)

<https://laudatosi.com/watch>

United Church of Christ - "A Resolution on Climate Change" (2007)

http://www.ucc.org/environmental-ministries_synod-resolutions_a-resolution-on-climate

Organizations and Websites

Interfaith Power and Light - <http://www.interfaithpowerandlight.org/>

IPL Minnesota - <http://mnipl.org/>

Lutherans Restoring Creation -
<http://www.lutheransrestoringcreation.org/>

Appendix B

What can we do as a church to care for creation?

Interfaith Power and Light, "Cool Congregations" program: 25 steps under \$25 (Ways to work toward the Paris Pledge reductions in carbon output)

<http://www.coolcongregations.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/2015-ccc-25-under25Guide.pdf>

Interfaith Power and Light, 25 Steps over \$25 (Ways to work toward the Paris Pledge reductions in carbon output)

http://www.coolcongregations.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/2015-ccc-25-over25_Guide1.pdf

Interfaith Power and Light Carbon Calculator, Parish and Home

<http://www.coolcongregations.org/calculator/>

Green Christian (British): "Nine Ways To Live Gently On Earth"

<http://www.greenchristian.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/leaflet/nine-ways.pdf>