

CLIMATE CHANGE & ECO-JUSTICE

The earth's climate has changed throughout history, sometimes drastically. However, the global climate change we are experiencing now has two primary sources, deforestation and the burning of fossil fuels, both resulting in dangerous levels of greenhouse gases. Over 75% of carbon emissions today come from fossil fuels.



The United Nations Foundation has summarized the consequences, unless we take immediate action: the most likely outcome will be rises in the global average surface temperature to dangerous levels (by 0.2 to 0.4 degrees C per decade) throughout the 21st century.

These scientists conclude that we must halt further temperature increases to a minimum of 0.2 degrees; otherwise climate change will be disastrous. Increases in sea level, extreme weather, and the acidity of oceans may not be reversible, which will result in disruptions in ecosystems beyond the point to which humankind can adapt. The vast majority of people – particularly the poor, women, the elderly and children – in water-scarce regions may not survive.

The academic journal "Science" reported in 2012 that the current rate of carbon emissions and its impact on ocean acidity is unparalleled in the last 300 million years of Earth history, "raising the possibility that we are entering an unknown territory of marine ecosystem change."

**By 2100,
our climate
will have
risen by 3 to 5
degrees since
1750.**



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Currently, about 15% of the world's energy production is based on renewable energy, and this figure can significantly improve with committed, effective political leadership. For example, it has been estimated that measures taken in Brazil to conserve energy since the 1970's have reduced in consumption of non-renewables by nearly 50%.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) says that documented temperature increases have already been observed in the following ways:

- 1 in the Arctic and Antarctic regions with the melting of polar ice;**
- 2 in sea-level rise contributing to the loss of coastal wetlands;**
- 3 on agriculture and forestry in the Northern Hemisphere (earlier spring plantings and forest disturbances due to fire and pests);**
- 4 on agriculture in Sub-Saharan Africa, where women are the primary farmers, and where warmer, drier conditions have reduced the growing season;**
- 5 on human health, such as infectious diseases and the effects of allergenic pollen.**

The World Health Organization concludes that climate change already contributes to the emergence and intensification of infectious diseases, including Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome, West Nile virus, malaria, and dengue fever – diseases which are likely to spread more quickly in developing and the least developed countries. Malaria is spreading in populated areas of Zimbabwe and the African Highlands, which were recently not at risk (United Nations Foundation and Sigma Xi, 2007).



Today, 21% of the world's population lives within 30 km of coastlines. Sea level rise, which could reach one meter or more by the end of this century, will profoundly affect low-lying areas in the most vulnerable countries like Bangladesh, resulting in the complete loss of fertile land, massive migrations of human populations, and starvation.

More intense storms and flooding along coasts and mountain valleys will create a staggering number of environmental refugees in search of food and shelter at re-location centers that most governments will be unable to provide.

Increased levels of carbon dioxide from the burning of fossil fuels are very likely contributing to the rapid rise of asthma.

Four sovereign states – Tuvalu, The Republic of the Marshall Islands, The Republic of Maldives, and Kiribati – are home to nearly a half million people whose habitable land will be completely inundated by the end of this century.

The impact of increasingly severe coastal storms together with sea level rise would displace roughly 130 to 450 million people during this century.

Indigenous peoples are especially vulnerable to the consequences of climate change, especially in coastal areas where sea-level rise has begun. Changes in ecosystems will have a harmful impact on every dimension of indigenous life.

WHAT THE CHURCHES CAN DO

- A good first step in reducing your carbon footprint in buildings and homes is to conduct an energy audit, while beginning to use renewable energy whenever possible.
- Simply turn off electric lights when they're not being used or when they're not really needed.
- Convene congregational discussions to strengthen community ties and promote inter-faith co-operation in relation to the adoption of renewable energy.
- Bring before your political leadership the imperative to use all means, including legislation and the removal of oil/gas subsidies, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- Use public transportation whenever possible, and organize car pools in your workplace.



BIBLE STUDY – CLIMATE CHANGE AND ECO-JUSTICE

INTRODUCTION

The Bible describes of the beauty and abundance of creation. It also talks of human injustice and oppression, distorting relationships amongst people and with the land. The Book of Isaiah offers inspiring images of these relationships being restored, so that all life in harmony and justice with each other and creation. As Isaiah 58:6 says, this will require a kind of 'fasting' or self-denial, to reject greed and embrace justice. These words speak in to us today, where the greed and overconsumption by some is having dire impact on the earth's climate and leading to desperate suffering in many parts of the world. We have little time to act – but must speak and act now.

This Bible study is for use by small groups or individuals, to be adapted to your own context.

ISAIAH 32:15-17 – THE PEACE OF GOD'S REIGN

...until a spirit from on high is poured out on us, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field is deemed a forest.

Then justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness abide in the fruitful field.

The effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust for ever.

My people will abide in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting-places.

Isaiah 58:6 – God's justice

Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:
to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords
of the yoke,
to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?

DISCUSSION

You may wish to open in prayer. Read the Bible passage twice and then discuss these questions:

In biblical times:

- What do you think these two passages are about? Discuss each and retell in your words.
- In Isaiah 32:15-17, what happens when people live with the Spirit in harmony with the land?
- What happens when justice and righteousness prevail? To what kind of justice do you think this refers?
- Isaiah 58:6 talks of a different kind of fasting or self-denial. What kind of human greed would lead to injustice and oppression of others?
- What do these passages say about God's vision for humanity and his creation?

In our own times:

- What do we recognise from this psalm in our world today?
- In what ways has humanity been unjust and damaged the environment?
- What is the impact of this damage on others, including the poorest communities?

PRAYER

Loving Father,

We give thanks for the abundance of your creation. We pray for forgiveness where our greedy and unjust actions have harmed the environment and our neighbours. Please give us strength to change our behaviour and courage to challenge others. Give us a passion for justice to support those affected by climate change and protect us when we face these challenges ourselves. Help us to see clearly the way to restore right and just relationships with the environment and each other, for the good of all.

In Jesus' holy name we pray. Amen.

- Isaiah 58:6 talks of fasting and ending greed that overcomes justice and oppression. What should people deny themselves to help bring justice for others and care for creation?
- What is our prayer? What practical actions can we commit to take at individual and community level?

FURTHER PASSAGES FOR READING

Genesis 1: 1 – 2:15

Psalms 8:3-9

Romans 8: 19-23

Revelation 22: 1-3

REFERENCES AND OTHER BIBLE STUDIES

[www.jubilee-centre.org/
uploaded/files/resource_267.pdf](http://www.jubilee-centre.org/uploaded/files/resource_267.pdf)

www.arocha.org

World Council of Churches:

[www.oikoumene.org/en/programmes/justi
ce-diakonia-and-responsibility-for-
creation/eco-justice](http://www.oikoumene.org/en/programmes/justice-diakonia-and-responsibility-for-creation/eco-justice)

www.ecocongregation.org

