

# LET'S TALK FAITH & CLIMATE

COMMUNICATION GUIDANCE FOR FAITH LEADERS



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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### ABOUT THIS GUIDE

*Let's Talk Faith and Climate: Communication Guidance for Faith Leaders* is designed to be useful to both experienced and novice climate change and faith communicators. This guide synthesizes the latest academic research and message testing on climate communications from across the social sciences into a practical guide to support meaningful discussions on climate change and faith among individuals and groups.

This guide offers tips on how to initiate new conversations with the faithful, how to create one's own successful, value-based messages, and how to utilize specific wording that has been tested for its ability to bring people together regarding climate issues. Additionally, this document provides guidance on how to more deeply integrate creation care concerns into one's own organization, ministry, or denomination.

This, along with the many resources offered by ecoAmerica's Blessed Tomorrow program, will allow faith leaders to become as adept at talking about climate change as they are at inspiring others to act on behalf of our shared future.

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## GREETINGS ABC FAMILY AND FRIENDS,

2018 marks the thirtieth anniversary of the passage of the American Baptist Policy Statement on Ecology, which was based on this beautiful verse. As the Psalmist proclaims, God is the Creator of our world and all living things. Similarly, John's Gospel introduces Jesus, "the Word," as the one through whom "all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (John 1:3; see v. 10). Paul links Jesus' role in the universe's creation to his roles as Savior and Lord of the church:

*The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, ... all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy...and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. (Colossians 1:15-20)*

As Christ followers, American Baptists have throughout the years heard God's call to respect, love and tend to our environment. American Baptists continue to respond generously and sacrificially to environmentally related events, such as massive fires in the western U.S. and hurricane relief, through coordinated disaster relief efforts, missionary development work, and opportunities to grow spiritually in settings that inspire a deeper appreciation of nature.

ABCUSA's commitment to creation care and justice has been consistent and longstanding, and as General Secretary, I call upon all American Baptist related churches, institutions, leaders and members to continue this tradition of environmental activism. I would like to encourage our spiritual family to embrace spiritual disciplines and practices to reduce impacts on the environment and to preach and teach about creation care and justice. To support you in this outreach, we are sharing this guide, Let's Talk Faith and Climate, produced in partnership with Blessed Tomorrow. The guide offers tips on how to initiate new conversations by creating your own successful, value-based message using language that has been tested for its ability to bring people together regarding climate issues. I hope you find this a useful tool to integrate creation care into your individual living, your congregations, and your ministry.

In spite of the real and pressing environmental challenges facing our generation, I am hopeful that we will find creative ways to address ecological challenges and its associated justice issues. The whole world is holy, the work of the Creator. God's breath gives life to humanity (Genesis 1-2) and to all creatures (Psalm 104). We live in a world of beauty and wonder, a world animated and sustained by the love of God. Let us give thanks for the beauty and vitality of the Earth; let us work to preserve God's Garden!

Yours in Christ,



Rev. Dr. Lee B. Spitzer  
ABCUSA, General Secretary



Blessed Tomorrow is a comprehensive climate change program designed to help faith organizations strengthen the moral connections between climate and faith and integrate climate solutions into their institutions. The program is guided and built by a coalition of faith leaders who are committed to creating a path toward a positive future for our families, our communities, and our world.



We encourage you to join the Blessed Tomorrow program at [www.BlessedTomorrow.org](http://www.BlessedTomorrow.org). The program provides a suite of resources to help institutions lead through example by increasing climate-friendly activities in facility operations, advocating for climate solutions, and inviting their communities to do the same.

## PARTNERS



ecoAmerica's programs for leaders in other fields:



Community leaders



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# WHY OUR FAITH LEADS US TO ACT ON CLIMATE

*"Climate change is a global problem with grave implications. . . It represents one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day. . . A great cultural, spiritual, and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set out on the long path of renewal."*

— Pope Francis, encyclical on ecology, June 2015, *Laudato Si'*

*Climate change is a moral and spiritual issue that is causing unprecedented harm to God's creation and people. Climate change is having and will continue to have profound effects—from injury and illness to displacement and destruction—on people across the globe.<sup>a</sup> The most vulnerable among us are being harmed first and worst.*

*This section of the guide is not meant to provide information on how climate change impacts people generally, but instead offers context on how climate change is connected to the core values of many faith traditions.*

People of faith are inspired to act on climate issues for a multitude of reasons. If your religious experience is strongly connected to the sanctity of God's creation, you will likely feel compelled to defend the natural world from the destruction that results from climate damage. If peacemaking is a primary expression of your faith, you may be alarmed at the various ways in which climate change is sowing conflict over scarce resources. If the alleviation of poverty is central to your faith, you may be concerned about how the poor are being hit the hardest by pollution and severe weather, yet have the fewest resources to cope with such obstacles. If overcoming racism is a core aspect of your faith journey, you need not look far to witness climate injustice, such as racial disparities in childhood asthma rates or the inequitable response to disaster that often occurs when communities of color are the primary victims. If your faith is driven by a passion to care for the next generation, nothing threatens our children's wellbeing more than an unstable climate.

Whatever your faith journey and motivation, climate change intensifies our shared responsibility as people of faith to provide sanctuary and guidance for communities in times of need.

## DAMAGE TO THE CLIMATE CALLS FOR GOOD STEWARDSHIP, HOPE, AND ACTION

All faith traditions share a responsibility to care for creation and respect life. Abrahamic faith traditions view the care of creation as a practice that honors God the Creator. However, the use of fossil fuels and other damaging human activities puts creation and all life at risk. Our climate is changing, our ecology is threatened, and living creatures are becoming endangered or extinct.

Through faith leadership, we can reclaim Earth-honoring values that involve living simply, treading more lightly, and being mindful of our impact on all of Earth's inhabitants. We, as faith leaders, can grow the movement to better steward God's creation and provide a healthier, safer, and more stable world for all.

a. Please see the National Climate Assessment and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change for this information

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## CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS SOCIAL JUSTICE AND PEACE

Across our nation and world, severe storms, changing seasonal conditions, and other climate impacts are displacing vulnerable people, damaging our food and water sources, and impairing the livability of our communities.

According to the NOAA National Centers for Environmental Information (NCEI), 188 climate-related disasters have impacted the U.S. since 1980, costing U.S. taxpayers more than one trillion dollars.<sup>5</sup> Climate-related health issues are growing in frequency and severity, disproportionately affecting the poorest and most vulnerable Americans.<sup>2</sup>

Because faith leaders and congregations are often on the front lines of caring for the most vulnerable, our leadership is especially important in guiding our communities toward appropriate responses and encouraging them to assist those who have been impacted by a changing climate, both within and beyond our nation's borders. Faith leaders also play a pivotal role in advocating for policies that will protect our communities, our neighbors, and future generations and in ensuring that we all have access to the health and economic benefits of a clean energy economy.

## CLIMATE PREPAREDNESS AND SOLUTIONS REQUIRE FAITH LEADERSHIP

Faith community leaders are the backbone of American communities and are often charged with offering guidance in times of moral dilemma or when disaster strikes. Inevitably, every faith leader will meet the day when he or she must address climate change, either in dealing with its impacts directly or in helping others to do so.

Faith leaders are increasingly called upon to demonstrate leadership when speaking about the moral imperative of action, reducing their own climate impact, providing sanctuary in times of need, advocating for strong policies, encouraging preparedness, and guiding their congregations and communities toward the development of solutions. Thankfully, many thousands are already doing so.

*"I used to think that if we threw enough good science at the environmental problems, we could solve them. I was wrong. The main threats to the environment are not biodiversity loss, pollution, and climate change, as I once thought. They are selfishness and greed and pride. And for that we need a spiritual and cultural transformation, something we scientists don't know much about."*

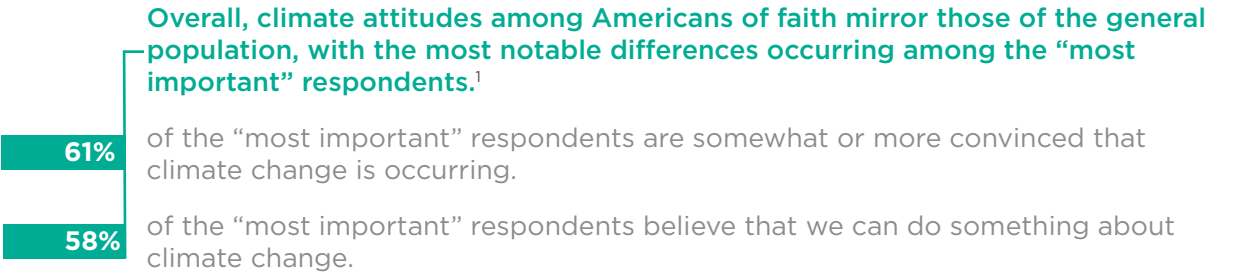
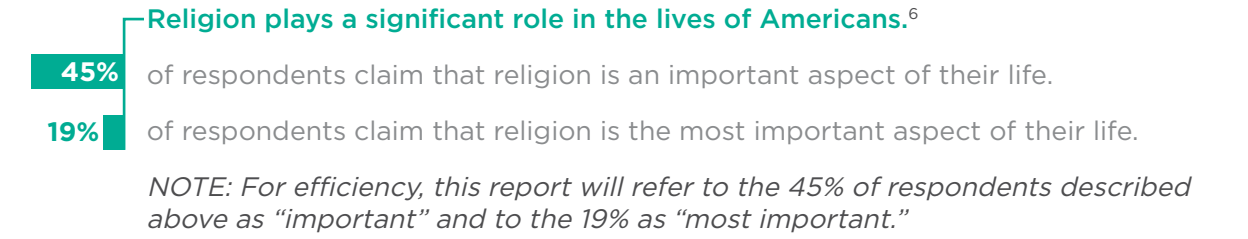
— James "Gus" Speth, Former Dean of the Yale School of Forestry and U.S. Presidential Climate Advisor

# RESEARCH ON AWARENESS & ATTITUDES

The following information from recent polls highlights the awareness, attitudes, and motivations of people of faith regarding climate issues. These figures represent opportunities for refining and deepening people's engagement and participation.

## QUANTIFYING “PEOPLE OF FAITH” IN AMERICA

According to the most conservative estimates, 80% of U.S. citizens self-identify as religious.<sup>7</sup> For many Americans, faith informs our decision-making and draws us closer to our opinions on social welfare issues such as climate change.



**Both “important” and “most important” respondents agree on many aspects of climate leadership, particularly when climate solutions are presented in faith-based terms.<sup>1</sup>**

	“Important” Respondents (%)	“Most Important” Respondents (%)	General Public (%)
Doing something about climate change now could protect God’s creation.	70	67	59
We should use more clean energy sources like solar and wind power in the future.	82	70	80



## THE MEASURABLE IMPACT OF FAITH LEADERSHIP ON CLIMATE ISSUES

Faith leadership has had and continues to have a measurable impact on climate awareness levels, attitudes, and behaviors among people of faith. In fact, 40% of Americans believe that religious leaders should take a stand on climate issues.<sup>9</sup> Faith leaders can look to these findings as encouragement to further elevate their advocacy and engagement efforts.

### “THE FRANCIS EFFECT”

According to a 2015 report by the Yale Program on Climate Change Communications, papal leadership on climate change has contributed to an uptick in positive climate opinions. Following Pope Francis’s visit, the frequency of discussions regarding climate change in Catholic communities increased.<sup>4</sup>

#### Pope Francis had an impact on Americans’ climate opinions and actions.

35%

of respondents claim to have been influenced by His Holiness (including 17% of non-Catholics).<sup>4</sup>

25%

of respondents believe that the pope’s statements concerning the environment will inspire them to take environmentally friendly actions, such as conserving water and energy.<sup>9</sup>

Additionally, there was a 10% increase in the number of respondents who count His Holiness as a source of information about climate change.

## A GROWING OPPORTUNITY FOR FAITH-BASED CLIMATE LEADERSHIP

The time is ripe for faith leaders to inspire Americans by speaking about climate change, showing them how climate solutions align with their faith values, and revealing how such solutions can benefit them in their daily lives.

#### There is an opportunity for both ordained and lay faith leaders to elevate their voices on climate issues, as people of faith are ready to listen and are seeking guidance on how to take proper action.<sup>1</sup>

59%

of the general public agrees that taking action on climate change is necessary.

44%

of the “most important” respondents say that they trust and follow their faith leaders for guidance on climate issues.

In the following sections, we will illustrate how faith leaders can best communicate climate issues in an attempt to broaden their constituencies, strengthen their relevance, and inspire, empower, and motivate action.

## SUCCESSFUL MESSAGES

### Why these messages work:

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.

**They speak about creation care**—a familiar term in faith—first, and then about climate change.

**They express stability and order** with the use of “balance,” which is highly valued among faith audiences.

**They employ a story arc** that encompasses a challenge, an action, and a resolution—**similar to the story arcs found in religious teachings.**

**They balance the belief in God's will** with the American value of choice.

They list the personal rewards that are **relevant to faith audiences: a stronger faith, a sense of belonging, family protection, and family bonding.**

They present a strong message that is relevant across all political beliefs and faith traditions.

*The following messages have been tested and proven successful in communicating climate issues to people of faith. You may use the following phrases, whole sentences, or the messages in their entirety. Use them to initiate or strengthen a discussion on climate and faith. As with all the guidance offered here, you will need to tailor the language to be specific and appropriate to your faith tradition.<sup>b</sup> These messages provide a wonderful basis upon which you may begin your conversations on creation care and help ease the transition from religious texts to ground teachings.*

### Option A

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.

### Option B

We have a moral responsibility to be good stewards of God's creation. As Pope Francis said, “The Earth was here before us [and entrusted to us as a gift]. What kind of world do we want to leave for those who come after us, to the children who are now growing up? Human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above [ourselves].” Climate change is a message that something is wrong. You and I can choose “good”; we can choose a more worthy and moral path. Opting for safe and clean energy solutions such as wind and solar is evidence of the best in human beings and is an example of how we can act in the image of our Creator to preserve what He has bestowed.

### Quotes from Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'*

*“The Earth was here before us, and it has been given to us,”* page 48.

*“The Earth was here before us and entrusted to us as a gift,”* page 26.

*“What kind of world do we want to leave for those who come after us, to the children who are now growing up?”* page 106.

*“Human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves,”* pages 26, 134.

b. These messages were tested as part of ecoAmerica's 2015 national climate messaging project entitled *Let's Talk Climate: Messages to Motivate Americans*. “He” can be replaced with an attribution to a higher power.

## EMBRACE & REPLACE: WORDS + PHRASES

*Creating your own personal message has powerful benefits, particularly when that message is amplified by words and phrases that have been proven effective.<sup>3</sup> Consult the table below as you prepare sermons, newsletters, or other climate communications. You may find it useful in refining your messages, particularly when communicating with a broader audience that may not yet be familiar with climate change and how it relates to the core values and concerns of your tradition.*

*Though many of these words and phrases will work with any audience, most are especially resonant with people who claim religious affiliation. Slight variances in the language may be required to comport with your faith tradition. In this case, review the spirit of the learning, as well as the tone, for guidance.*

Embrace	Replace	Because...
<b>Good steward</b>	Disobedience	Some people believe that climate change is not intentional and therefore feel that they did not directly break a moral law.
<b>Golden Rule</b>	Greening	This term uses familiar and nonpartisan faith-based language, whereas “green” tends to have a left-wing connotation. Depending on the faith tradition, “love your neighbor” or “justice” can also be employed.
<b>God’s creation</b>	Natural limits	Caring for both people and the planet is more ethical and personal.
<b>Moral responsibility</b>	Moral obligation	“Responsibility” is more empowering and leaves room for choice. “Obligation” can come off as overly weighty and leaves no such opportunity for choice.
<b>Least of us</b>	Vulnerable, poor	Though these terms indicate the same group, “the least of us” is more universally used in faith language.
<b>Wind and solar</b>	Sustainability	“Wind” and “solar” are more straightforward, visual, and understandable to Americans. For some people, “sustainability” means longevity and does not trigger thoughts of clean energy.
<b>People of faith</b>	Religion	This term is less technical and traditional; people tend to identify with a faith rather than with a religion.
<b>Damage to the climate</b>	Climate change Climate crisis Climate risk Global warming	While some advocates favor “climate change,” this term can seem politicized to others. Furthermore, “damage” implies elective causation, whereas “risk” and “crisis” do not. Thus, “damage” can be prevented and protected against.
<b>Create healthy and safe communities for our families</b>	Stop/mitigate/slow down climate change	This term focuses on the positive outcomes and personal benefits that motivate people, whereas “eliminating the undesirable effects of climate change” does not. Americans want solutions and a positive future for their families, neighbors, friends, and communities.

## KEY TALKING POINTS

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*Climate leadership from the pulpit is an effective means of climate outreach, but it's far from the only method of encouraging engagement. We can engage in daily climate discussions with our congregants, other clergy and denominational leaders, community members, policymakers at all levels, and our families. Remember these talking points when partaking in deeper conversations about climate change. Please note that adjustments may be required to accommodate the values and beliefs of your faith tradition or that of your audience.*

### **1. We are grateful for God's creation**

The created world is a reflection of God's glory. We express our gratitude when we fulfill our responsibility to be good stewards of this creation and the people within it.

### **2. We have a tradition of being leaders in social change**

Faith leaders have been the driving force behind every transformative movement in U.S. history. Today, this sense of mission is more needed than ever.

### **3. Climate change is an ethical and spiritual challenge**

While some may see climate change as a political, economic, or scientific issue, we first and foremost recognize it as a moral issue.

### **4. A faith voice is needed for the creation of climate solutions**

In a time when partisanship often paralyzes conversation, people of faith can act as trusted messengers for the common good.

### **5. We are called to respond to what we see around us**

Many of us are already witnessing the impacts of climate change firsthand. We realize that addressing climate issues is an essential part of our mission to care for our neighbors.

### **6. We have a responsibility to care for the least of us**

The poorest people and places bear the greatest consequences of climate change, yet they are the least prepared. We have the power to translate our compassion into action.

### **7. We will protect the home of future generations**

Through leadership on climate change, we commit to passing down a safer, healthier, and more stable world to our children.

### **8. Leadership on climate change will strengthen our congregation**

Climate solutions will create fellowship, enrich our personal faith, reduce operating costs, and help us to connect with younger audiences.

### **9. We have the opportunity to be an inspiration for others**

Leading by example allows us to drive positive change.

## ...AND COUNTERPOINTS ON FAITH AND CLIMATE

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*The following counterpoints can help to guide climate conversations away from uncertainty and debate and can be used to craft a truthful conversation.*

### **“Climate change does not affect me.”**

The causes and impacts of our changing climate are currently affecting families and communities across the nation and the world. Americans, including our congregants, are suffering from a higher frequency and intensity of disease, illness, and injury, as well as from the heightened levels of property and community damage that are brought on by pollution and severe weather. Climate change will accelerate if we do not curb excess carbon emissions and other sources of global warming pollution. Luckily, we can do something about these issues—we can support the creation of solutions. Of all the things we would love to leave to our children and to future generations, a healthy and secure place for them to raise children of their own may be the most important.

### **“Renewable energy will cost my worship facility more money.”**

Implementing renewable technology, such as installing solar panels on your facility’s roof, will save your congregation money sooner than you might think. The costs of solar and other forms of clean energy such as wind are dropping, and new financing options are proliferating; this means that these technologies are rapidly becoming more affordable, even for small congregations. Visit [www.BlessedTomorrow.org](http://www.BlessedTomorrow.org) for resources to get your congregation started.

### **“Why is faith important to climate leadership?”**

Faith leadership plays a unique and vital role in securing necessary climate solutions, as faith leaders have an opportunity to elevate and discuss climate change as a moral issue. In doing so, faith leaders are elevating the public discourse and engaging people of faith more deeply by tapping into their common values. Faith leaders are helping to reach new audiences who may not yet be engaged in these issues but who may be receptive to a moral or religious argument for action.

### **“I am more concerned about my (family/health/job) right now.”**

We all want our families to live in the best possible place; thus, we must take steps now toward a healthier future. Let’s ensure that our families and the least among us have clean air, clean water, and safe communities to live in, now and in the future, by moving away from the dirty fuels that make us sick and shifting to the use of safe and clean energy such as wind and solar. Let’s ensure that every breath we take is a healthy one. Caring for our common home is caring for our family, ourselves, and our health.

### **“My faith tradition does not have a stance on climate change.”**

Every faith tradition holds a moral call to climate action, whether it is formalized or not. Most traditions have an official statement on climate change (see resources from [GreenFaith](#) and [Interfaith Power & Light](#)), and all traditions maintain a clear call to care for the Earth in their respective scripture(s). In most cases, this call is linked to our responsibility to care for one another. Moreover, most traditions draw a direct correlation between humankind’s relationship with the divine and how we treat the environment. The degradation of creation or the failure to act as proper stewards demonstrates a schism between humankind and the divine. By fulfilling one’s duty to care for the climate, we adhere to the paramount moral call of all faiths.



# 15 STEPS: HOW TO CREATE YOUR OWN MESSAGE

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*The following steps outline a sequential process that can increase the effectiveness of your climate communications by connecting with people's values and providing answers that are grounded in their beliefs. One-on-one conversations can help us to more deeply understand the climate concerns and hopes of our congregations.*

- 1 Start with people, stay with people**  
If you want your congregation to care about climate change, then show that you care for them. Begin from their perspective, not yours. Infuse your conversation with tangible and relevant daily concerns. Connect with your audience before talking about climate issues, not the other way around, and keep bringing the conversation back to them.
- 2 Connect on common values**  
As a trusted leader, you are in a unique position to connect climate issues with your audience's core values. Open your audience's hearts and minds by discussing important values and showing your congregation that you share and honor their concerns. Connect first on the values that bring the congregation together—for example, faith, family, and community. This creates an emotional and motivating bond that paves the way for a productive discussion on climate change.
- 3 Acknowledge ambivalence**  
People approach climate from different perspectives and have varying levels of concern for climate issues. Moreover, we all have other priorities. Respect the different viewpoints of your congregation, and allow your congregants to have their own space. A simple line such as “we have a variety of views regarding climate change in our community” allows people to be comfortable and to listen with an open mind.
- 4 Make it real**  
Many Americans still view climate change as a distant concern. By focusing on local realities that people can see with their own eyes—simple, irrefutable facts about changing seasons or record weather in their own backyards, for example—faith leaders can make climate change real and relevant. One way to connect your audience to the reality of climate change impacts is to share the story of someone you have met who has been affected by climate change. Assume the realities—don't argue the science. Use a light hand with one or two examples and then quickly pivot to solutions.
- 5 Emphasize solutions**  
Many people do not yet realize the extent to which clean energy powers our lives or understand that it is now among the least expensive of our energy options. We also have proven policies that reduce carbon pollution while accelerating economic growth. There is a suite of economic, health, nature, and security co-benefits associated with these energy solutions (see <http://www.climatesolutions.org>). Keep your congregation engaged and listening by offering tangible examples of solutions that are *real* in the here-and-now.
- 6 Inspire and empower**  
Americans are repeatedly told that they cannot affect climate change when, in fact, the exact opposite is true. Every day, our words and actions—from the way we drive, to what we eat, to our ministry—can support solutions and inspire the people around us. One great way to accomplish this goal is to highlight how congregations or faith communities have benefited from climate action. We can lead on climate issues and so can our states, towns, congregations, families, and congregants!
- 7 Focus on personal benefit**  
Most Americans think that action on climate change comes with a cost to their lifestyles and to their pocketbooks. However, the opposite is true. We save money by saving energy; moreover, we are also healthier with more efficient transportation and more nutritious food. Always emphasize the personal benefits of climate solutions. And for people of faith, it is also critical to emphasize how climate solutions advance the values and mission of their faith tradition, whether by creating a more just and humane world or by using energy savings to reduce the congregation's operating costs, support mission work, or provide food to a local food bank.

## 8 End with your “ask”

Always empower your congregation with solutions. Encourage them to turn information and understanding into action. Give them examples, ideas, and steps that they can take to make a difference individually, within and beyond the congregation. Show them how behavior change is easier and more inexpensive than they might think.

## 9 Sequence matters

Research reveals that you can take the same set of six facts, arrange them in different ways, and end up with very different results. Connect on common values, acknowledge ambivalence, and then transition from impacts to solutions. Finally, focus on personal and congregational benefits. If you begin with the negative and impersonal, it is very difficult to get back to the positive, personal, and relevant. Follow the first eight steps in order.

## 10 Describe, don’t label

Use the language of your faith tradition in your climate communications. Furthermore, keep it simple. Jargon and labels confuse people. Avoid such terms as “mitigation,” “adaptation,” and others on this guide’s “replace” list. Rather, follow the “embrace” guidance. Remember, the most persuasive language is vivid, familiar, and descriptive.

## 11 Have at least 1 powerful fact from a trusted messenger

One or two facts that pack a great deal of emotional power will add significant weight to your message. Your own testimony is important, but so is that of other highly trusted messengers or organizations, as it can lend credibility and importance to your words. Use at least one memorable and relevant quote or fact taken from someone your audience trusts. Consider your denominational head, regional or missional leader, or another well-known leader such as Pope Francis.

## 12 Ditch doom and gloom

We’ve all heard advocates who attempt to spur people to action by portraying climate change in dire or fatalistic terms. Emphasizing this aspect promotes fatalism and emotional numbing, causing people to turn away and disengage. Instead, focus on the common good. Cast a vision of a restored creation, of a better and healthier world. Remind your congregation that we can work together to achieve this vision. Solutions, benefits, and personal empowerment are the messages you want your congregants to absorb.

## 13 Use stories to strengthen engagement

Stories allow your message to seem relevant and vivid. They help you to create connections with your congregation, allowing you to build bonds, enhance empathy, and open hearts and minds to new perspectives. Deepen your message by weaving in your personal story—tell them how you became concerned about climate change, for instance, and how you see it as connected to your faith tradition and as a central part of your ministry.

## 14 Stay above the fray

Focus on the big picture; that is, emphasize what is important to your congregation and faith tradition. Do not get caught in the trap of arguing or diving into details, and do not get sidetracked if an individual tries to poke holes in your thesis. Avoid demonizing opponents, blaming adversaries, and engaging in confrontations that can distract from your message, cause you to lose your audience, or reduce your effectiveness.

## 15 Message discipline is critical

Stay true to your talking points. Repeat your key points. Do not explain the same thing in different ways—this can be more confusing than enabling. Follow the steps outlined in this guide, and be consistent across all messaging platforms. Use climate messengers and integrate climate messaging in all ministries, but be sure to tailor your message to your audience.

# PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER: A SAMPLE SERMON

*The following is a hypothetical example of how Reverend Eva Taylor used our 15 steps to craft a sermon on faith and climate to engage her Christian congregation. Additional resources can be found for other faith traditions [here](#).*

## 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.

## Step 6: Inspire and empower

Rev. Taylor motivates the congregation by conveying the success of a solution that has already been adopted.

Brothers and sisters,

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 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.

# HOW FAITH LEADERS CAN ENGAGE

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## HOW TO ELEVATE CLIMATE LEADERSHIP

The work and witness of faith leaders plays a vital role in addressing the causes and consequences of climate change. Faith leaders are inspiring many others to create a more just and healthy world.

By creating awareness and understanding, by educating program and policy leadership figures, by reducing pollution and installing clean energy systems in their congregations, and through community outreach, faith leaders lead by example and help prepare their congregations for climate impacts. Faith leaders can help communities and policymakers to understand that climate solutions are a matter of moral leadership and that such solutions are crucial if we wish to properly care for our families, future generations, and the least among us.

# 1

### **Institutionalize climate as a priority.**

- Work with your denominational leadership to link climate issues to your tradition's core values.
- Institutionalize climate as a key ministry and a visible priority for your denomination's leadership.
- Infuse climate concerns into all of your ministries: children, youth, disaster relief, regions, women, etc.

# 2

### **Become climate literate.**

- Whether you have been learning and talking about climate change for some time or are just getting started, it is useful to increase your knowledge about climate impacts and solutions in order to maintain your climate literacy.
- Include climate education in your clergy formation, leadership training, and other leadership development programs.
- There are a number of trusted agencies and NGOs that highlight the causes and impacts of climate change on faith communities and beyond. Find them at [BlessedTomorrow.org](https://BlessedTomorrow.org).

# 3

### **Reduce your impact.**

- Create a new "green team" or designate an existing group within your congregation to be responsible for finding and implementing ways to reduce carbon pollution.
- There are many ways to conserve energy in your facility and operations—and they all save money over time. Use energy wisely, turn off lights and replace inefficient bulbs with LED bulbs, put timers on thermostats, and purchase renewable energy. A comprehensive list of ways to reduce your impact can be found at [BlessedTomorrow.org/impact](https://BlessedTomorrow.org/impact) and [GreenFaith](https://GreenFaith.org).



## 4 Engage your congregation.

- Talk about climate issues in sermons and other congregational communications, and help your congregants to do the same with their friends and families.
- Ask your congregants to participate in the "green team" and help your organization reduce its footprint.
- Encourage your congregants to ride-share to services and reduce waste at congregational events.
- Install bike racks where appropriate and encourage active transportation.
- Hold thoughtful events to encourage dialogue and the exchange of ideas regarding how to elevate congregational climate leadership.

## 5 Lead in your community.

- Faith leaders have the opportunity to ensure that their communities benefit from a healthy, restored creation by helping to create or support climate solutions, preparedness programs, and institutional policies, both locally and regionally.
- Collaborate with other community leaders to maximize impact; engage in consortium purchasing and collective awareness and action efforts.

## 6 Elevate your voice.

- Learn from your clergy network by sharing successes, ideas, and best practices.
- Give a presentation or workshop at a regional or national conference.
- Submit articles or op-eds to news outlets, write a blog on faith and climate, or offer to be a media spokesperson.

## 7 Support collective action.

- Thousands of faith leaders are already leading on this issue, but we need many more to generate the necessary impact.
- Elevate and amplify faith leadership and collective action. This will raise climate as a moral and religious issue to new audiences—including policymakers—and increase awareness of the work done by denominations, communions, fellowships, and multi-religious organizations that are dedicated to climate stewardship.
- Collaborate with others on outreach efforts for action—including efforts to divest from fossil fuels and invest in clean energy—and help influence the principles of policy design.

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