What’s Love Got to Do With It?
The Faith Response to Climate Change

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About Me

Los Angeles air quality, 1974 – now.

Amount of VOCs dropped by 98% since 1960. Ozone levels 40% of 1970 levels.
Religious-Environmental Advocate

Director, Nebraska Interfaith Power & Light
& Climate Change Resource Specialist, University of Nebraska- Lincoln
Outline

- The Vision
- Where are we?
- How did we get here?
- How do we get out of here?
- Are we moving yet?
- What’s love got to do with it?
The Vision
Wayfarer's Chapel, Palos Verdes, California
Deuteronomy 8: 7-11

For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of flowing streams, with springs and underground waters welling up in valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, a land where you may eat bread without scarcity, where you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron and from whose hills you may mine copper.

You shall eat your fill and bless the Lord your God for the good land he has given you.
What if...

Every congregation in Nebraska held the care of creation as a central part of its ministry?
Ecologically-themed worship services
Farmer’s Markets
Creation-Based Rituals
Spirituality of Nature
Green Buildings
Advocacy for environmental stewardship
Where Are We? Climate Change
Climate Change Impacts

Health Impacts
- Heat-related deaths
- Infectious diseases
- Air quality-respiratory illnesses

Agriculture
- Crop yields
- Irrigation demand
- Pest management

Forest Impacts
- Health, composition and productivity

Water Resources
- Changes in precipitation, water quality, and water supply

Coastal Areas
- Erosion and inundation of coastal lands
- Cost of protecting vulnerable lands

Wildlife
- Loss of diversity
- Species range shifts

Temperature

Precipitation

Sea Level Rise
How Do We Know?

Atmospheric CO2 levels are higher than they have been in 800,000 years.
Our Growing Season has Lengthened

Observed changes in the frost-free season. For the Great Plains, the average increase in the frost-free season is 10 days. (National Climate Assessment Report, 2014)
**Figure 1.** Comparison of the 1990 and 2012 USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Maps. Image credit: USDA and Arbor Day Foundation.
Temperature Increase Predictions

- 1900 to 2008 observations
- 1900 to 2000 simulation
- Lower emissions scenario
- Higher emissions scenario
- Even higher emissions scenario

Graph showing temperature increase predictions over time, with different scenarios indicated by different colors.
Temperature Increase Predictions

[Maps showing temperature increase predictions for different time periods and scenarios (B1, A1B, A2)]

°F
Greatest Risk: Decreasing Water Resources

Platte River Watershed
Extreme Weather

Floods, droughts, rising sea levels, extreme precipitation
Boston Snowfall 2015

- 110.6 inches of snow = 9.22 feet
- All time record
- Transportation routes closed for days on end. Workers could not get to their jobs.
- “People are going to lose their homes.”
Indian Heat Wave, May-June 2015

2,500 deaths. Temperature up to 117; heat index up to 143.6.
Soon to enter fifth year of historic drought.
Worst drought in 500 years.
Reservoirs have one year of water left; groundwater supplies shrinking.
Valley & Butte Fires

Northern California, September 2015
Over 800 homes lost. One death.
Syrian Civil War, 2011- present

Linked to extreme drought, 2006-2009.

Current migrant crisis has roots in this drought.

Nebraska Drought, Summer 2012

Severe or greater drought in 2012 impacted 67% of cattle production and 70-75% of corn and soybean production nationwide. (USDA)

By mid-century, the conditions of the 2012 summer will become typical.
Super typhoon HAIYAN
(locally known as YOLANDA)

Haiyan hit the Philippines on Nov. 8 as a Category 5 storm with maximum sustained winds of 146 m.p.h. as well as wind gusts over 170 m.p.h.

- 11.8 MILLION people affected
- 921,212 PEOPLE displaced
- 4,460 REPORTED DEATHS
- 995 EVACUATION CENTERS
- 345,834 PEOPLE

OCHA totals as of Nov. 14

SOURCE: United Nations, OCHA

RICH CLABAUGH /STAFF
Typhoon Haiyan
November 2013, Philippines
What does it mean to be a faith community in the era of climate change?
How did we get here?

- Our Christian Theological Inheritance
Dualism

**Plato** (4th Century BCE)
- Ideas as ultimate reality

**Gnosticism** (2nd Century CE)
- Spirit is God, matter is evil
Origen 182-254 CE

Embodiment as a safety net from nothingness
Created world is the intended dwelling place of humans, and the locus of the covenant between God and creation established through the incarnation of Jesus Christ.
Who won?

Origen

Heaven, soul, spirit, eternal life, God, male

Earth, body, death, evil, sin, female
Traditional Christian Theology

- Dominion theology
- Original sin
- Virgin birth
Spirituality of Ascent

Motif of the upward journey

*The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, John Climacus

Ascent of Mount Carmel, St. John of the Cross

Seven Storey Mountain, Thomas Merton

12th century icon, St. Catherine’s monastery, Egypt
How Do We Get Out of Here?

Wayfarer’s Chapel, Palos Verdes, California
Reclaim Incarnational Theology
Embrace a Liberation Theology of Creation
Reclaim Eschatalogical Hope
A New Wild
A New Wild
A New Wild
A New Wild
Are We Moving Yet?

Yes.
New Religious Metaphors

“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom”

“The peace of the rivers be with you, the peace of the oceans too”
A Fossil-Free World

Omaha Public Power District
- Lowers CO2 emissions by 49%
- Stops burning coal at North Omaha plant by 2023
- Renews wind contracts
- Increases energy efficiency programs
- Keeps renewables at 33%

Lincoln Electric System
- 48% Renewables by 2016

Nebraska Public Power District
- Hydrogen fuel co-generation plant
- Will cut CO2 emissions by 50%
Divestment from Fossil Fuels

- Rockefeller Fund
- Stanford University
- Guardian Media Group
- United Church of Christ
- Episcopal Diocese of Nebraska
Nebraska churches make saving the earth part of their mission

By Michael O’Connor / World-Herald staff writer | Posted: Saturday, September 12, 2015 12:30 am

Some members of First United Methodist Church get more than a sermon when they attend Sunday services.

They pick up fresh tomatoes and other produce delivered by a small Iowa farm that members of the Omaha church help support. The financial support for the farm — which follows organic farming practices that are easy on the land — is an example of steps a growing number of churches are taking to protect the environment.

The efforts here and nationally are rooted in faith and range from installing solar panels to divesting from fossil fuel investments. Clergy and lay people say Pope Francis’ environmental encyclical issued this summer will give the movement a boost.

Kim Morrow, leader of a Nebraska interfaith group addressing climate change, said the effort is grounded in a belief that the Earth is a gift from God that must be protected and that climate change poses a threat.

“There is a sense our fellow humans are in danger, and we have a moral responsibility to respond,” said Morrow, executive director of the Nebraska affiliate of the Interfaith Power & Light.
61% of respondents think the state should develop a plan for adapting to climate change.

80% support renewable energy development in Nebraska.

Most rural Nebraskans have undertaken various energy conservation measures on their home.
Pope Francis’s Encyclical

‘Laudato Si’
Released June, 2015

- The intimate relationship between the poor and the fragility of the planet
- Everything in the world is connected
- We must seek other ways of understanding the economy and progress
Religious-Environmental Movement

- Interfaith Power & Light
- GreenFaith
- OurVoices.net
- Catholic Climate Covenant
- Lutherans Restoring Creation
- Blessed Tomorrow
White House Honors Faith & Climate Leaders as Champions of Change

July 20, 2015
Aims to cut CO2 emissions nationwide by 30% by 2030

Part of what the U.S. brings to the international negotiating table

Nebraska has joined 15 states in suing the EPA to block this.
“This year, in Paris, has to be the year that the world finally reaches an agreement to protect the one planet that we’ve got while we still can.”

– President Barack Obama
What’s Love Got to Do With It?
Everything.

◆ Love wins.

◆ The Christian tradition has taught a message of love in the face of nearly insurmountable circumstances from the very beginning.

◆ We must greet the climate crisis with love.
“As much as we need to fully recognize the harsh truth of the climate crisis, we must just as fully give thanks for the goodness and beauty that we love in the world.”

-- Tim DeChristopher

Crude oil from tar sands mining operation, Alberta, Canada.
A Spiritual and Cultural Transformation

"I used to think the top environmental problems facing the world were global warming, environmental degradation and ecosystem collapse, and that we scientists could fix those problems with enough science. But I was wrong. The real problem is not those three items, but greed, selfishness and apathy. And for that we need a spiritual and cultural transformation. And we scientists don’t know how to do that. We need your help."

--Gus Speth, founder of the Natural Resources Defense Council and former dean of the Yale School of Forestry, talking to religious leaders.
“Benediction”
by Michael Forsberg
Nebraska Interfaith Power & Light

Facilitating the faith community’s response to climate change through education, programs and advocacy.

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Roundtable Discussions on Climate Change

**Faith Communities**  
September 17-18

**Urban & Rural Communities**  
September 22

**College/University Campuses**  
October 1

**Wildlife, Ecosystems and Ecosystem Services**  
October 5-6

**Human Health in Nebraska**  
*Public lecture*: October 6, 4pm, UNMC.  
Roundtable: October 7, 9am-4pm, UNMC.

**Forests and Fire in Nebraska**  
*Public lecture*: October 13, 7pm Hardin Hall.  
Roundtable: October 14, Innovation Campus.

**Agriculture, Food and Water**  
October 20th, 9:30-4pm, East Campus Union

**Energy Availability, Use and Management in Nebraska**  
October 22, 9:30-4pm, East Campus Union