



Michael Forsberg

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

Rev. Kim Morrow, Director, Nebraska Interfaith Power & Light  
& Climate Change Resource Specialist, UNL  
September 17, 2015



## 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

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# 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?
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# 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.

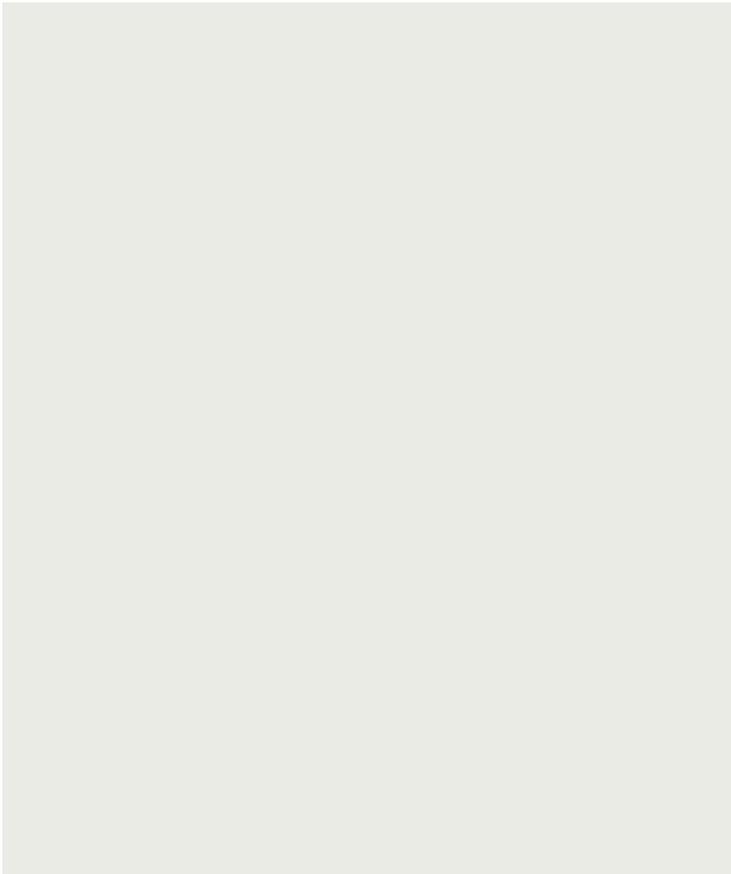


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*What if...*

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

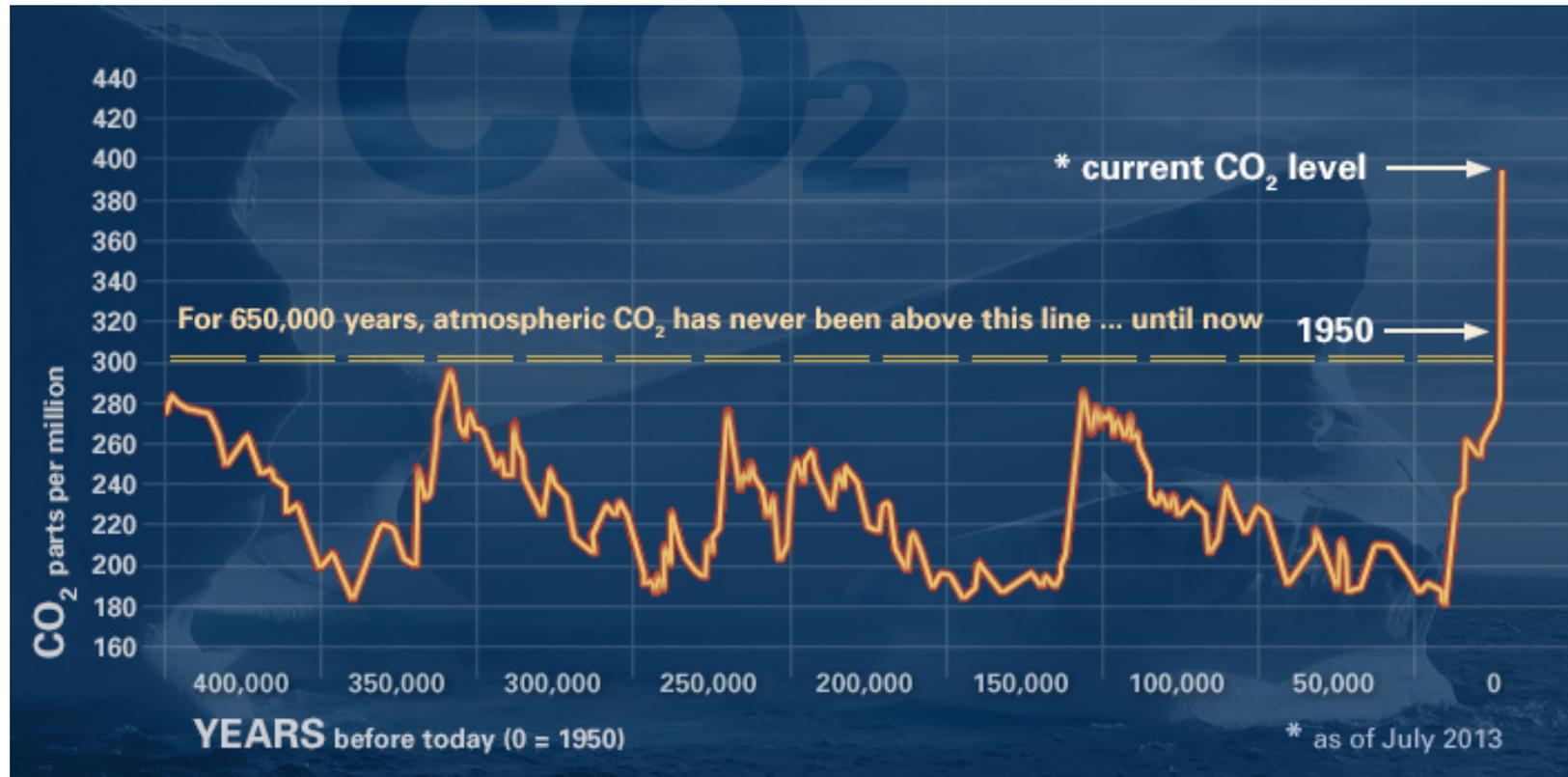




Where Are We? Climate Change

# Climate Change Impacts

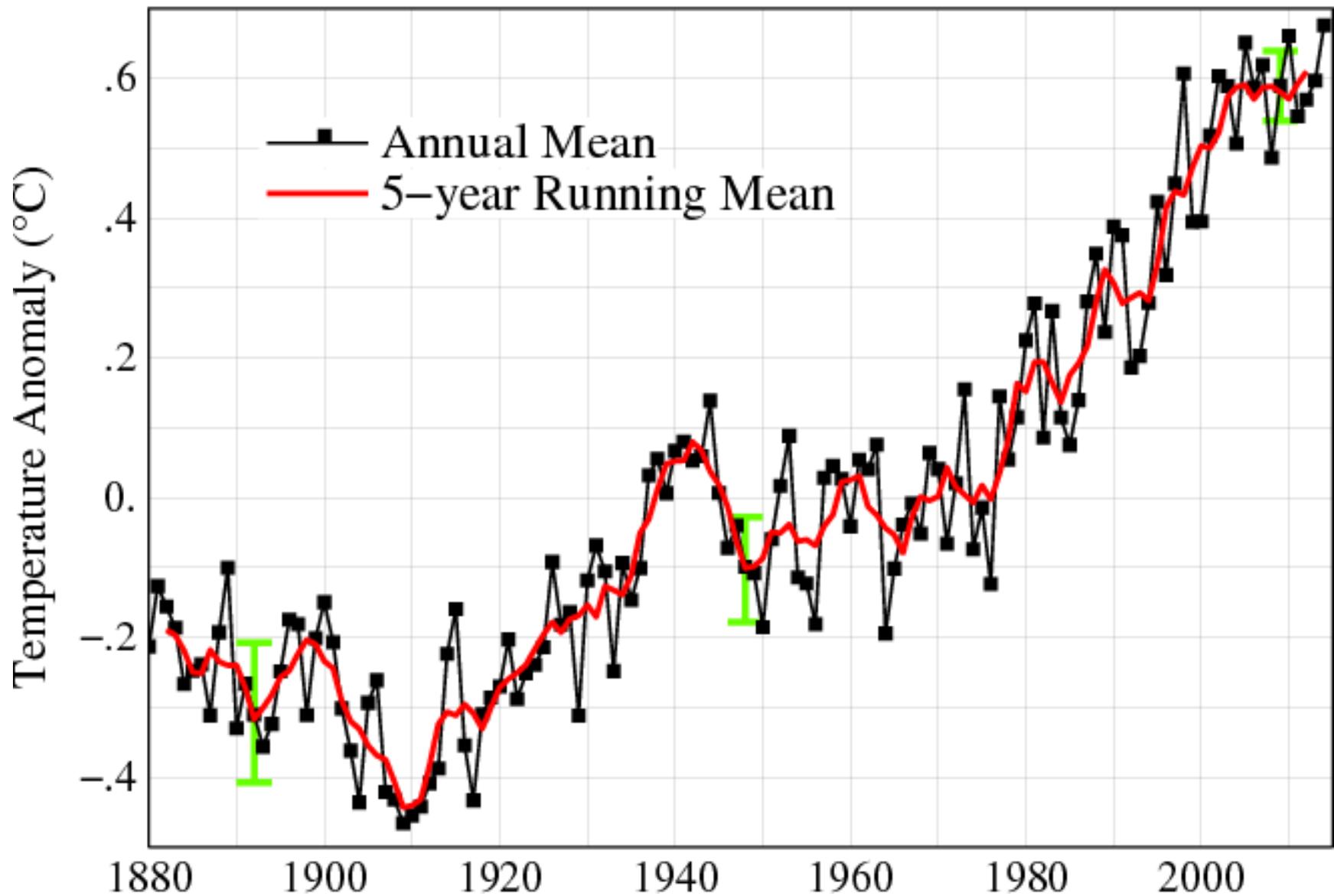




## How Do We Know?

Atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> levels are higher than they have been in 800,000 years.

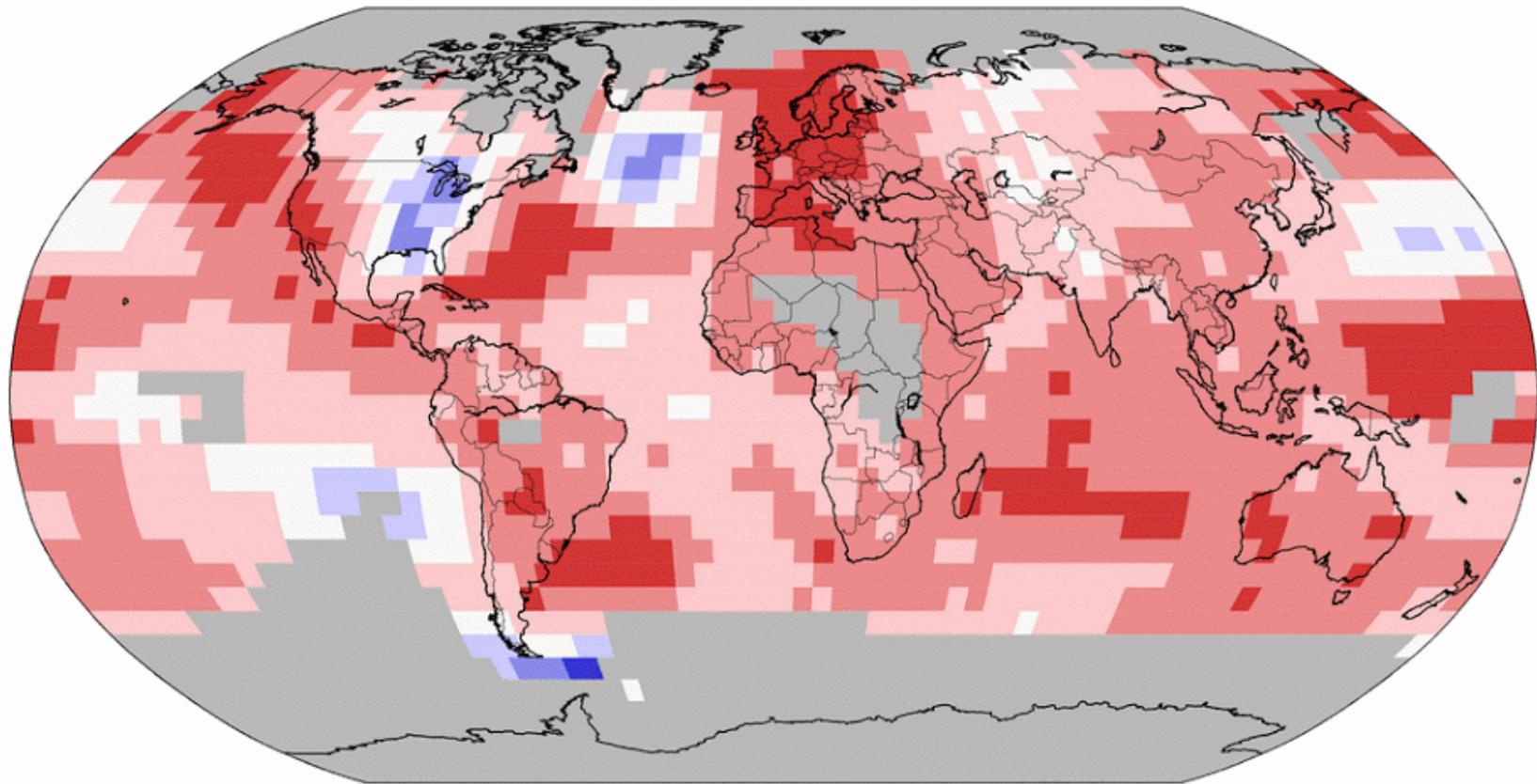
## Global Land–Ocean Temperature Index



# Land & Ocean Temperature Percentiles Jan–Dec 2014

NOAA's National Climatic Data Center

Data Source: GHCN–M version 3.2.2 & ERSST version 3b



  
Record  
Coldest

  
Much  
Cooler than  
Average

  
Cooler than  
Average

  
Near  
Average

  
Warmer than  
Average

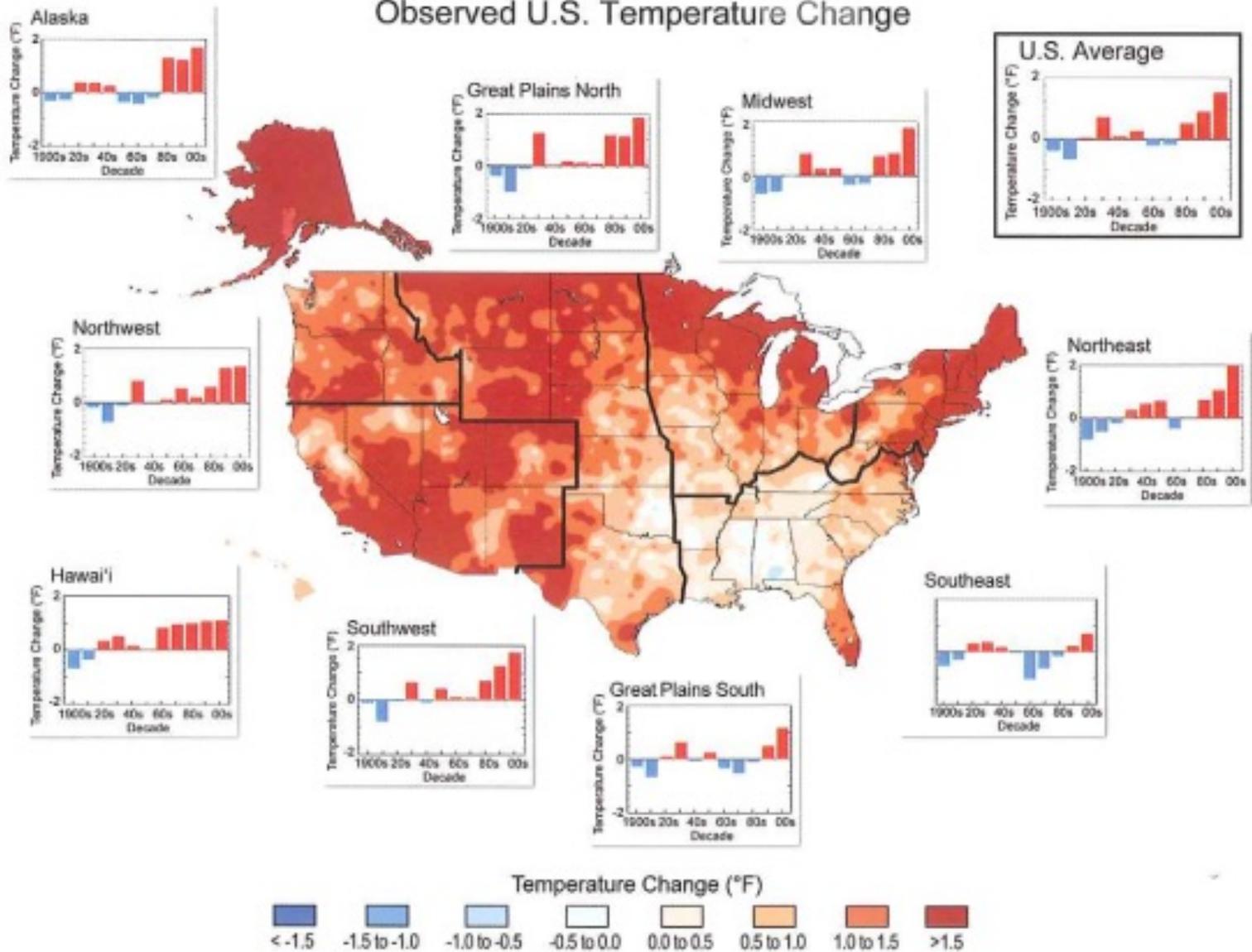
  
Much  
Warmer than  
Average

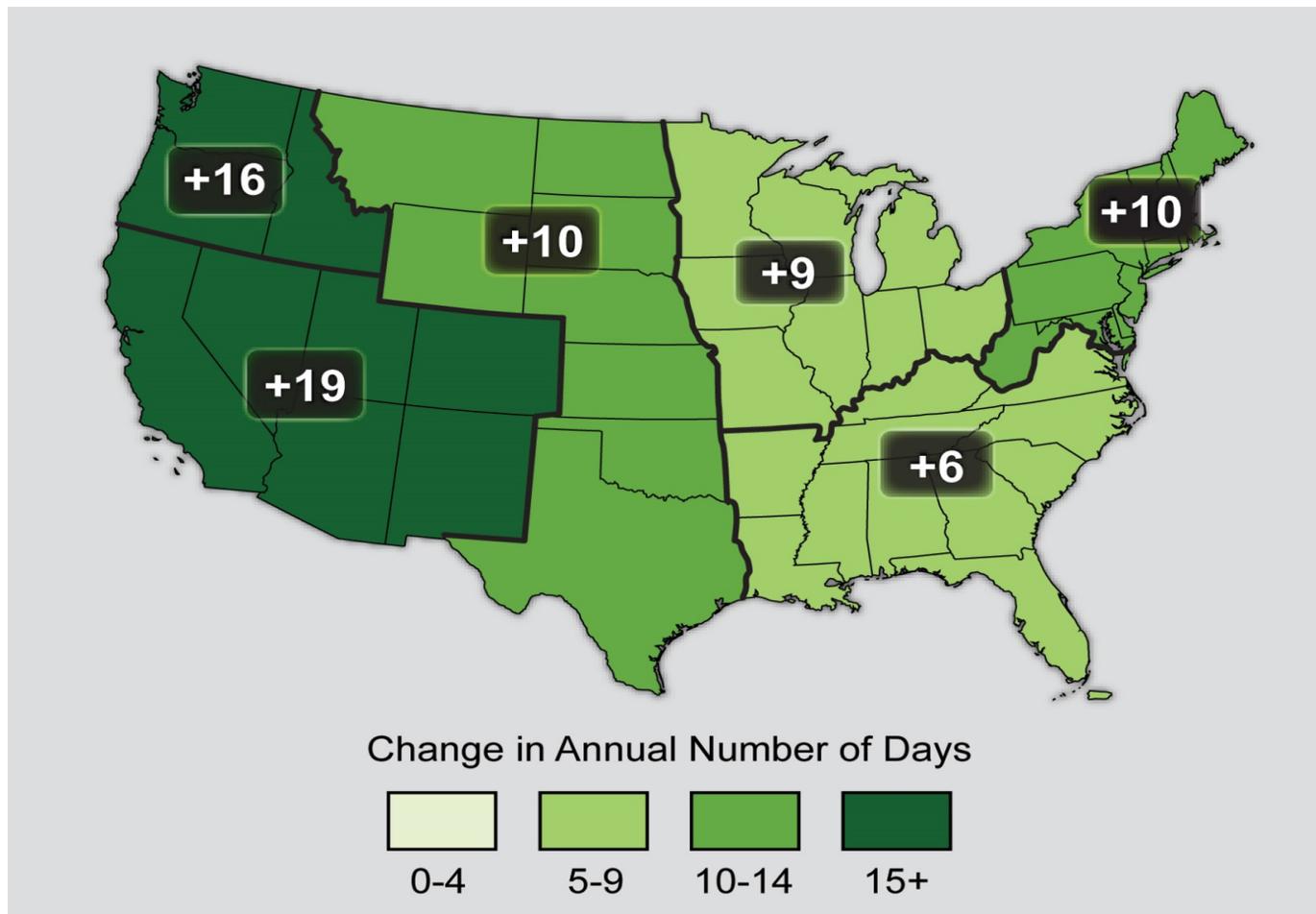
  
Record  
Warmest



Mon Jan 12 19:34:46 EST 2015

# Observed U.S. Temperature Change



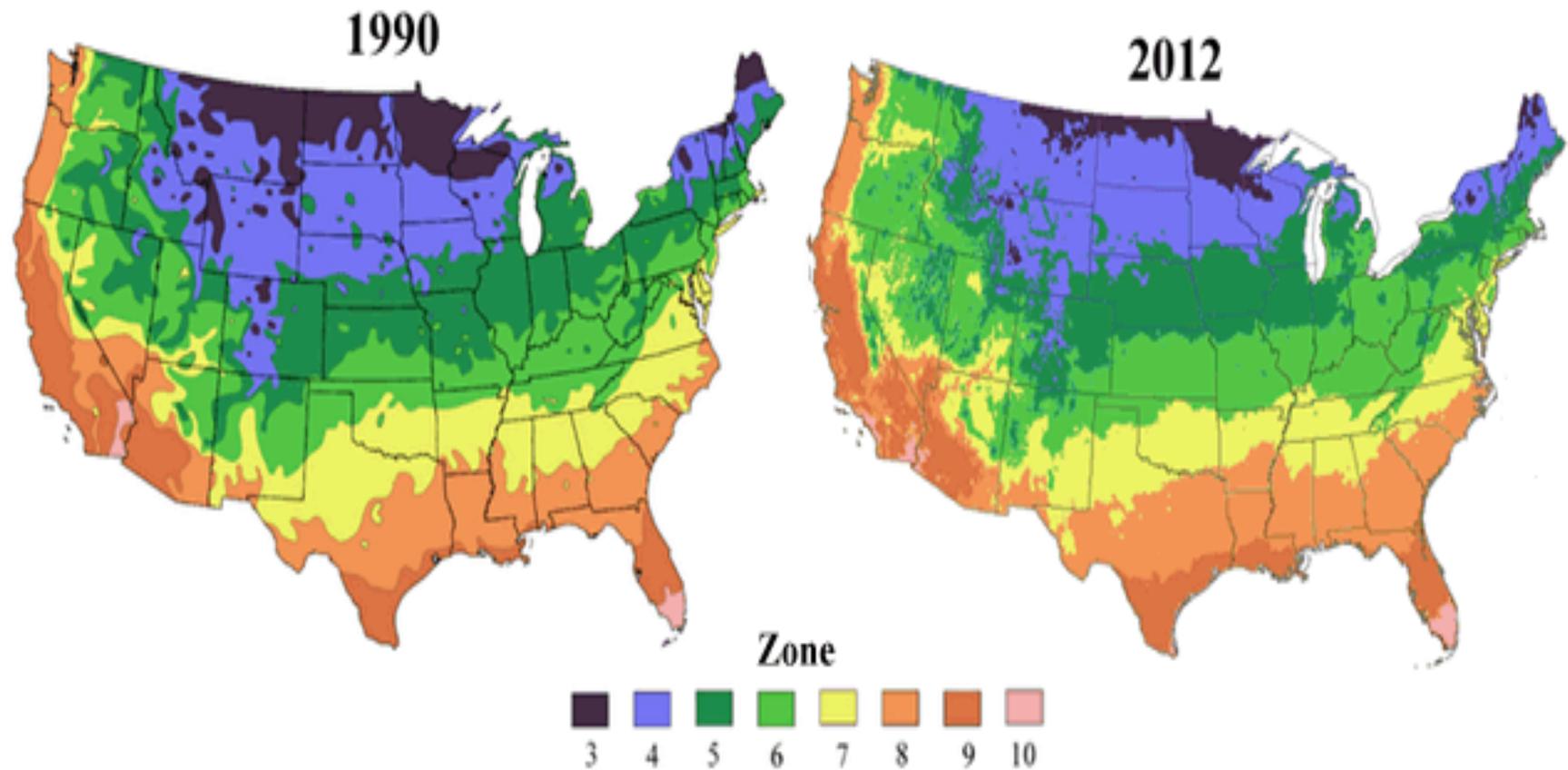


## Our Growing Season has Lengthened

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)

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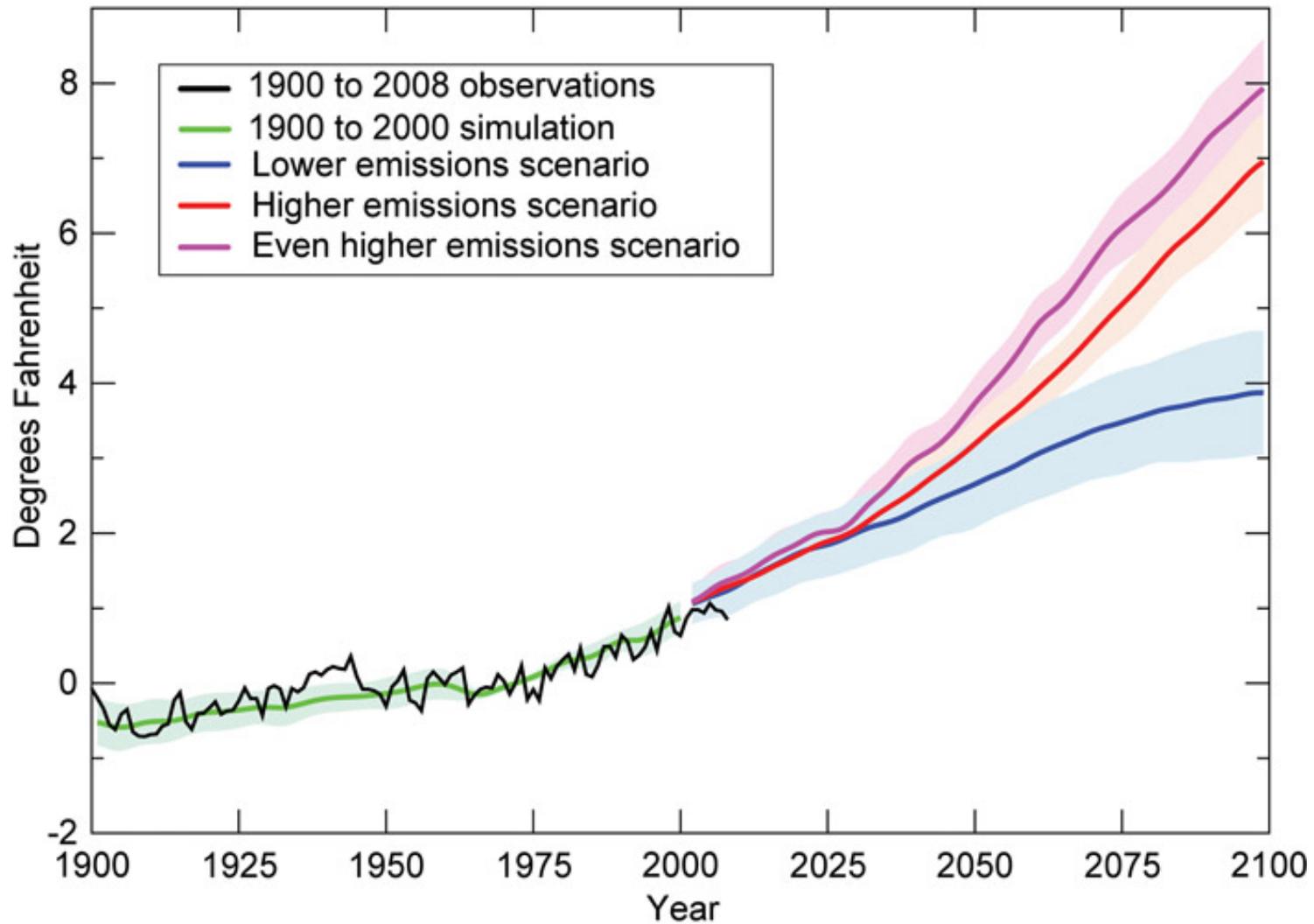
## USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Maps



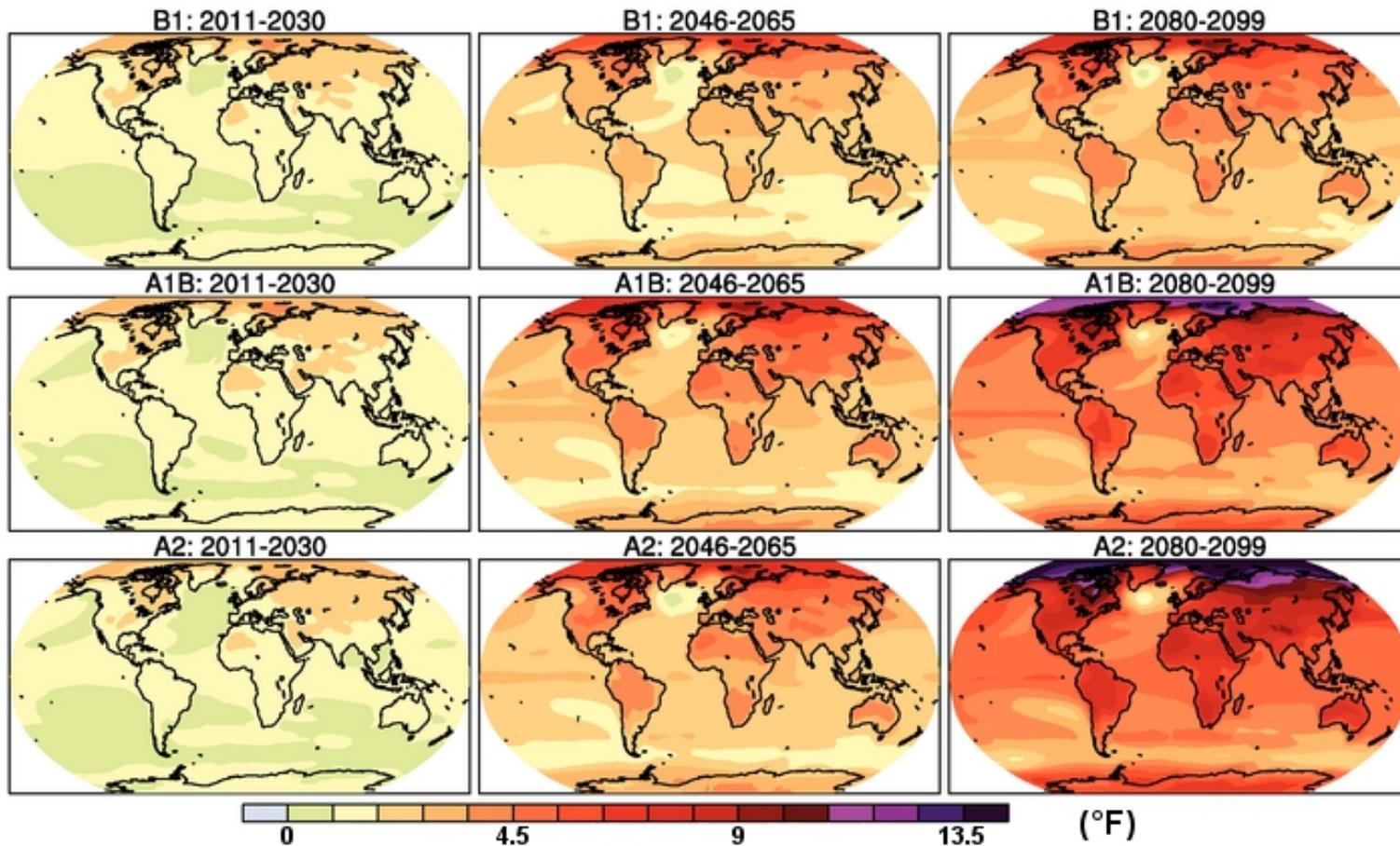
**Figure 1.** Comparison of the 1990 and 2012 USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Maps. Image credit: [USDA](#) and [Arbor Day Foundation](#).

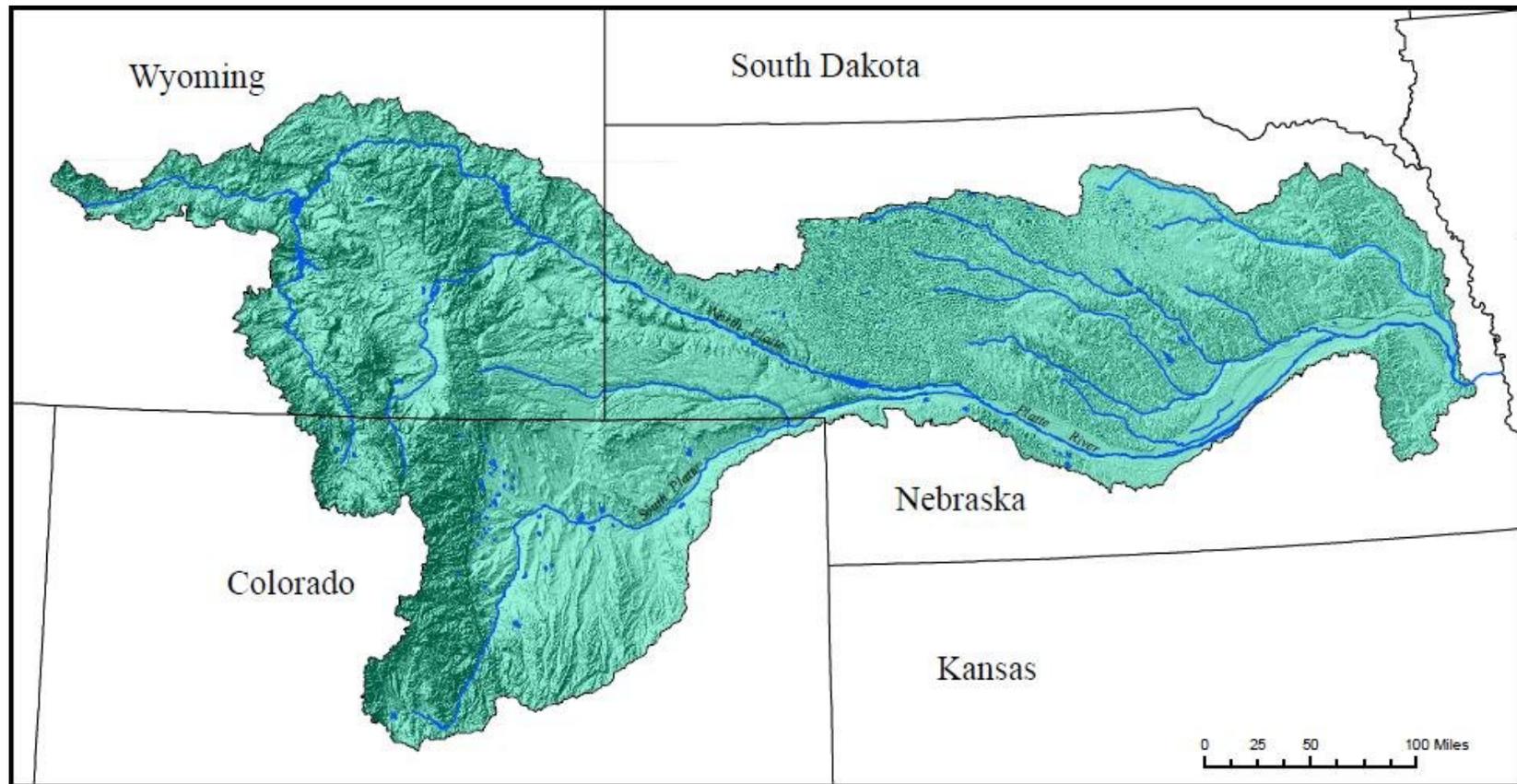
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## Temperature Increase Predictions



# Temperature Increase Predictions





## 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.

# California Drought, 2015

- ◆ 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.



*New York Times, March 2, 2015*



## 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

HOUSING  
**345,834** PEOPLE

*OCHA totals as of Nov. 14*



SOURCE: United Nations, OCHA

RICH CLABAUGH /STAFF

2013



# Typhoon Haiyan

November 2013, Philippines





© AFP/Getty Images



What does it mean to be a faith community in the era of climate change?

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# How did we get here?

- ▣ Our Christian Theological Inheritance



# Dualism

**Plato** (4<sup>th</sup> Century BCE)

◆ Ideas as ultimate reality

**Gnosticism** (2<sup>nd</sup> Century CE)

◆ Spirit is God, matter is evil



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# Origen 182-254 CE

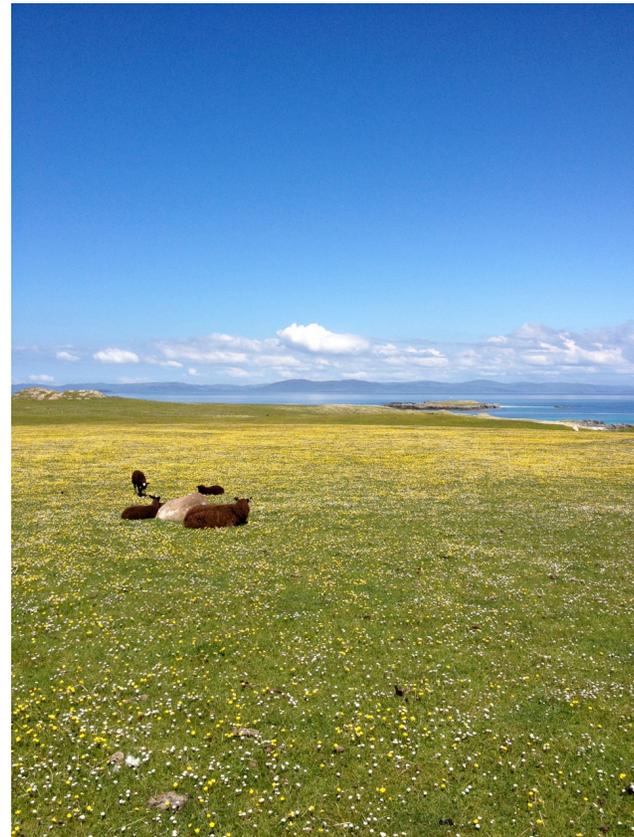
Embodiment as a safety  
net from nothingness



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# Irenaeus 130-202 CE

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



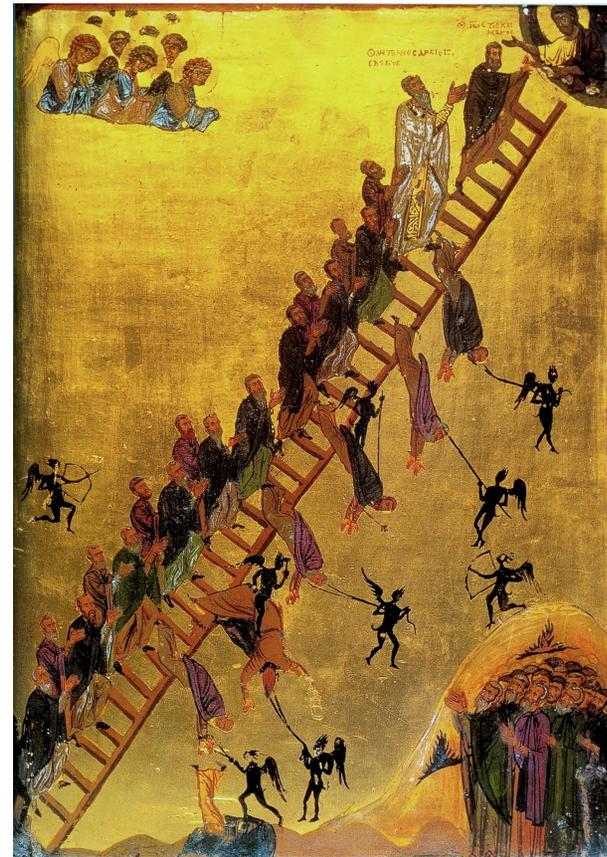
# Spirituality of Ascent

Motif of the upward journey

*The Ladder of Divine Ascent*,  
John Climacus

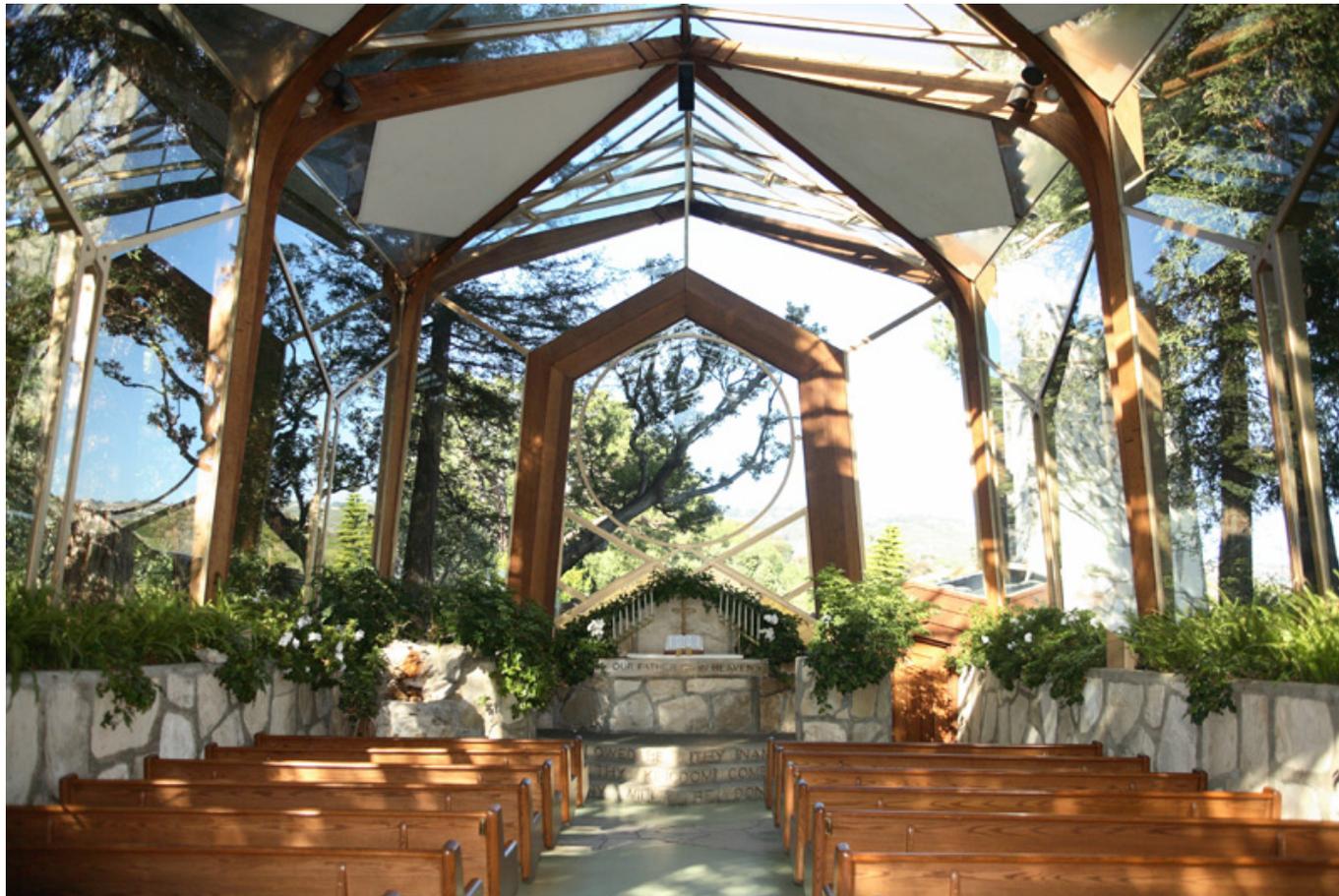
*Ascent of Mount Carmel*, St.  
John of the Cross

*Seven Storey Mountain*,  
Thomas Merton

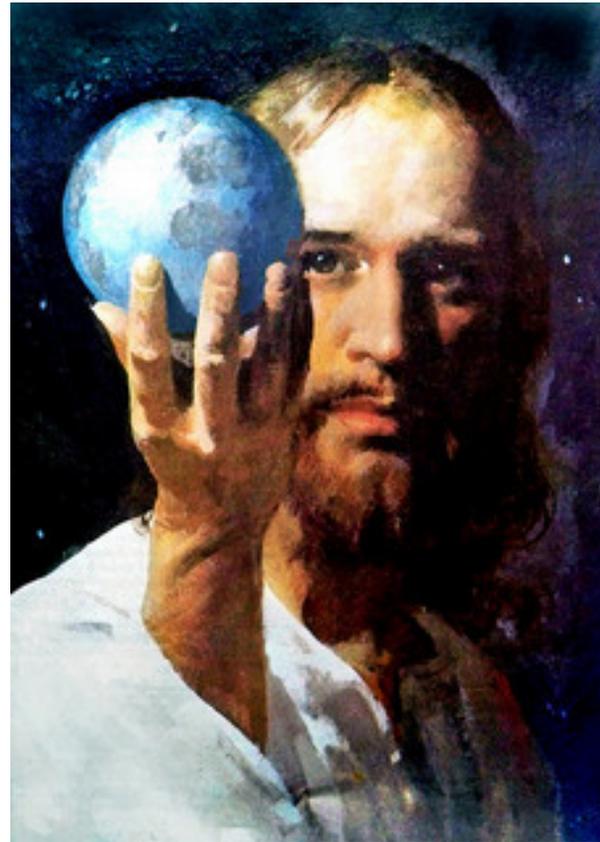


12<sup>th</sup> century icon, St. Catherine's monastery, Egypt

# How Do We Get Out of Here?



Wayfarer's Chapel, Palos Verdes, California



Reclaim Incarnational Theology

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Embrace a Liberation Theology of  
Creation

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Reclaim Eschatological Hope

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A New Wild

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A New Wild



# A New Wild



A New Wild

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# A New Wild

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Are We Moving Yet?

Yes.

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# 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**

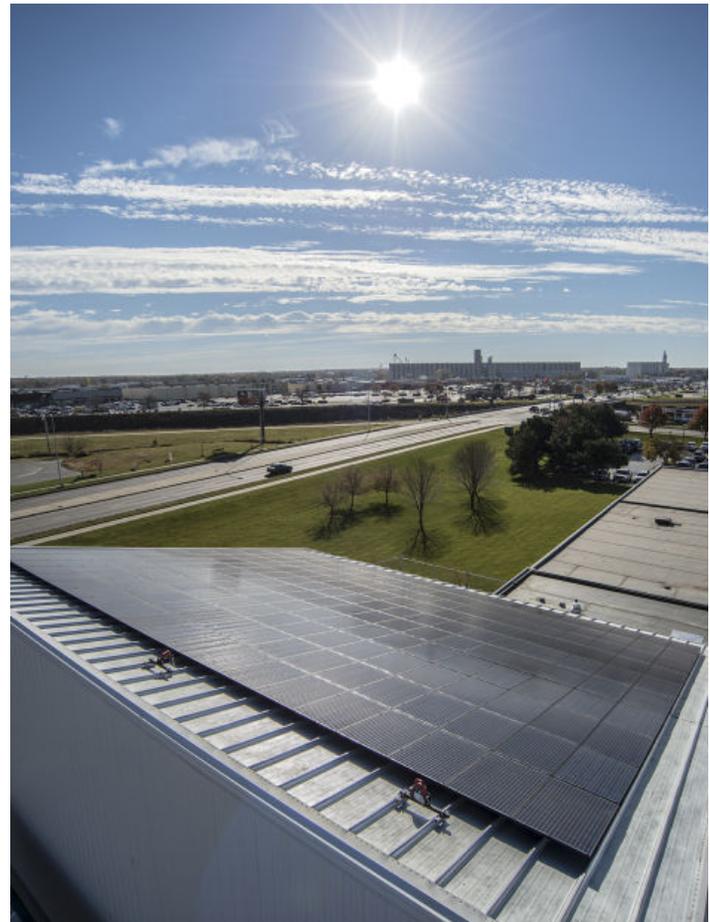
- Lowers CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 49%
- Stops burning coal at North Omaha plant by 2023
- Renews wind contracts
- Increases energy efficiency programs
- Keeps renewables at 33%

## **Lincoln Electric System**

- 48% Renewables by 2016

## **Nebraska Public Power District**

- Hydrogen fuel co-generation plant
- Will cut CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 50%



# Divestment from Fossil Fuels

- Rockefeller Fund
- Stanford University
- Guardian Media Group
- United Church of Christ
- Episcopal Diocese of Nebraska



# Sustainable Congregations

## 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.



### Rolling Acres Farm 2

Denise O'Brien shares friendly greetings with some of her customers.

# The Rural Nebraska Poll

- ◆ 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.



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# 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

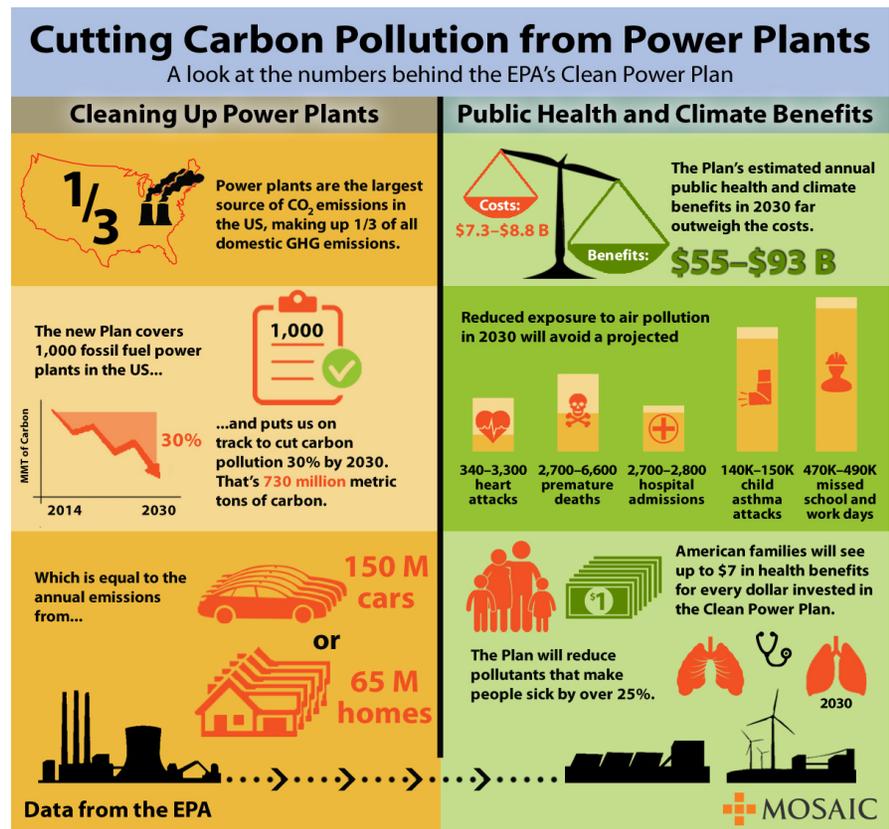
July 20, 2015

# EPA Clean Power Plant Rule

Aims to cut CO<sub>2</sub> 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.

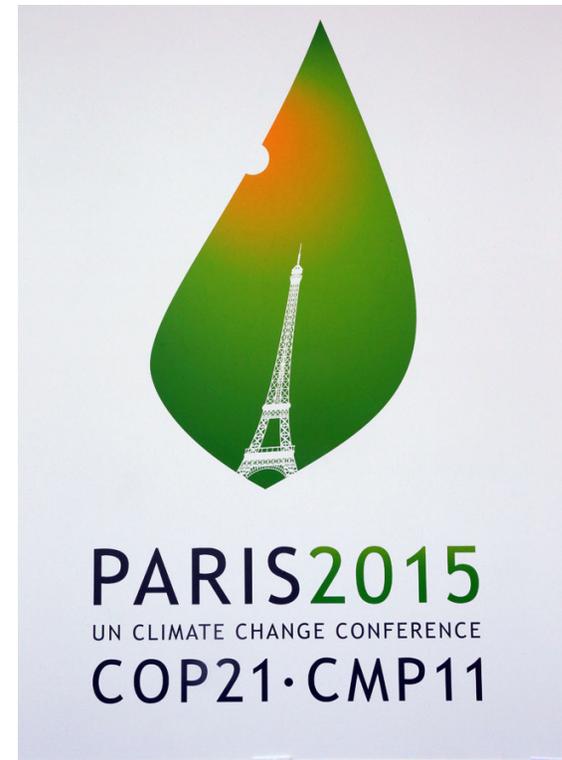


# U.N. Climate Change Conference

Council of the Parties 21,  
Paris, December 2015

*"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.



# The Prophetic Voice: Truth + 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 20<sup>th</sup>, 9:30-4pm, East Campus Union

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

