

Talking about climate change in a faith setting

Developed by Joy Bergey for PA Interfaith Power & Light, January 2014

It's a challenge to identify climate change, since you can't see, smell, or taste it, the way you can with dirty air or water. Climate change is invisible, with small changes already occurring that in isolation seem insignificant. And yet these small changes will cascade into serious impacts in the decades to come, and some – such as increasingly frequent floods and storms – are already here.

Why preach about climate change? Many think of this as an environmental problem. But it goes much deeper. As it unfolds, climate change will bring about great disruptions to the lives of people everywhere. And it will hurt first, and hurt worst, those least able to care for themselves – the poor. It will hurt our children and grandchildren.

A quick refresher on climate change science: The earth's atmosphere is made up of oxygen that we breathe in, carbon dioxide that we breathe out, and other gasses. Our energy for electricity and transportation comes largely from coal, natural gas, and oil—and its derivative, gasoline. We call these **fossil fuels** because they formed from the ancient remains of plants and animals. When we burn fossil fuels, we get energy to move our cars and power our houses. All good things....but we also get carbon dioxide as a byproduct.

We've burned so much fossil fuel in the last 150 years that we've created a huge excess of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. This excess acts like the glass over a greenhouse, holding in heat. This is why carbon dioxide is called a greenhouse gas. Think of all this carbon as a blanket warming up the earth. Average global temperatures are increasing. The land and oceans will keep warming. This overall warming is leading to instability in the climate with dramatic disruptions...more droughts, more floods, more Nor'easters, andmore intense hurricanes. Think Superstorm Sandy.

So our actions are leading to changes in the weather patterns. But this can be reversed. If we act responsibly, sooner rather than later, starting now, we can slow down climate change and leave a safer world for our children. We have the know-how—and the responsibility—to do this.

What can we as citizens do right now to make a difference?

Pennsylvania is the third worst state in the country in terms of the amount of industrial carbon pollution we create. As such, we have special responsibility to take action.

The largest source of industrial carbon pollution in the country is power plants. And Pennsylvania has some of the oldest, dirtiest power plants in the country.

Many individuals are acting, but since Congress, Governor Corbett, and the State Legislature all refuse to do their part on climate change, the responsibility has fallen on the President.

Fortunately, the President has a plan. Following laws passed (and renewed) with huge bipartisan majorities, he has directed the Environmental Protection Agency to proposed a strong new standard that would limit carbon pollution from any new power plants when they are built. The standard has been reviewed and commented on by industry, individuals, and scientists. This plan is facing fierce pressure among some Congress, so it's up to us citizens to show all of our elected leaders that we stand in favor of responsible action on climate change that will support the changes we're making in our congregations and our lives.

Each person can sign a postcard urging EPA Administrator McCarthy to resist the pushback and enact this strong standard as soon as possible.

Please sign a postcard and leave it here today. We will see that they are delivered both to the EPA administrator, and to our PA Senators in Washington.