

# **West Virginia Sustainable Energy Charter**

A West Virginia Interfaith Global Climate Change Campaign Initiative

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This draft document has been prepared as a contribution to the West Virginia Global Climate Change Campaign by the steering committee members and participants as a part of the West Virginia Council of Churches environmental initiative.

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# Summary

Because we have a responsibility towards all of God's family and creation, therefore we affirm:

1. There is scientific consensus that global warming is already affecting weather and climate. Furthermore, this warming is, in significant part, caused by human activity. By far the largest cause is burning of fossil fuels. This destructive manipulation of the environment is unprecedented in human history.
2. Impacts will become much worse over time. These include more frequent and severe weather events, heating and drought, wild land fires, reduction of agricultural productivity, immense ecological destruction, massive species extinctions, and serious and spreading human health problems.
3. Power plant emissions and automotive emissions pose a growing threat to human health. We have a responsibility towards our own children and grandchildren as well as generations to come. Their health tomorrow is affected by the harmful air pollution that is produced today.
4. The ethical imperative is clear – we must reduce these harms. We must respond with a powerful yet straightforward ethic of responsibility. Present and future human wellbeing and ecosystem health are at stake.
5. Ethical and religious norms of justice, security, family, peace, stewardship, reverence and respect are served by this sustainability ethic.
6. The sustainable energy ethic supports giving sustainable energy significant preference in public policy, and transitioning from use of fossil fuel into sustainable alternatives for our energy.
7. The transition to sustainable energy should be guided by the following themes: Creation Stewardship, Institutional Responsibility, Strategic Planning, Justice, Leadership and Responsibility.
8. Principals for transition and getting energy decisions on the right path include:
  - Promote energy efficiency.
  - Give preference to sustainable energy in public policy and citizen consumption.
  - Require reductions in emissions of the four major power plant pollutants: carbon dioxide, sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, and mercury.
  - Set reasonable time frames for bringing older plants into compliance.
  - Encourage and use alternative more efficient and effective energy sources for vehicles, buildings and power plants.

- Protect wild and traditional lands from exploitation that destroys ecosystems and thereby creates more climate warming.
- Recognize and promote the linkage between energy conservation, efficiency and sustainable livelihood.

## Preamble:

### *A Call for Responsible Sustainable Energy to Address Global Warming*

A sustainable energy system is clean. It is often renewable, and always efficient. It is always conservative of energy use.

**Sustainable energy** is supported by most scientists, religious leaders, environmental organizations, public health experts, architects and a growing constellation of businesses. An increasing number of elected officials have also come to realize that the common good requires it. Sustainable energy is moving more to the economic mainstream. It needs the kind of policy and fiscal preferences that fossil and nuclear energy have enjoyed for far too long.

In the very deepest sense, the transition and ultimate turn to sustainable energy is a test of our political and moral vision as a society.

We need visionary leaders to move society beyond business as usual. ***All of us need to be those leaders.*** We do not wish to pass to our children, grandchildren and generations to come, a world where even more species are extinct, air is unfit to breathe, wild lands are no more, and where economic and political insecurity is rampant.

Global warming threatens and harms our health and ecosystem and affects our very freedom. ***It is time to move to Sustainable Energy!*** The state of West Virginia has the opportunity to transition toward alternative sources for energy – and thereby supporting an economy based on cleaner energy. Economic development derived from alternative cleaner sources will also allow us to open up new national treasures and treat our natural resources with respect at the same time.

With our many coal-based power plants, automotive use, citizens affected by poor health, and our beautiful wild forests in need of protection, West Virginia can be a leading state in the move toward sustainable energy. We have the capacity and resources available to make this transition.

## What We Believe ~ Energy Policy and Religious Faith

### We believe in the following moral principles:

We have a responsibility towards all of God's family and creation. We have a responsibility towards our own children, grandchildren and generations to come. Their health tomorrow is affected by the harmful air pollution that is produced today. The poorer someone is, the less chance they have to escape the harmful effects of air pollution and global warming. We recognize God's call for us to be good stewards of the balance of creation that sustains all life on earth. In respecting the Creator, we also respect creation.

As people of faith, and as citizens of democracy, we have a special responsibility to families, local communities, children, the elderly and the poor. The processes that generate global climate change and the effect of global climate change affect these groups disproportionately and in a disastrous way.

As people of faith, we are being called to consider national purpose, not just policy, in the current energy debate. Far more than rolling blackouts and gasoline prices are at stake: the future of God's creation on earth; the nature and sustainability of our economy; our public health and public lands; the environment and quality of life we leave our children and grandchildren.

This is a critical time for decisions about our future. Global warming is an established scientific fact compounding the problem. In the last 20 years, population growth has added two billion people to the planet, while the aspirations of the developing world are raising consumption of fossil fuels far more rapidly than expected.

Advances in new technologies for clean and efficient energy make sustainable choices economically viable. Yet, the appetite for energy continues to look at current finite dirtier sources for the solution to the need for this energy now.

But there remains in our country both social and political denial of the ethical and moral ramifications of our energy choices. The market can drive itself, but it cannot steer. Our rich religious traditions can help provide a moral balance to energy development and usage decisions seemingly dictated strictly by dollars and cents. To be silent, will signify our assent to the choices being made.

As our Buddhist brothers and sisters remind us, we should always endeavor to act in ways that will benefit all the earth's inhabitants. If we cannot do what is of benefit, we can at least do no harm. ***We have a moral obligation to choose the safest, cleanest, most healthful, and most sustainable sources of energy to protect the fragile web of life.***

### Our religious values call us to the discussion of energy issues for several reasons:

- Care of Creation: Many of our traditions see the beauty of earth's plants and animals, oceans and mountains, flowers and deserts, as an expression of the Creator's very self.

We did not weave this web of life - we are merely strands of it. What is done to the web is done to all. Those who abuse or destroy creation heap contempt upon the Creator.

- Justice and Equality: The burdens of climate change will fall disproportionately on the poor of the world, who have fewer resources with which to shield themselves from dislocations, health effects, and ecological crises. Concern for the 'least among us' and minimizing harm to them must drive our energy policy decisions. Looking toward justice for all will help reduce the threat of international violence due to scarce and diminishing resources.

- Responsibility to Future Generations: Many indigenous people have long traditions of weighing their choices on the basis of possible effects on future generations. Our habits of prodigal energy use, dependence on polluting fuels, and resistance to any changes in our lifestyle must give way to concern and justice for our grandchildren and great-grandchildren. We are responsible for leaving them the beautiful ecologically sound, and habitable world our ancestors bequeathed to us.

### **Who We Are:**

We are Christians, Jews, Muslims, and members of other faith groups, united by our common belief of the preciousness of all life. The West Virginia Interfaith Global Climate Change Campaign is one of many state campaigns active in a national Interfaith Climate & Energy Campaign. This coalition of religious leaders, institutions, and individuals has been working to: a) educate congregants and the general public about the causes and effects of global climate change, and b) to speak out about the religious and moral imperatives to protect all creation ~ human and non-human. Over 1,200 leading religious leaders have joined in calling for federal policies for energy conservation and climate justice.

Concerns about the effects of climate change have also been documented in a report from the current Bush administration to the United Nations and in The Framework Convention of Climate Change, which was signed by the former President Bush and unanimously ratified by the U.S. Senate.

### **Why We Are Concerned:**

- Too much carbon dioxide in our atmosphere is changing the Earth's climate.
- The largest source of carbon dioxide in the United States is the electric power industry, which accounts for about 40% of all U.S. emissions.
- More than 88% of the carbon dioxide emissions come from older coal-fired facilities.
- The older coal-fired power plants are also a source of nitrogen oxides and sulfur dioxide, which cause smog and asthma and other breathing-related illnesses, and mercury exposure, which can cause birth defects.

## **A Call for Responsible Power Plant Planning**

Fossil fuel power plants pose a growing threat to human health because of green house gas emissions and other pollutants.

What we support: We support the following actions by government and industry related to climate change and the reduction of global warming:

- Reassess the “Cap and Trade” for pollution control.
- Require reductions in emissions of the four major power plant pollutants (the 4 Ps): carbon dioxide, sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, and mercury.
- Require that all power plants, including older coal-fired plants, meet appropriate modern standards for pollution sources. Set definite time frames for bringing older plants into compliance.
- Eliminate loopholes that allow older power plants to emit high pollution levels.
- Apply these requirements to any planning for new power plants and support the development of new viable jobs and energy sources as alternatives to coal-fired plants.

***We invite you to sign on in support of this statement of principals and actions.***

**Reasonable target levels for reductions in emissions of the four pollutants are:**

<u>Carbon dioxide:</u>	to 1990 levels
<u>Nitrogen oxides:</u>	to 75% of 1997 levels
<u>Sulfur dioxide:</u>	by 75% below Phase 11 Acid Rain levels
<u>Mercury:</u>	to 90% of 1999 levels

## **A Call for Responsible Fuel Economy Planning**

Recommendations for West Virginia to Reduce Emissions:

- Encourage the state government, religious communities, business leaders and all citizens to downsize when purchasing vehicles. These vehicles can initially be hybrids.
- Suggestions for the state government include: having more hybrids in fleet; encourage purchasing of school buses that use bio fuels - prototypes have been shown to get 52 miles per gallon (mpg) – *note, the Department of Environmental Protection is ordering hybrids.*
- Ask the state government to move toward Leadership in Environmental Design (L.E.E.D.) certification for buildings.

Use of Alternative Energy:

- Proceed toward bio fuels (bio diesel)
- Accelerate research and development toward alternative energies, which will not pollute and destroy the environment.



## The Following Elements as Basic Guides to Reduce Global Climate Change

### **Sustainability:**

Our Livelihoods Depend on Sustainable Development: The goal of moving to sustainable energy use by phasing out fossil fuels contributes to our quality of life and very livelihoods. It protects our environment. We can begin by promoting energy conservation.

### **Stationary Sources:**

Buildings: Move toward Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (L.E.E.D) certification.

As we renovate and construct new buildings, promote L.E.E.D. certification and N.E.T. 90metering.

Religious communities: promote leadership in environmentally friendly buildings

Government: Promote L.E.E.D. certification and N.E.T. metering.

### **Industrial Coal Burning and Nuclear Power Plants:**

Critical in this Process: Enforce emission reductions. Move away from use of fossil fuels and nuclear power use and toward sustainable clean energy sources.

### **Community Development:**

Block Grants and other programs: must have a percentage of L.E.E.D. certified building codes attached.

Religious Camps: Educational materials and workshops will encourage citizens and future leaders to utilize Sustainable Model for Urban Development Model (SMUD).

Churches: Renovations; New Buildings; Conducting educational workshops; Buying hybrid vehicles.

We agree with the following statement by senior religious leaders from America's leading faith groups:

*"At stake: the future of creation on earth; the nature and durability of our economy; our public health and public lands; [and] the environment and quality of life we bequeath our children and grandchildren. We are being called to consider national purpose – not just policy."*

**We Invite You - and/or Your Organization to Sign On To This Document –  
Help Us Implement Its Goals:**

We, West Virginians, have the power to change things! For further information contact:  
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