

Justice Sunday 2018

Sample Worship Service



ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE & CLIMATE ACTION

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Justice Sunday 2018 Focus

Slow-onset impacts of climate change, like rising seas and thawing permafrost, are inundating the homes and livelihoods of communities around the globe - many of whom have lived on their land for between hundreds and thousands of years, and have a long history of colonial occupation and forced relocations. This Justice Sunday, we invite you to come together to promote climate justice and support communities under particular threat of climate-forced displacement.

The Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC) is a 77-year-old human rights organization grounded in Unitarian Universalist values, committed to advancing human rights, dismantling systems of oppression, and uplifting and affirming the inherent worth and dignity of all people. Our unique eye-to-eye partnership model centers the experiences and wisdom of those most affected by human rights abuses, and we partner with grassroots groups around the globe to fight for economic justice, protect human rights at risk, and advance environmental and climate justice.

Opening Words

Committed to Respond - by Lynn Harrison

Committed to respond to the call of a wounded world...
We join together this day with loving hearts, hands and minds.
Embracing the interconnected web of water, air and earth...
We light a fire of sustaining hope, ever bright with love and justice.
May we bring forth this day new wisdom, strength and courage
To create a new world not of wealth, but well-being.
A world of new peace and abundance for all.
As we give thanks for this earth, our shared and singular home,
May we dedicate ourselves to its ongoing care.
Rising to the calls deep within us, and all around us...
May we respond today and always with courage and with love.

Suggested Hymns

44	We Sing of Golden Mornings
21	For the Beauty of the Earth
163	For the Earth Forever Turning
175	We Celebrate the Web of Life
1067	Mother Earth Beloved Garden
1002	Comfort Me
1012	When I am Frightened



Seeking Justice - The Challenge of Climate Change

Sermon by Rev. Dr. Michael A. Schuler

Some two hours west of Madison, the capitol of Wisconsin, the Kickapoo River meanders through what's known as the "Driftless Region." Spared by the most recent influx of glacial ice that scoured so much of the upper Midwest's landscape, this is an area of rolling hills and fertile valleys dotted with small dairy farms, organic gardens, and cottage industries. But despite its picturesque appearance, it is also one of the poorer parts of the state.

People here haven't been overly concerned about climate change – until recently, that is. Because of its rugged topography, villages and towns along rivers like the Kickapoo are subject to periodic flooding. Gays Mills is such a community. Best known today for its abundant commercial apple orchards, for the first 160 years of its history residents of Gays Mills coped with the rare occasions the Kickapoo rose above its banks. But in 2007, heavy rains caused the river to swell until the downtown and many residents' homes were inundated. A "once in a century flood" is how observers described it.

But it happened again the following year, prompting discussions about relocation. Thanks to a \$4.3 million dollar grant from the Economic Development Administration in 2010, strategic planning began. The planning was still in process when serious flooding recurred in 2016 and 2017.

Towns across the Mississippi River in Southeastern Minnesota were similarly affected. In that fatal year of 2007, eighteen inches of rain pummeled the town of Rushford over three days time. "This is our Katrina," a city council member remarked to the press. At a subsequent panel discussion on climate change, comprised of town and rural residents and organized by the University of Minnesota, a consensus was soon reached. "Evidence suggests," the panel reported out,

...that Minnesota's climate and weather are changing more rapidly and more dramatically than in many other parts of the country. These changes will have a measurable impact on our overall economy, environment, fish and wildlife habitat, health, insurance rates and more.

Respected members of the scientific community began issuing warnings about the potentially devastating effects of anthropogenic climate change decades ago. As the planet heats up, sea levels will rise due to the melting of the polar and Greenland icecaps, storms will increase in severity, droughts will occur more often and last longer leading to wildfires, water shortages, and habitat loss.

About Rev. Schuler

Michael A. Schuler is in his 30th and last year serving as the Senior Minister of the 1350 member First Unitarian Society of Madison, one of the largest Unitarian Universalist congregations in North America. Under his leadership the Society's membership has increased three-fold. In 2008 the congregation dedicated a new 24,000 square foot sustainably designed addition that met the LEED standard for Gold certification.

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Thirty years ago, James Hansen of the Goddard Institute for Space Science, testified before Congress about the rapid rise of greenhouse gasses in the Earth's atmosphere and what this might bode for our future. Four years later, representatives from 172 countries gathered at Rio de Janeiro for the first Earth Summit and adopted a Convention on Climate Change. Since then, additional compacts have been sealed at Kyoto, Copenhagen and, most recently, at Paris in 2015. And yet....

Not only has the challenge not been met, conditions have actually deteriorated further. Between 2000 and 2010, 3,322 environmental disasters – droughts, wildfires, extreme temperature events, floods and storms – were reported worldwide. This represents a five-fold increase over the decade of the 1970s.

Meanwhile, sea levels have been steadily rising, leading to increased flooding on islands and low-lying coastal areas. As New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof recently reported, Kutubdia, an island belonging to Bangladesh, has lost a kilometer of its shoreline to the sea since the 1960s. As a result, thousands of impoverished residents have been forced to flee to the mainland. Here, and in other similarly affected Asian nations, displaced parents have been forced to make tough decisions like pressing their young daughters into early marriages for lack of resources to support them.

In his revolutionary pamphlet *Common Sense*, Thomas Paine wrote that, "It is the good fortune of many to live distant from the scene of sorrow." That observation could easily be applied to those of us who are lucky enough to live on a continent that, so far, has not experienced the most disruptive effects of climate change. Yes, last year Hurricane Harvey brought the Houston megalopolis to a standstill, while Hurricane Maria laid waste to Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin islands in the Caribbean. But thanks to untiring debunking of the problem by fossil fuel interests, most Americans aren't connecting the dots. According to a recent survey, only a third of the nation is "seriously concerned" about climate change.

We Americans are, for the most part, fortunate to live in a country that has resources to ensure a measure of resiliency for some. The residents of Gays Mills can, with some government assistance, move their beloved village to higher ground. Thanks to federal emergency relief, the infrastructure of post-Sandy New York City or post-Harvey Houston can be partially repaired within weeks or months.

But even here climate change is more disruptive for some than for others. After Sandy, help was slow to arrive in the low-income neighborhoods of Brooklyn and the South Bronx. In New Orleans, the impoverished Ninth Ward was hardest hit by Katrina, and thirteen years later it still hasn't fully recovered. Months after Maria bore down on Puerto Rico, much of the island is still struggling with power outages and lack of access to clean water. In Houston, low-income residents are struggling to rebuild after Hurricane Harvey as they face housing shortages, rising rents, and exposure to toxic chemicals and mold in the aftermath of the storm. Residents of such places would undoubtedly echo the words of Dominica's Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerrit: "To deny climate change is to deny a truth that we have just lived with."

As for the rest of us, we may not question the science of climate change itself, but we have yet to be struck by the gravity of a rapidly evolving situation. We are lucky to live "at a distance from the scene of sorrow" and can look to the future with less dismay.



Seeking Justice - The Challenge of Climate Change

Sermon by Rev. Dr. Michael A. Schuler

Unlike other global crises – World War II, for instance – this one is a slow-moving catastrophe felt most acutely at first by those, mostly poor, residents living in vulnerable drought, flood, and hurricane-prone areas. In 2012, the same year that Sandy hit New York City driving many poorer apartment dwellers from their homes, 32 million people around the globe became displaced due to climate-induced extreme weather events. Similar disasters displaced 19.2 million people across 113 countries in 2015, more than twice the number that fled from conflict and violence.

Environmentalist Naomi Klein observes that climate change would turn out to be a “great equalizer” because of its indiscriminate potential for harm. To meet this threat with their shared interests, the rich and poor would have to link arms in common cause.

That hope hasn’t materialized because well-to-do people possess the private means to insulate themselves. Poorer areas like New Orleans’ Ninth Ward thus become what Klein calls “sacrifice zones,” where politically and economically disadvantaged people are left to fend for themselves. Writing in his 2017 book *Extreme Cities* Ashley Dawson agrees, saying that we seem to be moving into an era of “climate apartheid” characterized by a “hardening of boundaries and restriction of movements of those affected by environmental disruptions.”

Those who have vacated ravaged landscapes are often denied their rights and access to resources. Currently, there is no international convention that recognizes the plight of people affected by climate change. In late 2013 Ioane Teitioa, a native of the low-lying island nation of Kiribati in the central Pacific, sought to obtain legal refugee status through the High Court of New Zealand. But the Court dismissed the case arguing, in the words of Justice John Priestly, that by returning to Kiribati the petitioner,

...would not suffer a sustained and systematic violation of his basic human rights such as the right to life...or the right to adequate food, clothing and housing.

This was not an insignificant ruling, for if the Court had favored Teitioa, a precedent would have been established that could conceivably entitle climate-impacted people world-wide to protection under the Refugee Convention.

Teitioa and others like him are hardly responsible for their plight, Ashley Dawson points out. Wealthy, industrial nations that have so far been spared the worst effects of climate change are largely responsible for the emissions that are causing atmospheric and ocean temperatures to rise and generate more powerful storms.

If current trends continue, a third of Bangladesh will be submerged by the year 2100, but its citizens’ contribution to climate change is miniscule; they barely move the climate needle a fraction of a degree. Studies indicate that the planet’s 500 million richest citizens – a mere 6% of its total population – account for 50% of all global warming gases. There’s a direct correlation between wealth and emissions, and the energy profligacy of the privileged few is wreaking havoc on the lives and livelihoods of those most vulnerable.



Seeking Justice - The Challenge of Climate Change

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Little reflection is required to grasp the practical and moral implications of the foregoing. On the one hand, it's imperative that we recognize the fundamental incompatibility of an extractive, consumerist economy with the exigencies of climate change. According to Naomi Klein,

Our economy is at war with many forms of life on earth, including human life. What the climate needs to avoid collapse is a contraction of humanity's use of resources; what our economic model demands to avoid collapse is unfettered expansion. Only one of these sets of rules can be changed, and it is not the law of nature.

Prioritizing the planet's and future generations' well-being over short-term economic rewards reaped by the global 6% will take an act of collective political will unprecedented in human history. And yet, this is what needs to happen because our window of opportunity is closing.

Is the challenge beyond our capacity? From a purely monetary standpoint, it is not. Affordable and effective abatement measures, if aggressively implemented, would require an annual outlay of between \$200-350 billion Euros – merely 1% of global GDP. The way is clear, the goal attainable, but gaining traction remains a challenge. Without concerted citizen pressure on the political and economic elites to curb greenhouse emissions, the situation will continue to deteriorate.

So, what about those whose lives are already jeopardized by climate change? Clearly, we who command the most resource and enjoy a high standard of living owe them a debt. By doing “what comes naturally” as First World consumers, we are putting the lives of millions of marginalized fellow earth-dwellers at risk. As Canadian theologian Sallie McFague has observed, “economics isn't just about money; it's about who lives and dies, and who lives decently and who does not.” Still this needn't be a cause for breast-beating so much as sober reflection.

As “climate debtors,” the world's richest nations do have a humanitarian obligation to address the inequities inherent in climate change. And, as governments dawdle, NGO's like the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee are finding creative ways to respond to emerging needs.

UUSC partners with grassroots organizations primarily led by members of the affected communities. With respect to climate justice, the program it's investing in is no exception.

In the South Pacific, for example, UUSC is actively engaged with a consortium of representatives from eight island nations, including Kiribati (KIRR-i-BUS). Together they are engaging in advocacy, helping inhabitants develop strategies for protecting their islands, and building community capacity about strategies to ensure migration with dignity. Since climate-displaced people lack much in the way of defending their rights or accessing resources, help with the latter is especially meaningful.

UUSC is also concerned with the source of the problem and the lack of human rights protections currently in place. UUSC is involved in policy discussions at the international and local levels to make sure that community voices and experiences are integrated in decision making, and is supporting the efforts of the Pacific Climate Warriors who are seeking an end to the use of fossil fuels.



Seeking Justice - The Challenge of Climate Change

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The state of Alaska is thousands of miles removed from Kiribati, but the effects of climate change are being felt there as well. Melting permafrost, the depletion of indigenous food supplies, extreme weather events are all having an effect on the way of life of native Alaskan communities. Again, UUSC has partnered with groups supporting indigenous communities to meet the exigencies of an uncertain future and “ensure that the human rights of Native villages are advanced and protected in the face of climate risks.”

The overarching issue that the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, its partners, and all justice-seeking and environmentally concerned citizens of the planet are addressing is a simple one. Phrasing it as a question, the Lakota Elder Brave Bull Allard, an early leader at the Standing Rock protests, put it this way: “How do we live with the earth again, not against it?”

It should be clear to all that we do not lack the knowhow. The sticking point still is “when.” The answer to that should also be clear, for the time is now.

About Rev. Schuler

Bio continued from page 2.

Rev. Schuler has been active on many local and denominational Boards and for several years was a regular contributor to the features and editorial pages of Madison's afternoon newspaper, the Capitol Times. His essays have appeared in various Skinner House publications as well as Dharma World and The UU World magazines. In May 2009 Berrett-Koehler publishers issued Michael's book, Making the Good Life Last: Four Keys to Sustainable Living.

Schuler has delivered keynote presentations to a variety of Unitarian Universalist audiences and has also conducted workshops on church growth and sustainability throughout the country. In June 2011 he delivered two major addresses at the Annual General Assembly of UU Congregations, including the sermon at the Service of the Living Tradition. Locally he serves on the Board of the Interfaith Coalition for Worker Justice and has participated in several multicultural and interfaith panels discussing racial equity, reproductive choice, and other subjects. He has also served as community representative on the UW-Madison All-Campus Human Subjects Committee and the UW-Madison Pathways to Excellence Advisory Committee.

Schuler earned his BA in political science from Eckerd College, received his M.Div. from Starr King School for the Ministry, and holds a Ph.D. in the Humanities from Florida State University. Before being called to Madison, he served UU congregations in Binghamton, New York, and Sioux City, Iowa. He is a life-long distance runner who also practices t'ai chi and yoga. Michael and his wife Trina have enjoyed over four decades of marriage. Their son, Kyle, is a professional educator and illustrator working for a software company in the Twin Cities. The couple are also proud companions to a seventeen year-old Papillion, Sasha.



Moment for All Ages

by Carly Cronon, UUSC

(Note: A globe, or world map, might be helpful for telling this story.)

Does anyone know what the 7th principle of Unitarian Universalism is?

It is “Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.”

I like this principle, because it helps remind me that we are connected – to each other in this room, to other people outside of our congregation and our town and our country, and also to other living and non-living things, like animals, trees, mountains, and rivers.

Here’s an example. Let’s all take a BIG breath in, and then a BIG breath out. When we breathe in, we are taking in oxygen, and when we breathe out, we are breathing out carbon dioxide. Plants, on the other hand, do the opposite: they take in carbon dioxide to survive, and they put oxygen back out into the air. This back and forth exchange is called the Carbon Cycle. We humans need oxygen to live, and plants need carbon dioxide to live – plants and humans are interdependent. Humans and other creatures can’t live without plants making oxygen, and plants can’t live without creatures making carbon dioxide. We depend on each other to live.

Lately, our carbon and oxygen exchange has been off-balance, because there is more carbon dioxide in the air than plants can take back in. This is because there are things besides humans breathing out that put carbon into the air – certain ways of making heat, electricity, and transportation, for example. It’s also because we are cutting down forests for wood, oils, and other things we use every day. This extra carbon dioxide stays in the air and takes in heat from the sun, which creates a warm layer of air surrounding the earth. This warm layer causes the planet to slowly heat up too, sort of like how your coat helps keep warm air in to heat up your body. With warmer temperatures, ice melts and there is more water in the oceans, which puts communities by the ocean at risk of flooding.

Today, the planet has warmed up so much that it is harming some people’s lives and homes.

Let me tell you about some places where people are being harmed. This is happening especially in small low-lying islands in the Pacific Ocean, the large ocean lying between the western coast of America and the eastern coasts of Asia and Australia.

In Alaska there is a small village called Chevak (SHE-vak), home to around 1,000 adults and 200 children and located very close to the ocean. Chevak is a beautiful village near a river, and the houses there are bright and colorful – with lots of light blues, hot pinks, and bright reds. Because snow builds up in the village during winter, the houses are built up away from the ground on strong poles to keep them from the cold and freezing snow. Now, because the earth is getting too warm, Chevak is seeing more powerful storms that bring water from the nearby river into their village. But, even with their homes built up on stilts, the warming earth and overflowing river during storms is causing damage to houses in Chevak, making villagers worry that they will soon have to move to a safer location.



Moment for All Ages - by Carly Cronon, UUSC

Chevak also has a lot of permafrost, which are areas of ground that are frozen all year round. It's like in winter, when grassy soccer fields become cold and hard. Permafrost is an important and useful part of the landscape for Chevak villagers because it allows them to safely travel across sturdy frozen ground that would otherwise be too wet and unstable. With warmer temperatures, the permafrost is thawing and melting, which is causing damage to their land and making it harder make trips to nearby villages for food or other things they need.

Chevak villagers rely heavily on their land and sea in order to live. With changes caused by a warming earth, their way of life is threatened. The sad part is, they are not the ones who are contributing significantly to the earth warming and changing. In fact, the villagers in Chevak get their electricity and heat from four tall wind turbines that generate energy when the wind blows and the blades spin, which means they add very little extra carbon dioxide to the air.

Nevertheless, they are experiencing changes in their land due to warming temperatures because we are all part of the same Carbon Cycle – we are all part of the interdependent web of existence. That is why it is so important that we work to take better care of the earth – including making energy for heat, light, and transportation from sources like, the wind and sun, which put less carbon into the air – while also supporting Chevak villagers and other Alaskan and Pacific Island communities at the same time. We are working to help them respond to rising sea levels and melting permafrost so that families can stay in their homes and respond to changes to their land.



About Carly

UUSC's Associate for Congregational Giving Programs, Carly plays a critical role in connecting UUSC with congregations throughout the United States. A lifelong Unitarian Universalist, Carly received her bachelor's degree in English, creative writing, and education from Colby College.

