

**Victory Congregations:**  
**Voicing the Sacred Trust Covenant in Climate Defense**

Earth Sunday Address  
United First Methodist Church  
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It is truly an honor to participate in your Earth Sunday. Your congregation is already doing so much to focus on environmental responsibility as part of your relationship with the Earth, with God's Creation. I am here because our society needs to go so much farther than perhaps we can even imagine, to save our planet. We need to go passionately farther, with the same love that emboldens parents who are fighting for their child's life. I am here because I think that you, both as a congregation and as individuals, are the catalysts for the passion our society urgently needs.

We live together during a sacred time on Earth. What is sacred is not just God's Creation -- all of the birds, the animals, the rivers, the trees, the flowers -- but also this fleeting moment of time we share together on Earth, a time in which just about all of the gifts of Creation are imperiled through our own pollution and excesses. Just from the mere coincidence that we happen to be alive together at this time, we share a spiritual calling that perhaps no other generation of Humanity has known -- to protect Creation

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from unimaginable, and irrevocable, destruction of our own making. If you come to a river and you see a young child fall into the swirling waters below, and you look around and no one else is there to rescue him, you know at that moment what your calling is – and you do what it takes to save that young and precious life. I am asking you today to find your calling for all of the children of this world, because their Earth -- their future -- is like that of a drowning child.

I will start by addressing the urgency of today. Then I will turn to the matter of responsibility for addressing carbon pollution, on both the governmental level and the individual level. After that I will turn to how people can passionately mobilize this society into action, and how individuals and families can reconstruct their daily lives and family enterprises to live gently in this new world we face.

## I. At the Precipice

Most of you have read quite a bit on climate crisis. I would consider you a very well informed community. But let me ask, how many of you wake up in the middle of the night, worried about global warming and its effect on your children's or grandchildren's future? If you still sleep well through the night, I would say you probably don't know how bad the situation is. We're dealing with a mind-blowing urgency where, literally, every day counts.

In June 2007, leading climate scientists issued a report concluding that the Earth is in "imminent peril"—literally on the verge of runaway climate heating that would impose catastrophic conditions on generations to come.<sup>2</sup> Climate change is leagues beyond what our civilization has ever faced. It threatens to destroy our planet's major

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<sup>2</sup> James Hansen et al., *Climate Change and Trace Gases*, 365 PHIL. TRANSACTIONS ROYAL SOC'Y A: MATHEMATICAL, PHYSICAL AND ENGINEERING SCIENCES 1925, 1949 (2007), available at <http://www.planetwork.net/climate/Hansen2007.pdf>; see also Steve Connor, *The Earth Today Stands in Imminent Peril*, THE INDEPENDENT, June 19, 2007, [http://environment.independent.co.uk/climate\\_change/article2675747.ece](http://environment.independent.co.uk/climate_change/article2675747.ece) (last visited Jan. 8, 2009).

fixtures, including the polar ice sheets, Greenland, the coral reefs and the Amazon forest. If unchecked, it will cause rising sea levels and inundation of coastal areas worldwide. It will trigger the kind of mass extinction that has not occurred on Earth for 55 million years. In the words of a leading scientist, our continued carbon pollution will cause a “transformed planet.”<sup>3</sup>

The implications for Humanity, and our children, are dreadful, and I think it does no one any good to sugar-coat the situation. If this scenario comes to pass, it could mean death for millions or even billions of Earth’s citizens. The nation’s leading climate scientist has said that global warming threatens “[n]ot simply the Earth, but the fate of all its species, including humanity.”<sup>4</sup> The Mayor of New York City has said: “Global warming in the long-term has the potential to kill everybody.”<sup>5</sup> Just days ago, Hillary Clinton told international leaders, “No issue we face today has broader long-term consequences or greater potential to alter the world for future generations.”<sup>6</sup> This is no time for cowardice, or denial, or distraction. This is something that we have to face head on with all of the courage we can muster.

The insidious thing about climate crisis is that, if we just keep on doing tomorrow what we did today, we will send the world over the edge. Humans emit 70 million tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere a day, and emissions are rising by 2-3% a year. James Speth, the Dean of the Yale School of Forestry, has just written a book, *THE BRIDGE AT THE EDGE OF THE WORLD*, in which he concludes that, if we continue Business

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<sup>3</sup> Jim Hansen, *The Threat to the Planet*, N.Y. REV., July 13, 2006, at 12.

<sup>4</sup> Jim Hansen, *Tell Barack Obama the Truth – The Whole Truth* 1 (2009), available at [http://www.columbia.edu/~jeh1/mailings/20081121\\_Obama.pdf](http://www.columbia.edu/~jeh1/mailings/20081121_Obama.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Benny Avni, *Mayor Compares Threat of Global Warming to Terrorism*, THE SUN (Feb. 12, 2008), available at <http://www.nysun.com/national/mayor-compares-threat-of-global-warming/71103/>.

<sup>6</sup> *Clinton Says U.S. No Longer AWOL on Climate Change*, CNN Politics.com (April 27, 2009).

as Usual, “the world in the latter part of this century won’t be fit to live in.”<sup>7</sup> That’s four decades from now. I wake up in the middle of the night – on most nights -- haunted by the knowledge that people across this country *will do* tomorrow exactly what they did yesterday. I’m a mother of three young boys. Every time I look at my children, I think about the urgency of climate crisis. I couldn’t look them in the eyes unless I knew in my heart that I was doing everything possible, in every way I know how, to secure a future for them by fighting carbon pollution.

We are amidst a planetary emergency, and yet few people know it. They hear the politicians talk about reducing carbon by 2050. But we won’t have a 2050 that is recognizable to us unless we take serious action to reduce carbon this year, and next year. The head of the UN climate panel said in 2007, “If there’s no action before 2012, that’s too late. What we do in the next two to three years will determine our future. This is the defining moment.”<sup>8</sup> Let me explain why.

We are rapidly slipping towards a climate tripwire -- a point of no return that climate scientists call the tipping point.<sup>9</sup> At such point, our enormous carbon pollution could kick in positive feedbacks in Nature that are capable of unraveling the planet’s climate system, causing runaway heating despite any subsequent carbon reductions achieved by Humanity. Scientists have identified several dangerous feedbacks. One is the albedo flip. When ice melts and turns to water, it causes further heating, because

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<sup>7</sup> See JAMES GUSTAVE SPETH, *THE BRIDGE AT THE EDGE OF THE WORLD: CAPITALISM, THE ENVIRONMENT, AND CROSSING FROM CRISIS TO SUSTAINABILITY* x (2008); see also Mark Lynas, *Why We Must Ration the Future*, NEW STATESMAN (Oct. 23, 2006), at <http://www.newstatesman.com/200610230015> (last visited Jan. 8, 2009) (“[I]f we go on emitting greenhouse gases at anything like the current rate, most of the surface of the globe will be rendered uninhabitable within the lifetimes of most readers of this article.”).

<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth Rosenthal, *UN Report Describes Risks of Inaction on Climate Change*, NEW YORK TIMES (Nov. 17, 2007) (quoting Rajendra Pachauri, head of UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change).

<sup>9</sup> For general explanation, see Goddard Institute for Space Studies, *Research Finds that Earth’s Climate is Approaching ‘Dangerous’ Point* (May 30, 2007), [http://www.nasa.gov/centers/goddard/news/topstory/2007/danger\\_point.html](http://www.nasa.gov/centers/goddard/news/topstory/2007/danger_point.html). See also Fred Pearce, *WITH SPEED AND VIOLENCE: WHY SCIENTISTS FEAR TIPPING POINTS IN CLIMATE CHANGE* 238–39 (2007).

water absorbs heat, and ice reflects heat.<sup>10</sup> So, melting begets more melting. Just two years ago scientists made a stunning prediction that the Arctic might be free of summer ice by 2040. Within a year they revised that date to 2012 because the ice sheets were collapsing so fast.<sup>11</sup> Another feedback is the failure of Earth's natural sinks to absorb more carbon to compensate for our pollution. The Amazon rainforest – the lungs of the planet -- is drying and burning, now releasing more carbon than its remaining vegetation can absorb. The oceans are becoming saturated with carbon. They are becoming so acidic in some places that shellfish can't survive – the acid erodes their shells. Dead zones now cover tens of thousands of square miles of ocean. Another feedback results from vast expanses of permafrost melting in Siberia and Alaska, which has the capacity to release enormous amounts of carbon and methane – a scenario described by one science writer as an “atmospheric tsunami.”<sup>12</sup>

These feedbacks all lead us closer to a precipice.<sup>13</sup> Even two years ago it was thought that we might have 8-10 years left before the climate tipping point, but more recent data shows that we are on its doorstep now. We've reached the limit of what Nature can take. As NASA scientist Jim Hansen said a year ago, “We are now on the hairy edge.”

Scientists are trying to explain this to the public by making an analogy to a bathtub. There's a drain on the bathtub, but if you put more water in than can drain out, you will overflow the bathtub. Our sinks -- the oceans and forests -- are the drains to the atmospheric bathtub. We have to slash our carbon emissions urgently, today and

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<sup>10</sup> See Steve Connor, *The Earth Today Stands in Imminent Peril*, THE INDEPENDENT (June 22, 2007).

<sup>11</sup> Seth Borenstein, *Arctic Sea Ice Gone in Summer within Five Years?* ASSOCIATED PRESS (Dec. 12, 2007).

<sup>12</sup> Pearce, *supra* note 9, at 78.

<sup>13</sup> *Id.* at xxiv.

tomorrow and the next day and every day thereafter, in order to bring the emissions down to what Nature will absorb – to what can drain from the bathtub. And if we fail, we flood the atmosphere with so much carbon that it will cause runaway heating, which Humanity and civilization cannot survive. So this is isn't about what we can do by 2050. It's about what we do now. That is why I say, we are in a spiritual time. We are on that riverbank, and the child is flailing in the swirling water. It's your child. It's my child. If you see that child, you hear your calling.

There is hope. Many scientists still believe that bold action on a massive planetary scale can avert the worst of the catastrophe. And we have the human imagination, the resources, the legal tools, and the bureaucracy to tackle this challenge head-on. We always have. But because carbon pollution is an all-encompassing global crisis, it has defied the civic understanding of most citizens. No one is holding anyone else responsible. When human beings can't figure out who has responsibility to solve a problem, it usually doesn't get solved.

Citizens have not even begun to hold their government responsible. Government has done next to nothing to address this emergency. In view of the consequences of runaway heating, governments that continue to ignore climate crisis might as well cast a future death sentence over their citizens. Yet citizens in this country approach the climate threat in much the same way they do any other problem—viewing it as a political issue that government may (or may not) choose to address. Citizens find it normal to have to go lobby government for their own survival. And we lack a sense of responsibility on the individual level as well, which may explain why some people are dramatically changing their personal lifestyles to slash carbon emissions, while others are mindlessly enlarging their carbon footprint.

The lack of any framework to assign responsibility is the most profound, and insidious, threat facing us, yet one well within our capacity to address. If this mental blind spot can be filled with clear understandings shared by citizens across this country, powerful notions of civic responsibility will unleash the momentum needed to mobilize and rebuild society in a sustainable, carbon-free manner. This is an alter call to religious communities. As Reverend Sally Bingham says, “I believe that People of Faith cannot stand by and let Creation be destroyed. We have a responsibility to protect it.”<sup>14</sup>

## **II. Nature’s Trust and the Living Covenant**

My own work at the law school focuses on a framework of climate responsibility. The bedrock principle of this framework is that government is trustee of our natural assets, including the waters, wildlife, and air. This is legal tenet dating back to time immemorial. A trust is a fundamental type of ownership whereby one manages property for the benefit of another – similar to you managing a college account for your niece. We citizens all hold a common property interest in what I call Nature’s Trust.<sup>15</sup> We, along with future generations, are the rightful beneficiaries of this natural Endowment, and we need our trust to be productive in order to sustain human survival. Our imperiled atmosphere is the most crucial asset in our trust.

With every trust, there is a core duty of protection. The trustee must defend the trust against injury. This obligation to protect Nature’s Trust lies at the very heart of government’s purpose. Engrained in the mantle of government that citizens confer upon

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<sup>14</sup> Rev. Canon Sally G. Bingham, *LOVE GOD, HEAL EARTH* viii (2009).

<sup>15</sup> *Geer v. Connecticut*, 161 U.S. 519 (1896) (“The power . . . resulting from this common ownership is to be exercised, like all other powers of government, as a trust for the benefit of the people, and not as a prerogative for the benefit of private individuals as distinguished from the public good.”). For discussion of the Nature’s Trust paradigm as it applies to environmental law, see Mary Christina Wood, *Nature’s Trust: Reclaiming An Environmental Discourse*, 25 *VIRGINIA L. J.* 431 (2007), <http://www.law.uoregon.edu/faculty/mwood/docs/nreclaiming.pdf>.

representatives and officials is an obligation to act as prudent trustees safeguarding this natural inheritance. When we call upon our government to defend our atmosphere, we are calling forth principles that have been said to “exist from the inception of humankind.”<sup>16</sup> In this country, Nature’s Trust principles were penned by judges long ago as the first environmental law of this nation.<sup>17</sup>

We must quickly reframe what is currently government’s *discretion* to destroy our atmosphere, into an *obligation* to defend our atmosphere. As a sign at a recent climate rally said, “Survival is non-negotiable.” Under this trust frame, all government agencies at every level – local, state, and federal – have a strict fiduciary responsibility to protect the atmosphere, as one of the assets in Nature’s Trust. Moreover, there is a standard of care against which to evaluate government action. You see, we don’t just vest trustees with control over priceless assets and have no measure of their performance.

Government trustees must protect the atmospheric trust according to prescriptions set by scientists, rather than arbitrary political targets. If our pollution exceeds the capacity in that bathtub drain, it doesn’t matter much that we tried hard – we still face catastrophe.

The Union of Concerned Scientists has called for arresting the growth of greenhouse gas emissions by 2010, then bringing levels down 4% a year.<sup>18</sup> As a long-term target, industrial society should be carbon-free, or close to it, by 2050. The most important target of all is the near-term one – arresting the growth of emissions by 2010 – because only the near-term goals keep us on the safe side of the Earth’s tipping point.

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<sup>16</sup> *Oposa v. Factoran*, G.R. No. 101083 (July 30, 1993) (Supreme Court of the Philippines), *excerpted in* JAN G. LAITOS, SANDRA B. ZELLMER, MARY C. WOOD, & DAN H. COLE, *NATURAL RESOURCES LAW*, Ch. 8.II, at 441–44 (West Publishing 2006).

<sup>17</sup> *See Illinois Central Railroad v. Illinois*, 146 U.S. 387, 393 (1892). The body of law known as the “public trust doctrine” is compiled and analyzed in LAITOS, ZELLMER, WOOD, & COLE, *NATURAL RESOURCES LAW*, *supra* note 12, at ch. 8.II.

<sup>18</sup> AMY L. LUERS ET AL., UNION OF CONCERNED SCIENTISTS, *HOW TO AVOID DANGEROUS CLIMATE CHANGE: A TARGET FOR U.S. EMISSIONS REDUCTIONS 3* (2007), *available at* [http://www.ucsusa.org/assets/documents/global\\_warming/emissions-target-report.pdf](http://www.ucsusa.org/assets/documents/global_warming/emissions-target-report.pdf).



This obligation to reduce carbon flows to every level of government. Let me explain why. The sovereign nations of Earth share the atmosphere as their common property on behalf of their beneficiaries, the citizens. Governments are sovereign co-tenant trustees of the atmosphere, all bound by the same duties that organize, for example, the relationship of family members who own a cabin together as co-tenants. Property law has always imposed a responsibility on co-tenants to not degrade, or waste, their common asset.

Let's think about the industrialized world's carbon pollution as one big "pie in the sky." Even though industrialized nations come in different sizes, if each reduces carbon proportionately by the same amount, the carbon pie as a whole will reduce by that amount. But the contrary is also true: if any one major polluter does not accept its share of carbon reduction, it will leave an *orphan share* that will sink all other planetary efforts. An orphan share is simply a share of responsibility that is abdicated. If there are orphan shares, the carbon pie will not shrink by the amount it needs to. The United States emits 30% of the carbon pollution on the planet. No nation on earth is positioned, much less obligated, to adopt an orphan share left by a deadbeat sovereign – especially a share as large as ours. Scaling down to another level, this also means that all states, cities, and counties must carry their burden. In order to save this planet, we must not excuse any orphan shares.

Last year I gave a talk to a class of high school students in McCall, Idaho. McCall is a small mountain town of just 3,000 residents. These high school students had studied global warming, and they were already very worried about their futures. I told them, "The fate of the entire planet rests on you people in McCall, Idaho, because if you don't take your share of carbon reduction, who will? Do you expect those of us in

Eugene, Oregon to take it? We have enough of a challenge with our own share. And unless every share is accounted for, we're not going to decrease the carbon pie enough in the time we have left." That point hit home with those students. There was a sober moment when they realized that their future depends on *their* town accepting carbon responsibility – and on everyone else in the world thinking the same way.

When we realize that cities and states and nations are made up of individuals – people just like us – we see that this orphan share concept translates into our own personal responsibility for the Earth. Each of us has a personal responsibility to care for the Creation that God entrusted to us, as one generation, to pass down to the next generation of his children. When we live, we hold part of a sacred estate called Earth. It is comprised of the natural assets that we need to survive. The Earth Endowment is a trust. We are only the present beneficiaries of the trust. The trust contains the inheritance that we hold for our beloved children.

We assume that when a person has a child, no one has to tell that person, "This child is now your responsibility." We just know it is so. And everything around us in society tells us it is so and reinforces our parenting inclinations. We should think of the Earth in the same way. No one should need to tell us to love her, care for her, protect her. It is our sacred responsibility as part of the living generation drawing from all of Creation. But for *our* living generation, this responsibility is greatly heightened, because the Earth is in peril, and with it, our children.

Yet we individuals are hiding as faceless creatures behind the veil of society. We're all a part of this problem. We all generate carbon pollution. Yet, no one is asking us how much we drive, whether we waste materials, whether we consume and consume and consume well beyond what we need. Gandhi said, "Live simply so that others may

simply live.” When we live too far beyond our most essential needs, whether intentionally, carelessly, or mindlessly, we leave an orphan share of responsibility that presents a moral hazard for life on Earth. We have orphaned our responsibility to care for the trust that was divinely bequeathed to us as we took our first breath in life and is in our care until we take our last breath. Rev. Fred Small has written: “Every religious tradition teaches awe of creation, yet we desecrate it. Every religious tradition teaches temperance in sensation and material things, yet we pursue them addictively, vainly hoping to fill our spiritual emptiness. Every religious tradition forbids theft, yet every day we live unsustainably we steal from our children and our children’s children.”<sup>19</sup>

So now, we find ourselves treading into a moral realm, because our actions hold lethal consequences for our own children and for generations after them. And yet a lot of people dealing with climate advise: “Don’t be judgmental. People don’t like being told that they should change their lifestyles.” On one level, I can really appreciate and respect that. But I also think we are engaged with moral questions every day as we take actions that destroy the planet for our children, and their children. We love our children, after all. Can we really ignore this issue?

Barbara Kingsolver speaks of “the anguish of standing behind a child, looking with her at the road ahead. . . .”<sup>20</sup> She writes, “The truth is so horrific: we are marching ourselves to the maw of our own extinction.”<sup>21</sup> In the end, the destiny of our own children *does* come down to actions taken by each one of us individually, and all of us collectively. Should we just turn away from it and continue driving SUVs and drinking bottled water and consuming endlessly without thought? Should we just leave others to

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<sup>19</sup> Rev. Fred Small, *The Greater Sacrifice*, LOVE GOD, HEAL EARTH 15 (2009).

<sup>20</sup> BARBARA KINGSOLVER, ANIMAL, VEGETABLE, MIRACLE 346 (2007).

<sup>21</sup> *Id.* at 345.

solve the problem of climate crisis when we know it can't be solved without everyone's participation?

Kingsolver says: "I do know the answer to that one: that's called child abuse. When my teenager worries that her generation won't be able to fix this problem, I have to admit to her that it won't be up to her generation. It's up to mine. This is a now-or-never kind of project."<sup>22</sup>

And she's right. We're at the tipping point. It's up to us. I think it does people a disservice to not embrace those moral questions, because after all, most human beings do want to be good people, and we all need to believe in our hearts that we are good people. If we turned away from that drowning child, we would face the worst indictment and punishment in our own souls. We are at a point now where scientists are clearly telling us that, if we don't change our lifestyles and consumption urgently and dramatically, our world won't be habitable for our children within their life spans.

We really can't solve this problem without entering the moral terrain. Government cannot control all carbon pollution in our daily lives – and we wouldn't want it to. And yet, there is no moral compass to orient citizens in defining their own personal responsibility in this crisis. The social norm prevailing today conveys a volunteer-like approach to carbon reduction -- it's great that some people do it, but the rest of us don't have to bother ourselves with it. The huge scope of carbon pollution provides a shield behind which we can all rationalize our individual carbon emissions. We bear witness to this when we see a hummer roaring past a commuter bicyclist. The bicyclist may feel demoralized by the hummer driver, but the picture is much bigger than those two individuals. Our society has an altogether de-moralized stance towards the untold death

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<sup>22</sup> *Id.*

and suffering that will happen if the present generation does not rein in its carbon excesses. The moral implications of our everyday actions scream out to the future, but they are silenced by the present.

A framework for climate action must call out to something larger than ourselves, something that connects us to each other and to the generations that follow us. A trust approach is unique, because it not only draws upon ancient legal doctrine, but it harnesses the strong, even instinctive, inclination that human beings have to hand inheritance down to the next generation. Entire societies have defined morality through inter-generational obligation, and families throughout all of time have built and nurtured legacy through the generations. The concern and protection of descendant generations is a strong human covenant that runs through cultures and families, binding the generations to one another as they pass through life.

We draw upon that covenant when we characterize the natural endowment that future generations are entitled to inherit. Failure to protect this vital natural inheritance amounts to generational theft – it breaches the moral covenant. The eighth of the Ten Commandments states: “*You shall not steal.*” By recognizing the atmosphere as a priceless asset that this generation inherited, and that our children have no less right to and need for, we may better judge ourselves and our personal carbon pollution against this Commandment. Are we taking something rightfully owned, and needed, by them? Are we loving parents who are nevertheless thieves against our own children?

There was once a time in this country when a moral ethic against waste prevailed across all of America. In WWII, the country was united in an extraordinary patriotic effort that included, at its core, a conservation ethic. During WWII, all possible resources had to be diverted to the troops whose lives were on the line in defense of our nation.

Americans clearly understood that human life and welfare hinged on their daily conservation practices. You surely wouldn't have seen SUVs roaring down the streets of America when people were trying to conserve gas for the troops. Any waste on the home front was a direct affront to the families that had sent their sons into war. There was a high community standard backing the tremendous individual sacrifices and conservation measures needed for the war effort.

Today we have to make the same connection between our lifestyles, our waste, and the welfare of our sons and daughters. We must realign our consumption choices into needs versus wants, and chose simplicity over extravagance, given that the real hidden subsidy of today's consumptive lifestyle is human death and suffering tomorrow.

### **III. The Climate Victory Speakers**

How do we incorporate this climate responsibility into our own lives? First, we need to mobilize this nation. As Reverend Fred Small has said, "Changing a light bulb is good. Changing a member of Congress is better."<sup>23</sup> There are many people in this country – perhaps the majority – who are concerned about global warming but are taking no action at all to reduce their own carbon or to hold their leaders accountable. They are not deniers. They are simply distracted. When these citizens are confronted with the truth of what is happening, they will feel a moral imperative to act, and they will force their leaders to act. This is a psychological leap forward happening all over the world at once. But it doesn't happen without catalysts.

The greatest mobilization this country has ever known occurred in WWII. People did not just sit by. They took initiative. They used whatever talent they had to throw themselves into the wartime effort. Households made do with the bare minimum. But

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<sup>23</sup> Small, *supra* note 19, at 17.

this great mobilization would not have happened without the Victory Speakers, as they were called. Speakers Bureaus formed in cities across the country, drawing 100,000 volunteers. Their purpose was to explain the nature of the threat, the need for citizen support, and to show citizens how they could conserve resources. Victory Speakers would give five-minute speeches at theatres, clubs, town halls, schools -- any forum they could find. These Victory Speakers were not chosen for their outstanding oratory skills, but rather were the “trusted and familiar voices” in the community -- the banker, carpenter, mother, and school teacher. My mother and grandmother were both Victory Speakers in Oregon.

Today, we need Victory Speakers for climate crisis -- ordinary people who can convey the urgency of carbon reduction, deliver the trust framework of responsibility, teach people how to conserve, and inspire extraordinary action. The Climate Victory Speakers that I know wake up in the middle of the night and spend their next day speaking out, writing letters, emailing legislators, calling reporters, and gathering neighbors --- they use any forum they can find to convey the urgency of planetary heating. There are now scores of people across the planet who are devoting their lives, jobs, and families to this, and the numbers grow every day as climate tragedies unfold through fires, floods, droughts and food shortages. Climate Victory speakers, like the WWII victory speakers, invoke a stirring patriotism -- but this time, it is a planetary patriotism to mount a world-wide atmospheric defense effort.

Let me tell you about some young Victory Speakers I know. I mentioned speaking to schools in McCall, Idaho last year. Not long ago, McCall was a place where people didn't ever talk about global warming. They didn't have time to deal with it. They were either working too hard, or playing too hard. People sped around in SUVs, snowmobiles,

powerboats and jet skis. Recall that I had told one high school class, “The whole planet rests on McCall, Idaho taking its responsibility for carbon pollution – and on everyone else thinking the same way.” After I left that day, two students named Peter and Sam organized the class to take action. A month later, the class gave a community presentation on global warming and how it would affect their future. They packed the high school gymnasium. There were city officials, school officials, parents and grandparents, coaches, nurses, doctors, accountants, architects – the town turned out in mass. The event began with an eight year old, Claire, who had written a letter addressed to the People of McCall, Idaho:

***Dear People of McCall,***

*I'm really disappointed not only in what America is doing but . . . what the whole world is doing. Coral reefs are dying, forests are becoming farms, ice bergs are melting into the ocean. That is only the start. . . All the world is getting in trouble. . . . We can make a difference though. We can all make a difference if we just spend time with family and friends talking over what we can do and proceed to do what we talk about doing.*

There was silence after she spoke. And there were tears. The citizens of McCall realized, this is real. But now there's no stopping that town and the changes they will make. They are creating local food systems, exploring alternative energy, starting local transportation initiatives, and involving hundreds of community people. Peter, Sam, and Claire were Victory Speakers. They placed responsibility for carbon pollution squarely on McCall, Idaho -- and they are taking a leap of faith that towns across the world will step up in just the same way.



So what can you do? Two things. First, I ask you all become Climate Victory Speakers. Climate Victory Speakers must engage government to focus immediately on this planetary emergency. In WWII, government moved fast to mobilize the country. Our government is moving at a snail's pace, putting all Americans and their children and descendants at risk. May Roosevelt's words echo through the voices of today's Climate Victory Speakers: "Let no man say it cannot be done . . . . Speed will save lives; speed will save this Nation which is in peril; speed will save . . . our civilization . . . slowness has never been an American characteristic."<sup>24</sup>

Climate Victory Speakers must engage as many decision-makers as possible, at every level, from the school boards, to the state legislature, to the White House. As citizen beneficiaries of this great atmospheric trust, require your public servants and politicians to take responsibility for arresting the growth of carbon emissions within the next year. Demand also that government begin the huge task of making our communities more resilient to the damage that is inevitable from the climate heating that we have already set in motion. Scientists say that, due to the carbon pollution we've already dumped into the atmosphere, we have another 2.6 degrees F. of warming in the system that is irrevocable. We can't call it back. All of the damage we've seen from climate so far has resulted from only 1 degree F. heating. Living in this greenhouse of our own making may become more difficult than any of us can imagine as we sit here today.

There is tremendous work to be done across society to restructure and re-localize society to create local food systems, carbon free public transportation, local manufacturing capacity for essential tools and clothing, and to provide necessary stores

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<sup>24</sup>President Roosevelt, 1942 State of the Union Address, <http://janda.org/politxts/state%20of%20union%20addresses/1934-1945%20Roosevelt/FDR42.html>.

of medicines. Agencies at all levels, within all departments, must be involved. Public officials have to recognize that we are entering a new world of planetary heating. They need to start using our tax dollars in a much different way, to favor bike paths over freeway expansions, school gardens over artificial turf fields, edible landscapes over manicured parks. This will not happen without citizen catalysts like you.

But Climate Victory Speakers also have to reach beyond government, to their own families, schools, and neighborhoods, to wake people up to climate crisis. We have to call out the urgency while at the same time voicing, from the heart, a sacred trust covenant to protect our children's' rightful natural inheritance. I think you will find that this trust covenant rings in the heart of all Humanity. These trust morals can be spoken as the last words from a grandmother to her grandchildren, anywhere in the world.

In your mission as a Climate Victory Speaker, you will find that many people are mentally wandering, and wondering. They sense we are entering a new world, but they haven't found their role in it. If you show them the urgency of the climate tipping point, the lethal consequences of runaway heating to their children, the likelihood of demolished civilizations from sea level rise, the endless drought, raging infernos, crop failures, and migration of millions or billions of human environmental refugees that will result from our carbon pollution, they will realize -- yes they will realize -- that it is *they* who are standing on the bank of that river watching a child below struggle in the swirling waters. If you just show them the emergency, they will find their calling.

#### IV. The Great Family Turning

The second thing I am asking you to do is to live tomorrow in a much different way than you did today. I am asking you to be the living expression of the trust covenant to protect our common natural Endowment, and to raise your children and grandchildren within that covenant. This can't be done merely by changing a few light bulbs, or riding the bus more often, or recycling more. It means defining, for yourself, a new life way, and through your exuberance and delight and confidence over that life way, inspire others to follow a similar path. For parents in the congregation, I'm asking you to be part of a Great Family Turning.<sup>25</sup>

Families all over the world are turning to a new way of life as defined by re-localization.<sup>26</sup> It's a grassroots movement fueled not by petroleum, but by sheer human imagination and innovation, from the family up through the neighborhood, and spreading through whole towns. Re-localization addresses the converging threats we face – not just climate crisis, but also peak oil and economic collapse – and builds self-sufficiency by drawing upon neighbors and by building community. It is expressed through school gardens, Victory Gardens, farmer's markets, local dairies, bicycle taxis, backyard chickens, urban homesteads, renewable energy projects, garage bulk food storage, and

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<sup>25</sup> See DAVID C. KORTEN, *THE GREAT TURNING: FROM EMPIRE TO EARTH COMMUNITY* (2008), described at <http://thegreatturning.net/book-great-turning-empire-earth-community> (“A convergence of climate change, peak oil, and the financial instability inherent in an unbalanced global trading system will bring an unraveling of the corporate-led global economy and a dramatic restructuring of every aspect of modern life. We cannot avoid the unraveling. We can, however, turn a potentially terminal crisis into an epic opportunity to bring forth a new era of Earth Community grounded in the life-affirming cultural values shared by most all the world's people. . . .”).

<sup>26</sup> The definitive resource is ROB HOPKINS, *THE TRANSITION HANDBOOK: FROM OIL DEPENDENCY TO LOCAL RESILIENCE*.

neighborhood emergency networks. Eugene, Oregon is a Transition Town, as we call it – a town moving from the industrialized paradigm to a new paradigm of local resilience.

The backbone of this movement is the family. I can speak personally to this way of life, because my husband and I are fully engaged in it with our three young boys. But it wasn't always so. Five years ago, I was a newbie soccer mom. I enrolled my little boys in soccer and started hauling them around town to practices and games. Along the soccer field at the appointed time was a regular line-up of huge, gas-guzzling SUVs and mini-vans. After the children spilled out onto the field, the parents would idle on the sidelines sipping coffee from Styrofoam cups, or drinking Pepsi from plastic bottles. They would talk about their family trips to Costa Rica, or Mexico, or Europe, or Disneyland. They would rave about the new soccer equipment they had purchased and share their exploits at the mall. At half time, the parents would dole out dozens of plastic juice bottles to the little soccer players. They would dispense Albertson cookies from plastic boxes and slices of cake from thick plastic domes, slap the goodies on paper plates, and stuff plastic forks into little reaching hands. Within five minutes, the trash cans exploded with paper, plastic and Styrofoam. No one seemed to give any thought to the waste. This was the soccer life. Practices three times a week, two games on the weekend, and heaps upon heaps of trash.

At this same time I was learning how to be a dutiful soccer mom, I was doing climate research for my job. The conclusions I was reading from the scientific community turned my reality upside down. I came to a dreadful realization that my children's future survival was threatened by exactly the carbon-intense parenting culture that I, as a loving mother, was engaged in. But oddly enough, for a couple of months, I

kept on being that newbie soccer mom, because I really hadn't thought of any other way to raise our kids. Seemed like everyone was hauling their kids to soccer games around town and that's what good parenting was all about.

There came a point, however, when I could no longer look my children in the eyes without thinking about climate crisis and the tipping point and my role in it all. Yes, there were benefits to soccer, but really, in light of the world ahead, is soccer the skill that our kids need most? And how do we reconcile the enormous carbon pollution in today's parenting? How can we love our children and yet contribute to the demise of their world? That's not love. That's denial.

We gave up the soccer life.

At about this time, Mayor Kitty Piercy made a carbon challenge to the residents of Eugene in which she asked them to do two new things a month to reduce carbon. We made this a family challenge. At first we did things like ride the bus, or have a no-drive day once a week. The next month we'd come up with two new things, and the next month two more things. Within a year, our front lawn had become a mini-orchard and vegetable garden, there was bulk food stored in our garage, we were riding our bicycles nearly everywhere, we had eliminated almost all food packaging, nearly all of our fruits and vegetables came from local sources, we made our own bread and chicken soup and granola bars every week, we rarely entered a grocery store, we raised chickens and built a coop, we gave up plastic and air travel, we spent our summers berry picking and backpacking, and we spent the long autumn days canning, freezing, and drying the harvest we had gleaned from our own garden and local farms. Our family enterprise

became completely devoted to self-sufficiency, home food production, and skills-building in farming, food preservation, wild plant identification, and the like.

These days, our kids dash home from school eager to get started on planting, or raising seedlings, or canning tomatoes, or drying pears. They hop on their bicycles and ride through the neighborhood, giving away extra lettuce, tomatoes and berries from our garden. Their little acts of sharing build community. Neighbors drop in with gifts for our kids – like an old tub to wash carrots in, a blueberry bush, a jar of pie filling, pumpkin seeds, and a recipe for granola bars. My children have become self-appointed ambassadors for this urban homestead lifestyle by talking about it to our neighbors and their friends, and using it as the subject for school writing assignments and projects. Our family dinner conversation is often filled with new insights into raising vegetables or canning foods, or the latest ways to keep slugs out of the spinach. We also have discussions about how fast the world is changing, and how we will prepare for it, embrace it, and learn new ways -- or old ways. Days upon days go by without using the car, and we really don't even notice it because we are so occupied at home, working side by side to produce our own food -- all of which is part of a family journey towards more self-sufficiency, carbon reduction, and sustainability.

At some point along the way, I noticed that Mayor Kitty Piercy's carbon challenge had evolved into a new – and infinitely richer – way of life for us. The challenge of two carbon-reducing initiatives a month had grown into a family enterprise, a source of joy and pride, a learning experience, a family identity, and a well-spring of self-esteem and responsibility for our children. Perhaps most important, it had become a shared statement of purpose, a moral fabric for family life – a daily expression of the trust

covenant shared with our children. My husband often comes in from the garden and says, “It’s a wonderful life.” And I have to agree. I invite you to embrace this new world ahead -- with courage, passion, and a sense of adventure -- and join in the Great Family Turning.

## **V. The Victory Congregations**

And finally, I ask your church community to become a Victory Congregation. Churches are, I think, the most suitable places for these ideas to flourish. Reverend Pat Watkins has written: “Global warming can be seen through the lens of science and politics, which is fine. But it can also be seen through the lens of faith. Faith will move us like nothing else can.”<sup>27</sup> Churches are sanctuaries in which humans explore ethics and morals in the sacred context. You lend support to people going through frightening times, you summon faith in uncertain times, and you develop new strategies for everyday living that enrich, rather than deplete, your spiritual reservoirs. You are supremely organized. If this calling begins in your church, as the first Victory Congregation, its hopeful voice could sing in Victory Congregations across this state, and across this nation. The trust covenant among generations can be preached from pulpits all across this precious Earth.

## **VI. Claiming Our Moment**

The world today needs can-do people – millions of them -- to activate government, communities, and neighborhoods. We have too many can’t-do people -- passive bystanders to climate crisis. The can-do people will save this planet, and they

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<sup>27</sup> Rev. Pat Watkins, *Building Creation on a Firm Foundation*, LOVE GOD, HEAL EARTH 26 (2009).

will tell their grandchildren how they answered a generational call. There are can-do people in every corner of the globe, and there are can-do people in every seat in this church. Whatever your position is in life, this is *the time* to do something, anything. Just don't do nothing. It is true that you alone can't save the world, but the world can't be saved *without* you.

Somehow fate has delivered all of us into this pivotal moment on Earth. We did not live 100 years ago, when it was too early to even imagine the collapse upon us, and we will not be here 100 years from now, when it will be too late to save what we still can. We can only claim our moment. In our moment, let us live and defend that sacred trust covenant -- to protect our precious atmosphere as part of the Earth Endowment we must hand down to our children, for their survival.