



Resolutions To Action

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Transition to Renewable Energy Sources

Joan Brown, OSF

"Thanks to our bodies, God has joined us so closely to the world around us that we can feel the desertification of the soil almost as a physical ailment, and the extinction of a species as a painful disfigurement. Let us not leave in our wake a swatch of destruction and death which will affect our own lives and those of future generations." -- Pope Francis

EXPERIENCE

Hello, I am the President of the North Valley Neighborhood Association (Albuquerque, NM). We want to honor New Mexico Inter-faith Power and Light and St. Therese Catholic School with our Good Neighbor Award," the cheery voice said.

"Thank you so much, but, why?" I asked.

"That was such a good thing that you and the Catholic grade school did to install solar panels. It was such a visionary and public witness for our neighborhood."

When I began work with several faith communities to install solar panels it was a dream. St. Therese Grade School and Holy Rosary Catholic parish, both

serving low and middle income families, were persistent in making the dream reality.

Many faith communities are evaluating their energy use to save money, to reduce carbon emissions, and to care for creation and the future. They know climate change is the greatest moral and justice issue of our day.

St. Therese School and Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary Catholic church did extensive energy efficiency upgrades before installing solar 130 and 270 panels respectively. My own Rochester, Minnesota Franciscan community received an EPA Energy Star award for efficiency measures before installing a large array this past year.

In the Southwest oil, gas, coal, and uranium extraction and processing for energy leaves a legacy of pollution, water over use, and health implications. These realities do not figure into the real cost of a carbon based economy. Transitioning to renewable energy is a justice issue with very visible implications.

A recent NASA study shows methane release from fossil fuel extraction through a sobering satellite image (tinyurl.com/po9zmg8).

"One small "hot spot" in the US Southwest is responsible for producing the largest concentration of the greenhouse gas methane seen over the United States – more than triple the standard ground-based estimate." In this poorest region of the United States, many Navajo have no access to electricity generated from the coal and natural gas plants. But, that doesn't protect their their land, air, and water from pollution. They are looking to the future and installing small scale solar.

SOCIAL ANALYSIS

Climate change is a justice issue at the nexus of many others including immigration, refugees, pover-

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LCWR
8808 Cameron Street
Silver Spring, MD 20910
301-588-4955
fax: 301-587-4575
ascholz@lcwr.org

LCWR
www.lcwr.org

ty, security, and hunger. Disinformation and profiteering by corporations slow the transition to a new ecological age.

However, interest in renewable energy continues to grow and is proving to be a positive response to climate justice. St. Francis of Assisi's "Canticle of the Sun" takes on significant new meaning: "Be praised my Lord for Brother Sun, who brings the day; and You give light through him. And he is beautiful and radiant in all his splendor!"

In 2012-13 renewables accounted for 19 percent of US energy. Internationally, renewable energy makes up 20 percent of the energy supply. Experts predict the cost of solar power in many areas will drop below retail electricity rates sometime between 2013 and 2018. Workers spending at least 50 percent of their time developing solar jumped by more than 45,000 from 2010 to 2013 with solar employing 140,000 workers, according to the National Resource Defense Council.

Wind energy in the United States powers more than 15 million homes with wind providing 25 percent of electricity in Iowa and South Dakota, 20 percent in Colorado. Nine other states receive 10 percent of their electricity from wind. Currently wind is the cheapest source of energy. In the face of Congressional gridlock, many are working at the state level to achieve 100 percent renewable energy by 2050. thesolutionsproject.org

Rapid deployment of renewable energy and energy efficiency can result in energy security, climate change mitigation, and economic benefits. United Nations' Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said renewable energy has the ability to lift the poorest nations to new levels of prosperity while addressing climate concerns.

REFLECTION

The time for creative, hopeful action inspired by deep spiritual values is NOW. The debate about human-made climate change is over. The most vulnerable people and God's creation are suffering. Our current course of business and life as usual is a grave sin.

At the UN climate conference in September, the Holy See called for "an authentic cultural change" to combat climate change which is man-made and therefore man's responsibility.

Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin said, "The greatest challenge lies in the sphere of human values and human dignity; questions which regard the human dignity of individuals and of peoples are not able to be reduced to mere technical problems. In this sense, climate change becomes a question of justice, respect and equity, a question which must awaken our consciences."

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to save money,
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ACTION

- **Take advantage of resources from organizations** like, Catholic Climate Covenant, Interfaith Power and Light, and GreenFaith. Carbon footprint calculators, educational resources, certification programs and opportunities for public policy advocacy can assist.
- **Engage in public policy advocacy to support EPA Clean Power proposals and Production Tax Credits (PTC) for Wind Energy.** Congress, influenced by big polluters, allowed the PTC to expire in 2013. This killed nearly half of the wind energy jobs and several manufacturing companies. PTC extension is needed by the end of this year.
- **Installing solar has never been easier and many financing options are available** with incentives and rebates varying from state to state.
- **Divestment in fossil fuels and re-investment in renewable energy.** GreenFaith (www.greenfaith.org) offers practical and theological resources to begin the discussion and movement toward divestment/reinvestment.
- **The Solutions Project** of Stanford University offers each state important data to join collectively in the US to meet a 2050 goal of zero emissions through renewable energy. thesolutionsproject.org
- **Public policy advocacy is needed.** Petitioning for wind tax credits is needed at the federal level. At the state level influence to establish, renew or increase Energy Efficiency and Renewable Portfolio Standards can push the technologies to move us toward 100% renewable energy by 2050.