# Caring for Creation: A Prayer and Action Guide for a Lenten Fast from Carbon

The spiritual practice of fasting, accompanied by prayer and meditation, moves us to be open to the will of God in our lives. Fasting helps us listen to what God wants us to be and to do. During Lent this year, **Earth Ministry/Washington Interfaith Power & Light** is partnering with the **Seattle Office of Sustainability and Environment** to invite you to try a "fast from carbon." This fast will help to reduce the amount of carbon dioxide we put into the atmosphere and to better reflect our care of God's great gift of creation.

**Why should you consider a fast from carbon? There are at least five reasons:**

1. The carbon dioxide we are putting into the environment, in the form of greenhouse gases, is changing the climate of God's creation, our planet Earth. Scientists no longer debate the basic facts of climate change.
2. The sources of these greenhouse gases are largely produced by human beings and the society we have created.
3. The largest component of greenhouse gases is carbon dioxide, which comes from the burning of fossil fuels during the generation of electricity and from the modes of transportation that we use.
4. Unless we reduce our emissions of greenhouse gases, the impact of these increases will be devastating for our planet, for its people—especially the poor and vulnerable—and for the plants and animals that have lived here for millions of years. Time is critical.
5. God created this Earth, declared it to be good, and expects us to care for creation and to maintain its goodness for future generations.

While we are heavily dependent on carbon, it's not as hard as you might think to "fast from carbon." We can use these seven reflections to consider the amount of carbon dioxide we each generate and to take steps to reduce that amount.

For your "fast from carbon," we have prepared seven spiritual reflections (Ash Wednesday and the six Sundays of Lent) which include the following:

- weekly actions for individuals to reduce their carbon footprint
- information on global warming in Washington State — including likely impacts and local opportunities to address this threat
- a statement by the faith community
- a scripture reading followed by a prayer
- discussion questions to be used in group reflection

Use this resource in a small group to encourage each other as you fast from carbon this Lent. By prayerfully focusing on these actions you will make concrete progress in reducing your carbon footprint, which you can continue throughout the year.

# Caring for Creation: A Prayer and Action Guide for a Lenten Fast from Carbon

## Ash Wednesday (Introduction)

**Impact of climate change on Washington State:**

"Even with moderate reductions in the rate of current global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, Washington can expect these climate impacts: First, higher temperatures - increases in annual temperature of, on average, 2.2°F by the 2020s (compared to 1970 to 1999). Second, changes in precipitation patterns - wetter autumns and winters, drier summers, and small overall increases in annual precipitation in Washington, as well as increases in extreme high precipitation in western Washington. Third, lower water supply in summer months - decreases in spring snowpack by nearly 30 percent are projected across the state by the 2020s, 40 percent by the 2040s and 65 percent by the 2080s. Earlier snowmelt and earlier peak river flow are projected to affect municipal water supplies and agricultural water availability." (WA Dept. of Ecology, "Focus on Impacts of Climate Change in Washington State")

**Statement by the faith community: Episcopal**

"We are called to be good neighbors and act with love and care for all of what God called "Sacred." The natural greenhouse effect set up by God has been disrupted and the imbalance is causing temperatures to rise. Global warming means not only higher average temperatures, but also changes in weather patterns, precipitation, and ranges of plants insects and animals. Such changes would threaten natural resources, human health, already endangered species, and fragile ecosystems. Although no person would be immune from the consequences of climate change caused by global warming, the world's poor would be especially vulnerable." (From a resolution adopted by the Executive Council of the Episcopal Church, 2001, http://www.ecusa.anglican.org/1866_70059_ENG_HTM.htm)

**Scripture Reading: Joel 2:12-13**

Yet even now says the Lord, return to me with your whole heart
With fasting, and weeping and mourning; rend your hearts, not your garments,
And return to the Lord, your God.
For gracious and merciful is God, slow to anger, rich in kindness,
And relenting in punishment.

**Discussion:**

- What other fasts have you completed? How have they helped you grow in your relationship with Christ?
- How does your faith inform your understanding of the environment, God's creation?

**Prayer:** Gracious and merciful God, as we "fast from carbon," grant us the humility and the inspiration to move through authentic mourning for the destruction of so much of your creation. Move us to accept our obligation to restore your creation, and to act with love and care for all that you call sacred.

This Lent, Christians across the state will focus their actions on fasting from carbon. Each of the specific actions over the next weeks will help you significantly reduce carbon emissions. May these practices provide you a prayerful basis to mindfully care for creation and the climate.

# Caring for Creation: A Prayer and Action Guide for a Lenten Fast from Carbon

## First Week in Lent: Eating Less Meat

During Lent, Catholics and some other Christians fast from meat on Fridays. The sacrifice of forgoing meat reminds all Christians of Christ's sacrifice on Good Friday. Reducing meat consumption can ground us in faith while fulfilling our promise to steward the Earth. Eating a plant based diet just once a week saves 930 lbs. of $CO_2$ a year. If every American did not eat meat just one day a week, it would save the equivalent of carbon produced by 46 million flights between New York and Los Angeles. (Seattle Office of Sustainability and Environment)

**Statement by the faith community: Presbyterian USA**

"Global Warming is likely to increase hunger. It will hit the poor hardest. Climate change (or global warming) is already affecting and will dramatically impact food production patterns...
We are called as Christians to love our neighbors and how we, individually and corporately, react to climate change and our own role in causing global warming demonstrates this witness to God. While the link may not appear obvious at first, reducing our energy use, particularly our use of fossil fuels, is one way of demonstrating our love for our neighbors." (From the Presbyterian Hunger Program, 2006, http://www.pcusa.org/environment/climate-change.htm)

**Scripture Reading: Genesis 2:8-9**

> Then the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and placed there the human whom he had formed. Out of the ground the Lord God made various trees grow that were delightful to look at and good for food, with the tree of life in the middle of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

**Additional Readings:** 1 Corinthians 10:31, Proverbs 15:17

**Discussion:**

- Watch Graham Hill's talk on being a weekday vegetarian at *http://www.ted.com/talks/graham_hill_weekday_vegetarian.html*.
- How many of your meals each week include meat? Write down the number for your records.
- Have you cut back on meat consumption before? Share tips for success with the others in your group.

**Prayer:** God of all, instill in us the knowledge that we are called upon to tend and care for your garden. Grant us the wisdom to cultivate it for the good of all, so that all your creatures may be fed from the bounty of your creation as we insure that even those without access may be nourished.

## Action:

Focus on cutting back on your meat consumption during the next week. Consider thinking of meat as a condiment rather than the main dish. Reduce your portion sizes and try to cut meat out of one or more meals completely. Next week bring your favorite vegetarian recipe to share with the group!

# Caring for Creation: A Prayer and Action Guide for a Lenten Fast from Carbon

## Second Week in Lent: Follow up on Eating Less Meat

**Impact of climate change on Washington State:**

"Our analysis of the impacts of climate variability on the Pacific Northwest coastal zone suggests that some important climate-related factors to consider are sea level, air and sea surface temperatures, winter precipitation, and storminess. In particular, the following conditions increase the risk associated with various coastal hazards: increased sea level increases the risk of coastal erosion; increased winter precipitation increases the risk of coastal riverine flooding and of landslides; southeasterly winter storms increase the risk of coastal erosion; and the co-occurrence of these three conditions increases the likelihood of large, damaging coastal erosion and flooding events." (Climate Impacts Group, "Climate Impacts on Pacific Northwest Coasts")

**Statement by the faith community: Orthodox**

"God's creation delivers unsettling news. Earth's climate is warming to dangerous levels... To continue to walk the current path of ecological destruction is not only folly; it is sin... Churches, as communities of God's people in the world, are called to exist as representatives of the loving Creator, Sustainer, and Restorer of all creation. We are called to worship God with all our being and actions, and to treat Creation as sacred. We must engage our political leaders in supporting the very future of this planet. We are called to cling to the true Gospel - for "God so loved the cosmos" (John 3:16) - rejecting the false gospels of our day."
("God's Earth is Sacred: An Open Letter to Christians in the United States", Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas , July 2005)

**Scripture Reading: Psalm 121:1-2**

I raise my eyes toward the mountains.
From where will my help come?
My help comes from the Lord
The maker of heaven and earth.

**Discussion:**

- How many times did you consume meat in the past week? Compare this to the number you recorded last week. Besides eliminating meat completely from a meal, were you able to reduce the portion sizes of meat?
- Were any days harder than the others? What hurdles did you face?
- Did your family try a new dish that will now be included in your regular meal rotation? Share your favorite recipes with the group.

**Prayer:** Creator of all, we are called to worship you with all our being and actions and to treat your creation as sacred. Give us the insight we need to reject "false gospels" that encourage consumption patterns that are destructive to the web of life.

## Action:

Use the suggestions and recipes from others in the group to reduce your consumption of meat again this week. Think about how you can incorporate vegetarian meals into your menu planning throughout the year.

# Caring for Creation: A Prayer and Action Guide for a Lenten Fast from Carbon

## Third Week in Lent: Driving Less

**Transportation is a major source of carbon dioxide emissions and stress in modern society.** Almost three fourths of oil consumption in the US is used for transportation for people and goods. (Rocky Mountain Institute, http://rmi.org/rftransportationexecutivesummary) By using public transit, you can reduce your carbon emissions and your road rage. You'll save one pound of carbon dioxide for every mile you don't drive! If you drive 20 miles less each week during Lent, you will have fasted from 120 pounds of carbon dioxide.

**Statement by the faith community: United Church of Christ**

"[United Church of Christ] recognizes the dangers of global warming and our biblical mandate as stewards of God's creation to be diligent in our efforts to decrease the emission of greenhouse gases; affirms the greater responsibility of industrial nations and especially the United States to reduce greenhouse gas emissions; encourages local churches, Conferences and national agencies to engage in efforts to educate and advocate for ratification of the Kyoto Climate Change Treaty and to address their own lifestyles (institutional and personal) to assure the minimum production of wastes that threaten the environment."
(From "Statement on Global Climate Change," United Church of Christ 22nd General Synod, http://www.ucc.org/environmental-ministries/)

**Scripture Reading: Psalm 95:1-5** **Additional Reading:** Micah 6:8

Come let us sing joyfully to the Lord, cry out to the rock of our salvation.
Let us greet God with a song of praise, joyfully sing out our psalms.
For the Lord is the great God...
Whose hand holds the depths of the earth;
Who owns the tops of the mountains.
The sea and dry land belong to God, who made them, formed them by hand.

**Discussion:**

- How do you normally commute or run errands? Do you carpool or use public transit? Why or why not? How often do you walk or bike? How could you plan your shorter trips to get there using "people power"?
- The average carbon footprint per vehicle per year is 12,100 pounds. Find out how you're doing by calculating your driving carbon footprint at *terrapass.com/carbon-footprint-calculator/*.
- Micah instructs us "to walk humbly with our God." Consider using time on public transit for mediation and prayer. You will replace the time you used to feel road rage with peace of mind.

**Prayer:** Great God of the mountains and the sea and creator of all that is, we give joyful thanks for the gifts of your creation. Give us the courage to assume individual and congregational commitments to renewing your creation through our study, prayer and actions.

## Action:

This week, reduce your time on the road by one car trip of 10 or more miles. Check *metro.kingcounty.gov* to plan trips using public transit in King County. Alternatively, plan to carpool to next week's discussion group, or to next Sunday's worship service. Experiment with walking or biking for trips of less than 2 miles.

# Caring for Creation: A Prayer and Action Guide for a Lenten Fast from Carbon

## Fourth Week in Lent: Follow up on Driving Less

**Opportunities for Washington State to address climate change:**

"Burning coal, gas and oil produces carbon dioxide, which is a greenhouse gas that warms the planet as it builds up in the atmosphere. Some of the carbon dioxide released today remains in the atmosphere after even 100 years, trapping more and more heat. Washington has the potential to generate 63 percent of its electricity needs from renewable energy sources including wind, biomass, geothermal and landfill gas."
(National Wildlife Federation, "Global Warming and Washington")

**Statement by the faith community: United Methodist Church**

"The decisions that humans are now making will either enhance or degrade the quality of life on the planet. We have entered an era of greater energy interdependence. As the world confronts global issues such as climate change, energy inequity, and pollution, energy-related problems will require international solutions based upon the values of justice and sustainability... We support strenuous efforts to conserve energy and increase energy efficiency. A transition to energy efficiency and renewable energy sources will combat global warming, protect human health, create new jobs, and ensure a secure, affordable energy future."
(From the General Board of Church and Society Energy Policy Statement, Resolution 5, 2000, www.umc-gbcs.org)

**Scripture Reading: Ephesians 5:7-10**

> For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light, for light produces every kind of goodness and righteousness and truth. Try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.

**Discussion:**

- How were you able to cut back on driving in the past week? Did you carpool, walk, bike, or use public transit more often? Were you able to combine trips?
- If you used public transit, how did it affect the timing of your commute? How was the overall experience?
- Did you find a prayer or Psalm that you could reflect upon during your trips?
- How is your experience with the carbon fast going? What have been your challenges? Your opportunities? How has carbon fast brought you closer to God?

**Prayer:** God of all, we confess our complicity in failing to be good stewards of your creation. We ask your forgiveness as we seek to live in the light, walking gently on your earth, looking for ways to replenish what we have taken away, to heal what we have damaged.

## Action:

This week, build upon the patterns you began last week. Take the bus to work again. Walk to the store. Invite a neighbor to run errands with you, or save up all your errands and make a single trip. Getting in the habit of driving less makes combining trips, carpooling, and using alternative transportation more automatic.

# Caring for Creation: A Prayer and Action Guide for a Lenten Fast from Carbon

## Fifth Week in Lent: Energy Efficiency

**Energy efficiency** is key in reducing our carbon footprint, and some of the best methods of lowering our electricity use are the easiest. For example, replacing an incandescent bulb with a compact fluorescent light (CFL) takes a few minutes but will give your carbon savings a boost!

**Statement by the faith community: Roman Catholic**

"At its core, global climate change is not about economic theory or political platforms, nor about partisan advantage or interest group pressures. It is about the future of God's creation and the one human family. It is about protecting both "the human environment" and the natural environment. It is about our human stewardship of God's creation and our responsibility to those who come after us."

(From "Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good", U.S. Catholic Bishops, June 15, 2001, http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/international/globalclimate.shtml)

**Scripture Reading: Ezekiel 37**:14

> O my people! I will put my spirit in you that you may live, and I will settle you upon your land; thus you shall know that I am the Lord. I have promised and I will do it, says the Lord.

**Additional Readings:** Leviticus 19:9-10, Ezekiel 34:18

**Discussion:**

- How many loads of laundry do you wash per week? How many use hot water? **OR** Write down the approximate length of your normal shower. How many minutes could you cut?
- What does your household already do to reduce your energy use? Where have you found the most savings?

**Prayer:** God of all, let us trust in a resurrection of will to restore your creation. And grant us your vision of creation transformed. Lead us to let go of those behaviors that would keep us from imagining such a renewal. Give us the desire to work with others who understand that faith in you demands working for healing for your creation.

## Action:

This week, take a *one time action* of replacing 5 incandescent bulbs with a compact fluorescent light (CFL). This will save 500 pounds of carbon dioxide in the next year!

Also, choose *one* of the following repeatable actions:

- Wash two loads of laundry in cold rather than warm or hot water. This will save energy needed to hear the water.
- Shorten your showers! You'll save not only water but also the energy used to heat the water. Cutting your shower from 8 minutes to 3 minutes will save a whopping 25 gallons of water and add up to a total saving of 513 pounds of carbon over the next year!

# Caring for Creation: A Prayer and Action Guide for a Lenten Fast from Carbon

## Holy Week: Follow up on Energy Efficiency

### Opportunities for Washington State to address climate change:

"Making changes in our lifestyles and reducing our carbon footprints are immensely important ways of caring for creation. However, in responding faithfully to Jesus' call for a common life in which no one is left behind, we must also become involved in public policy advocacy. The challenge is powerfully posed in this question: If a single decision in Congress or the Washington State Legislature can either enhance or undo literally millions of individual acts of Christian caring for the Earth, should we not try to influence such decisions? We can, and we must." ("A call to faithful advocacy", sermon by LeeAnne Beres, Earth Ministry Executive Director, All Pilgrims UCC, February 4, 2007)

### Statement by the faith community: Evangelical

"Over the last several years many of us have engaged in study, reflection, and prayer related to the issue of climate change (often called "global warming"). We commend the four simple but urgent claims offered in this document to all who will listen, beginning with our brothers and sisters in the Christian community, and urge all to take the appropriate actions that follow from them: 1) human-induced climate change is real; 2) the consequences of climate change will be significant and will hit the poor the hardest; 3) Christian moral convictions demand our response to the climate change problem; and 4) the need to act now is urgent. Governments, businesses, churches, and individuals all have a role to play in addressing climate change—starting now." (Excerpted from "Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action", signed by 90 Evangelical leaders in January 2006, http://christiansandclimate.org/learn/call-to-action/)

### Scripture Reading: Psalm 118:1-2; 24-25

Give thanks to the Lord, who is good, whose love endures forever.
Let the house of Israel say: God's love endures forever.
This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice in it and be glad.
Lord, grant salvation! Lord, grant good fortune.

### Discussion:

- Which actions challenged you the most this Lent? How did they help you grow?
- How will you continue these carbon reduction habits throughout the year?

**Prayer:** God of all, help us to respond to your never-ending love by giving to us the strength to bear moral witness to the assault on your creation, the audacity to make global warming a major priority in the public square, and the courage to remain steadfast in this effort.

## Action:

During this final week of Lent, take another *one time action* by reducing your water heater to 120 degrees. Also, maintain your carbon fasting habits from this Lent. Rejoice in God's gift to the world through Christ our Lord, who reconciles all things on heaven and earth. Commit to continue elements of your carbon fast into the Easter Season and throughout the year. Blessing to you in your efforts!