

# EARTH letter <sup>Fall 2018</sup>



## Receiving Grace, Practicing Democracy

By Jessie Dye

In the summer of 2017, as fires ravaged the great forests of the West, two intrepid Earth Ministry staff members traveled across Snoqualmie Pass in the Cascade Mountains to lead workshops in Eastern Washington on climate policy. Smoke from the Jolly Mountain Fire filled the air and our spirits with ash and grit; both our physical and spiritual sightlines were severely limited.

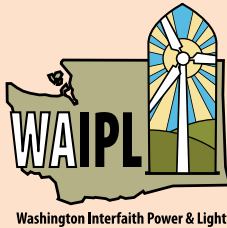
We passed the smoky trip with an in-depth discussion of the meaning of grace in our faith traditions. Grace, we decided, is divine influence that fills our lives with goodness, regenerates our spirits in times of despair and distress, and inspires right action. It is a gift from the goodness of our Creator. By aligning with grace, we can act with compassion and power.

As we dropped into the Columbia Basin, the pall lifted and our conversation changed to the threats American democracy faces daily from Russian hacking, attacks on truth and journalism, and polarized social circles. How, we wondered, can the amazing gift of grace heal our wounded national soul?

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Join at [www.earthministry.org](http://www.earthministry.org) or [www.waipl.org](http://www.waipl.org), by phone at (206) 632-2426, or by sending in the enclosed envelope. Please contact us for congregational membership information.

## ABOUT US

Earth Ministry transforms faith into action for the well-being of communities and the environment. We organize people of faith to advocate for strong environmental policies and provide strategic guidance to religious communities working toward environmental justice.

Founded in 1992, Earth Ministry has a history of leading the way in caring for the environment from a faith perspective. Our Greening Congregations program was the first in the country to help houses of worship implement sustainable practices, and our Faithful Advocacy program is on the cutting edge of empowering clergy and lay leaders to speak out on public policy issues. Earth Ministry's Washington Interfaith Power & Light (WAIPL) project organizes an interfaith religious response to climate change, and is part of a national Interfaith Power & Light network that is 40 states strong and growing. Our programs and resources are available to all. [www.earthministry.org](http://www.earthministry.org) [www.waipl.org](http://www.waipl.org)

## FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Are you planning to vote in this fall's election? No really, are you? Are your friends, family, neighbors, coworkers, and members of your congregation going to make the trip to the polls or put a stamp on a mail-in ballot?

Forgive me if you think it's forward of me to ask. We tend to shy away from such questions, even though voting is one of the most important ways we as citizens can engage in our democracy. Voting is an opportunity to make our voices heard, a chance to put our values into action for the common good. It's an invitation to say "this is what is important to me" in the life of our country, state, county, city, or school district.

Yet many Americans don't vote. For some, it's because it is too difficult to get to the polls, due to individual circumstances or the systemic disenfranchisement of poor neighborhoods and communities of color with fewer polling places and shorter hours. But many who do have access feel that their vote doesn't matter, so what difference does one person make?

It's useful to remember that Thomas Jefferson was elected president by one vote in the Electoral College, as was John Quincy Adams. In 1890, Idaho became a state by a one-vote margin. And there are scores of examples of elections being decided by fewer than a hundred votes. Your vote matters – as do those of your friends and family.

As Franklin D. Roosevelt said, "Let us never forget that government is ourselves and not an alien power over us. The ultimate rulers of our democracy are not a president and senators and congress[people] and government officials, but the voters of this country." Democracy is within your grasp. All you have to do is vote.

Blessings,





## GOINGS-ON at Earth Ministry

Earth Ministry relies on donations from individuals like you to make this important work possible. Join or renew your membership in Earth Ministry, sign up for monthly giving, or make a special gift at [www.earthministry.org](http://www.earthministry.org) or by calling (206) 632-2426. Thank you for your support!

### Colleagues and Congregations

Summer may be a slow time for congregational programming, but your Earth Ministry staff was still hard at work! We presented to St. Mark's Episcopal Cathedral in Seattle, Jesuit Volunteer Corps Northwest, Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace, and Seattle University. We also taught two workshops at the NW Washington ELCA synod assembly, and our Executive Director traveled to Austin, Texas to lead sessions on Greening Congregations and Faithful Advocacy at the Episcopal Church Women's national meeting.

Consider getting an Earth Ministry workshop on your house of worship's program calendar. Descriptions are available on the Earth Ministry website under the Greening Congregations tab. We book up quickly, so schedule your class now by calling (206) 632-2426.

### Interfaith Solidarity

On May 29 we gathered at Puget Sound Energy's headquarters in Bellevue to ask that their 20-year plan reflect faith values of responsibility, legacy, and stewardship.



Interfaith prayer service at Puget Sound Energy's headquarters

Earth Ministry's Jessica Zimmerle and leaders from a variety of religious traditions addressed the need for PSE to invest in clean energy and to halt construction of their LNG plant in Tacoma, which threatens the health of Puget Sound and the surrounding community.

As part of the Poor People's Campaign, Earth Ministry staff, board, and members attended a rally on the steps of the capitol on June 4. This nationwide movement is calling for systemic change in our political and social institutions. Religious leaders participated in a 40-day campaign with coordinated weekly actions that focused on poverty, racism, militarism, ecological destruction, and more. Big thanks to our members near and far for engaging in Poor People's Campaign actions near you!

Earth Ministry/WA IPL also attended a Ramadan Iftar dinner hosted by the Pacifica Foundation. The evening featured a panel of young interfaith activists who spoke about the intersection of their faith and work advocating for justice both within and outside of their faith communities.

### Laudato Si' Summit

Over 175 Catholics from across the Northwest came together in June to celebrate the third anniversary of *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis's encyclical on the environment. The focus of the summit was "Care for the Earth, Care for the Poor," emphasizing the Pope's teaching that caring for nature and humanity are two sides of the same coin.

Three keynote speakers were both informative and inspirational. Dan Misleh, Executive Director of the Catholic Climate Covenant, provided a summary of *Laudato Si'* and its impact on the church and the world in the three years since it was issued. John Sirois from the Upper Columbia United Tribes spoke about the impacts of climate change in Washington State on Native lands, waters, and people; and Caroline Brennan from Catholic Relief Services addressed the impacts of climate change globally.

This event was put on by Earth Ministry in partnership with A New Solidarity with Creation, a group of Catholic parishes, schools, and organizations living out the vision of the encyclical. Contact [jessie@earthministry.org](mailto:jessie@earthministry.org) if your parish may be interested in getting involved.

## GOINGS-ON at Earth Ministry

### Earth Ministry Creation Care Camp

In June, Earth Ministry collaborated with the Episcopal Diocese of Spokane to host a Creation Care Camp at Camp Cross. Lay leaders from across Washington and Idaho brought their passion for creation care and a willingness to share, listen, and learn from each other. We facilitated workshops that equipped participants with the tools to articulate why they care for creation, to implement sustainable practices in their houses of worship, and to take action as effective advocates for justice.

In addition to being fed spiritually and intellectually, we were well fed physically by a volunteer nutritionist who focuses on environmental stewardship through clean, whole foods. Overall, it was an empowering weekend in community and we look forward to possibly hosting another camp next summer!

### Initiative 1631: Say Yes to Clean Energy!

On July 2, Earth Ministry/WAIPL joined with our coalition partners from Yes on



*A morning workshop at Earth Ministry's Creation Care Camp*

I-1631 to turn in over 375,000 signatures to the Secretary of State's office – well over the required 260,000 signatures needed to get an initiative on the ballot. Of those signatures, over 10,000 were collected by people of faith in houses of worship. Thanks to all of you who contributed to such an impressive total!

Earth Ministry leaders have been a strong presence in the campaign, with pastors speaking at both the campaign kickoff and the signature turn-in rallies. We are now in the final stretch to make this equitable energy policy a reality, and it's not too late to get involved! Contact [leda@earthministry.org](mailto:leda@earthministry.org) to learn more and get looped in. And remember to vote YES on I-1631 in November!





## Supporting the Puyallup Tribe

Earth Ministry/WAIPL continues to stand with the Puyallup Tribe in opposition to the liquefied natural gas (LNG) plant being built next to their reservation in Tacoma. We are circulating a clergy sign-on letter supporting 15 tribes' request for a stop-work order on the project and have collected signatures from pastors, rabbis, and imams across the state. We will continue to accept signatures through the fall, so be sure your community's religious leader has signed on!

This year's annual Tribal Canoe Journey was hosted by the Puyallup Tribe. Over 100 canoes from around the Salish Sea gathered at Puyallup, where they shared song and dance. This year's theme was "honoring our medicine," focusing on water as a life-giving source that sustains, heals, and protects. Earth Ministry was honored to join in the celebration of this revived tradition by attending the canoe landing.

We now invite you to participate in the Tacoma LNG Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) public comment period, open through November 15. See [www.earthministry.org](http://www.earthministry.org) to submit your comment in favor of tribal sovereignty and community safety.



## New faces at Earth Ministry

We are happy to welcome two new staff to Earth Ministry: Operations Manager Ryan Olson and Outreach Coordinator Rachel Shinabarger.

A long-time Earth Ministry volunteer, Ryan is now working with us two days a week while also serving Providence Hospice of Seattle as Volunteer Coordinator. Ryan manages our database, processes donations, oversees office administration, and assists with fundraising.

Rachel comes to us through the United Church of Christ's Justice Leadership Program. Rachel cofounded Students for Sustainable Living on her university campus and served as staff for A Christian Ministry in the National Parks. She will be supporting our Greening Congregations and Faithful Advocacy programs in the coming year. Please welcome both Ryan and Rachel!

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**VOTE  
NOV 6**

# GROUNDED IN FAITH

## Voting Our Values By LeeAnne Beres

“Why do you care for creation as a person of faith?”

When we are out leading a Faith and Environment workshop in one of our many partner congregations, Earth Ministry staff often start by asking participants this important question.

The answers we get are as varied as the people who provide them: “I want to leave a better world for my children.” “I feel connected to the Divine while in nature.” “I’m appalled that Flint, Michigan still doesn’t have clean drinking water.” “There is only one climate and we have to protect our common home.” “My grandson was born with a birth defect attributed to toxic chemicals.” “The Earth is a precious gift from God and we should take care of it.” “My daughter has asthma.”

The specific reasons for caring for creation may differ from person to person, but one thing remains the same: each of these heartfelt statements is grounded in religious values. These answers draw out the faith values of stewardship, responsibility to future generations, spirituality, justice, care for the poor and most vulnerable, sufficiency, and community.

By asking this question we are encouraging people to open a window into what matters most to them – the deep-seated values that make up who they are and how they operate in the world. Our values shape how we feel and act at our most fundamental level. They impact how we make decisions, respond to particular situations, and interact with other people. Our values also guide how we vote.

Since faith and values are central to who we are, they should also inform how we look at public issues and interpret what is happening in political life. As people of faith, we have a responsibility to step outside of our comfort zones and challenge ourselves to address issues that affect all of God’s children and creatures

around the world. Decisions made by elected officials have an enormous impact on civil rights, immigration, housing, hunger, peace, creation care, and more. If we care about the well-being of communities and the environment, we must bring our values to bear in the political process that determines how those decisions are made.

In this polarized time, it is tempting to withdraw from the public square out of a growing sense of cynicism and mistrust. I urge you not to do so. Our voices are needed now more than ever. Voting gives us the opportunity to share our opinions on the issues that matter most to us and is one of the most powerful vehicles to make our voice heard. Whether voting for a candidate, initiative, or referendum, we are exercising our rights and shaping the future we want to see. Voting is a commitment we make to each other and the common good.

In the words of Episcopal Presiding Bishop Michael Curry, “We are blessed as a nation to vote. As citizens of this country this is a right, an obligation, and a duty. Go vote. Vote your conscience. Your conscience informed by what it means to love your neighbor, to participate in the process of seeking the common good, to participate in the process of making this a better world. However you vote, go and vote.”

As people of faith, we can play a unique role in this election cycle by offering a hope-filled vision of the future. That vision starts to become a reality when we vote our values. Join me in doing just that on November 6.

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*LeeAnne Beres is the Executive Director of Earth Ministry.*



# Washington Wants Clean Air – Yes on I-1631

By Leda Zakarison

Earth Ministry members are putting their faith into action by speaking up in support of Washington's Initiative 1631, which will invest in clean air, clean energy, healthy forests, and clean water with a fee paid by the state's biggest polluters. People of faith support I-1631 because it aligns with our values of caring for creation, being good stewards of our common home, and creating a more just world for all.

This spring, faithful activists across the state collected over 10,000 of the 375,000 signatures gathered to put I-1631 on the ballot in November. From Port Townsend to Ellensburg, from Bellingham to Walla Walla, and from Vancouver to Spokane, over 100 congregations participated in our effort to collect signatures. The good news is that the initiative qualified and your hard work paid off!

At the signature turn-in rally in Olympia, Pastor Nancy Hylton of Rainier Valley Community of Christ in South Seattle said, "I was excited to invite our congregation and others to learn about and sign Initiative 1631 because I believe that it is past time to act to reduce fossil fuel emissions that we know are changing our atmosphere and changing our oceans in very negative ways.... This Earth we live on is a precious and amazing gift. We who recognize the immensity of that gift have a special responsibility to keep it healthy and vibrant for all."

Earth Ministry supporters like Pastor Nancy believe that our faith calls us to do more than just recognize the majesty of God's creation. We must act on behalf of our common home when it is threatened by climate pollution, dangerous fossil fuel projects,

and corporations that have only their interests at heart.

Often, we can feel helpless in the face of climate-related disasters and the power of dirty fossil fuel companies. Supporting I-1631 is a way to make a tangible difference in our communities and gives us the chance to leave a healthy legacy for the next generation. I-1631 is a practical first step to ensure clean air and clean water for everyone in Washington, and the eyes of the nation are on our state as we attempt to enact a truly equitable climate policy.

Big Oil has already lined up against I-1631. The No on 1631 campaign is headed by the Western States Petroleum Association, and the oil company Andeavor (formerly Tesoro) recently donated \$1.7 million to the No on 1631 campaign. But while the oil companies have money, we have people power – and lots of it.

Initiative 1631 is endorsed by the state's largest coalition ever to support a ballot initiative. Over 250 faith groups, community of color organizations, environmental groups, labor unions, tribal nations, health professionals, businesses, and many others have come together to say YES on 1631 because we know it will make our communities healthier and safer. We are truly stronger together, and so we need your support to get I-1631 over the finish line.

Earth Ministry/WAIPL is offering a variety of ways for faith communities to support I-1631, beyond voting yes in November. If you want to get your congregation more involved in the effort, please email [leda@earthministry.org](mailto:leda@earthministry.org).

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*Leda Zakarison is Earth Ministry's Climate Field Organizer.*





# Raise Your Voice By Rev. Traci Blackmon

*In a video entitled "Raise Your Voice," as part of the United Church of Christ's Our Faith, Our Vote campaign, Rev. Traci Blackmon speaks of her vote as an essential tool for living out her concern for her neighbors.*

I'm a child of the sixties, born in Birmingham, Alabama, and public speaking has always been my thing. I can remember as a little child being in church and my grandmother would often say to me when I had speeches to do or reports to read, "Raise your voice. Make sure everyone can hear you."

I still hear those words from my grandmother as we enter this political season. I hear her telling me to raise my voice. I'm mindful that people like my grandmother and my grandfather and others in my family fought for the right for me to raise my voice politically. For them, in Alabama, there were tests to make sure that they were prevented from voting. My

grandmother recalls a story of showing up at the polls and being asked to name the number of jellybeans in a jar. The number of jellybeans stood between her and her ability to raise her voice.

So for me, voting is the only way I get to raise my voice in a political climate that does not want me to be heard.

I raise my voice for equal rights.

I raise my voice for equity in education.

I raise my voice for health care for all.

I raise my voice for marriage equality.

I raise my voice because people like my grandmother and my grandfather and my aunts and uncles fought for me to have the right to do so.

Please join me. Make your voice heard. Vote this November.

Thank you.

*As Rev. Blackmon reminds us, our vote is our voice in this election. For those of us who care deeply about protecting and sustaining creation, it is essential that we make our voice heard in the voting booth. Election day is November 6.*

.....  
*Rev. Traci Blackmon is the Executive Minister of Justice and Local Church Ministries of the United Church of Christ. This article is a transcript of a video that can be found at <http://www.ucc.org/ourfaithourvote>.*



**VOTE  
NOV 6**



# A Prayer for Election Season

Gracious God,  
we are blessed to live in a democracy  
where each citizen has the opportunity and the  
responsibility  
to participate in our decision-making processes.  
**Our faith belongs in the voting booth  
as well as in the sanctuary!**

Justice-Seeking God,  
we know that our policymakers impact our lives:  
they have power to ensure that all your children  
are equally part of this society;  
they can require that taxes are just  
and that our nation's income goes to benefit the  
many;  
they can help to make all jobs  
good jobs that pay living wages;  
they can send us to war or foster peace.  
**Our faith belongs in the voting booth  
as well as in the sanctuary!**

Community-Building God,  
we know that questions of public policy are also  
matters of faith,  
for they help us to give substance to the Beloved  
Community

which you have called us to shape.  
You desire each of us  
to live a life of wholeness;  
to have the opportunities to fulfill our  
potential  
and become the persons you have created us  
to be;  
to live secure in the knowledge  
that if we fall on hard times, a strong, public  
safety net  
will be there to support us.  
**Our faith belongs in the voting booth  
as well as in the sanctuary!**

Help us to find a way to cut through the  
confusion and the spin.  
Give us patience to consider and make wise  
choices  
that will lead ever closer to your vision of the  
Beloved Community.  
**Our faith belongs in the voting booth  
as well as in the sanctuary!**

Seeds for Election Season Prayers by Edith Rasell,  
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# Jewish Perspectives on Civic Engagement

The Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism

## ***"You shall not hide yourself."*** – Deuteronomy 22:3

Medieval commentator Rashi interprets it thus: "You must not cover your eyes, pretending not to see."

*When the community is in trouble, a person should not say, "I will go into my house and eat and drink and be at peace with myself."*

(B. Talmud, Masechet Taanit, 11a)

*"The opposite of good is not evil, the opposite of good is indifference. In a free society, some are guilty, but all are responsible."*

– Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

*"As engaged citizens, each of us has a responsibility to not only take part in our democracy, but to involve others into the process as well."*

– Rabbi Jonah Dov Pesner, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism

As we work together to fulfill the sacred mandate of *tikkun olam*, world repair, voter engagement is essential. As Jews and American citizens, we have an obligation to participate in elections to ensure that policies at the local, state and national levels bring us closer to achieving our vision of a world where all people experience justice, compassion and wholeness.

Rabbi Yitzhak taught, "A ruler is not to be appointed unless the community is first consulted" (Talmud, Berakhot 55a). To ensure that our voices and commitment to social justice are heard in the public sphere, we must educate ourselves on the voting process, register and show up at the polls. We also have a responsibility to engage with our wider community to ensure that access to the vote is a reality for all.

Each person is an agent of change. By driving civic participation through nonpartisan voter engagement, we are acting on our belief that our democracy is strongest when everyone can and does participate, regardless of party or politics. The goal of

nonpartisan voter engagement is NOT to elect candidates or parties, but it is to connect with elected officials and to increase our ability to advance policies that reflect our Jewish values.

Elected officials pay attention to voter turnout. Mobilizing our communities to vote will help us have better access to elected officials and increased clout, putting us in a stronger position to advocate for the issues we care about. Voters are also more likely to volunteer and stay civically engaged.

As community members are mobilized to vote, leaders often emerge, similarly strengthening our future work on issues most important to us. And when we are acting together as a movement, this strength increases exponentially.

We believe that our democracy is strongest when everyone has the opportunity to participate. As we work together to fulfill *tikkun olam*, nonpartisan civic engagement in service of our enduring values is an essential way that we stay active in our communities.

Excerpted from Jewish Texts on Civic Engagement and the Voter Engagement Toolkit, "Civic Engagement: Every Congregation Counts, Every Vote Counts," part of the RAC's 2018 Civic Engagement Campaign.

*The Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism's 2018 Civic Engagement Campaign empowers all people to exercise their right to vote and ensures that Jewish voices are present in the public square, regardless of party or politics.*

“

Voting is about optimism and hope, about envisioning a world more whole and committing to enact that vision, and about ***seeing ourselves as partners with God in the ongoing work of creation.***

RABBI JOEL MOSBACHER

”

Religious  
Action  
Center  
of Reform Judaism

# Why I'm Hopeful about the Next Generation of Voters

By Lauren Stock

It's one thing to be standing in front of a room when you know more than everyone else; it's entirely different to be educating a group of people who know as much, if not more, than you do. It is scary, your heart is racing, and you feel like you could never possibly be equipped to handle whatever you've been tasked with.

But the room is filled with energy and passion, and people know as much as you do because they care as much as you do. And so they ask questions and answer questions. They help each other talk things through and figure things out. In this room, I can be okay with not knowing everything.

This summer, I had the responsibility of leading a program about civic engagement for a group of college-aged summer camp staff. As a member of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism's (RAC) Civic Engagement Campaign College and Camp Staff Engagement team, I was one link in a chain of program leaders at URJ camps across North America, all focused on educating and engaging young and first-time voters.

Together with my colleagues, Mikey Pliskin and Evan Traylor, I led the URJ [Union for Reform Judaism] Kutz Camp staff in a dialogue and discovered that they were some of the most passionate and informed young voters I had ever met. Staff members asked thought-provoking questions and engaged in conversations about voter disenfranchisement, the Jewish value of voting, voting history, and more. Their energy engaged not only those who were less politically inclined, but also our international staff, who curiously inquired about American voting trends, identification laws, and other national issues we are tackling as we go into the 2018 midterm elections.

I was impressed by the knowledge that our staff members have on politics, encompassing both current events and the legal logistics of the way our country runs. More importantly, I was overwhelmed by the excitement in the room of young voters ready to voice their opinions and shape the future of our country.

As we signed our voter pledge cards, it became clear that we will be informed voters. We will be the ones who order our absentee ballots weeks in advance. We will be the first ones in line for the early voting polls. We will be the ones wearing our "I voted" stickers proudly on our chests, because we will be the



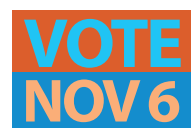
ones who sat together in a room at Kutz when I handed out the RAC's "I will vote" stickers.

We will be the ones who make this country look like what we want it to look like because we will be informed, we will be committed, we will be passionate, and we will be proud of this country.

**We can't wait to vote. Will you join us?**

Originally posted on the The Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism's blog at <https://rac.org/blog/2018/07/19/why-im-hopeful-about-next-generation-voters>.

.....  
*Lauren Stock is a Resident Advisor at the URJ Kutz Camp. She is a sophomore at Wesleyan University and is originally from Dallas, Texas.*





# Three Climate Messages That Win By Anna Fahey

A message triangle to engage and win on climate change and clean energy

Poll after poll tells us that majorities of Americans support climate and energy solutions. But neither the talking heads on TV nor our elected officials have kept pace with public opinion—or with scientific urgency.

Why? One major factor is that the fossil fuel industry is actively stalling our progress, spending millions to influence elections, lobby decision-makers, and hammer Americans with messages designed to mislead, cast doubt, distract, and polarize.

Breakthrough Strategies & Solutions (along with Sightline and a team of messaging experts) has retested and updated the powerful climate change narrative first developed in 2012 that informed high-profile climate communications from the White House and the Environmental Protection Agency to 350.org and state and local leaders across the US.

It's a clear, compelling narrative that cuts through these coal and oil industry tactics and frames global warming and

energy solutions on our terms, not theirs. (Climate blogger Joe Romm hailed it a “must-read” for climate communicators.)

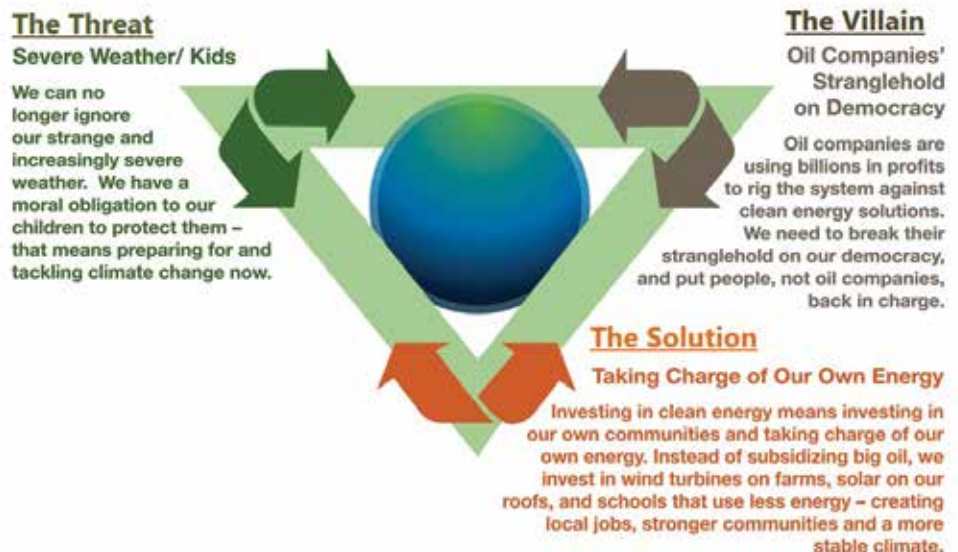
With a national survey, we identified three top-performing messages—persuasive among progressive voters *and* key swing and Independent segments of the electorate. Together they form a compelling message “triangle” anchored in shared *values*—*responsibility, accountability, and empowerment*. The narrative strikes an important balance between:

- **The Threat:** Pointing to strange and severe weather and our responsibility to protect our kids makes an emotional connection and grounds the issue in personal experience, underscoring the urgency of the climate challenge;
- **The Villain:** Holding oil and coal companies accountable for rigging the system against clean energy counters apathy and guilt by explaining why progress has stalled and showing that overcoming the roadblocks the fossil fuel industry has created is a way forward; and
- **The Solutions:** Demonstrating the benefits of shifting off dirty fuels to clean energy, especially in our neighborhoods, cities, and states, helps transcend partisanship and shows that local, practical solutions are available, affordable, effective—and empowering.

These three messages are most powerful together, supported by key facts and local examples. Here is your quick reference for effective words to use:

.....  
*Anna Fahey is the Director of Strategic Communication at Sightline Institute.*

## Three Messages That Win



# Hurricane Harvey 1 Year Later By Tarika Powell

## How to talk about climate change and weather

Hurricane Harvey wreaked havoc between Aug. 17 and Sept. 7, 2017. If you followed the catastrophe in Houston, Texas, or if you're following the 2018 predictions for Pacific hurricanes, you might be wondering about the influence of climate change on these massive storms. The short answer is that climate change didn't cause them, but surely makes them more devastating.

There are several ways that climate change can supercharge these kinds of storms:

- **Hurricanes build up power over warm waters.** Rising temperatures like the records set in the Gulf of Mexico over the past years make hurricanes stronger.
- **Catastrophic, record rainfall and subsequent flooding can be traced to warmer seas.** As the Guardian put it, "So, as temperatures rise around the world, the skies store more moisture and dump it more intensely." We're talking more in a single week than Seattle gets in over a year.
- **Rising sea levels played a role, too.** Again from the Guardian: "The storm surge was greater because sea levels have risen 20 cm as a result of more than 100 years of human-related global warming. This has melted glaciers and thermally expanded the volume of seawater." (20 cm is over half a foot).

So, climate change delivers outsized heartbreak, destruction, and mayhem that we're seeing. Obviously, we don't yet have any studies that definitively show the links, but no one would be going out on a limb to assert that global warming contributed to Harvey's severity.

As we watched news coverage of the storm and its aftermath, it's still interesting to see how different publications frame the climate connection. From *Politico* (Harvey is what climate change looks like), *Vox* (Climate change did not "cause" Harvey, but it's a huge part of the story), and *Wired* (How climate change fueled hurricane Harvey), to *USA Today*, which took a less assertive stance – and points somewhere in between. And, of course, there are outlets that will never even mention climate change – unless to dismiss it.

To prompt productive dialogue about the seriousness of climate impacts and the urgency for solutions, here's our guide for talking about the climate and weather connection in an accurate and forceful way.

Start with the basics. This is crucial. ***Is climate change happening? Is it caused by humans? Does it play a role in our weather?*** Yes, yes, and yes. People need to hear this. People also need to hear clear, honest statements about climate's role in our weather. Do not lead with what's unknown.

When called upon to talk about climate and extreme weather, here are the fundamental elements to cover **before you say anything else:**



Editor's note: This article was originally published on Aug. 31, 2017, at the height of Hurricane Harvey. Minor updates were made to include information about the current hurricane season.

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*Tarika Powell is a researcher and author at Sightline Institute.*

*Continued from page 1*

As committed activists, we believe that prayer alone is not sufficient. “Thoughts and prayers” has become a cynical phrase to justify cowardice in the face of evil. As faith-based environmental advocates, we believe that grace is a necessary foundation that frees us to act, in this case to create social change by practicing democracy.

My favorite analogy for the real work of citizenship is that of a fitness routine. Doctors tell us that consistency is the key. If I lift weights once every four years, or once every two years if I’m a mid-term aficionado, it’s not going to have a big impact on my body. Yes, the practice of citizenship requires voting – and to fail to vote is to turn away from the gift of self-governance. But, like going to the gym, healthy democracy requires regular, consistent attention.

What does citizenship fitness mean, then? Being well informed is a good starting place, even if daunting. The leap from avoidance (“climate change is exaggerated, a hoax, not a big problem, not my problem”) to despair (“climate change is terrible, it’s hopeless, there’s nothing I can do about it”) is a trap that grace can help us avoid. Opening to truth requires courage. Owning our part in any wrong, personal or communal, is hard. Grace gives us strength to face our human weakness and short-sightedness.

In some ways, grace is the opposite of karma. Karma gives us what we deserve; grace offers forgiveness and redemption even when we don’t deserve it. Grace is the ongoing realization of God’s presence moving in the world, in ways seen and unseen. Grace is always on our side, freeing us to face the truth and take action.

What else is involved in the democracy fitness challenge besides voting and studying the issues? For decades, Earth Ministry members have contacted

their elected officials about a wide variety of concerns. From emails to the State Department supporting the Standing Rock Sioux Water Protectors to in-person meetings with local legislators for safe chemical reform, religious voices for creation are gaining power in the electorate. By making phone calls, showing up, sending emails, and talking to our neighbors, we are developing a strong democracy.

In a heated election season across the United States, faithful citizen activists are stepping up. Texting friends to get out the vote, canvassing at farmers markets in support of ballot initiatives, and hosting phone banks are energizing and effective ways to tone your civic muscles. Every state has key elections, both initiatives and partisan votes. Alaska’s Ballot Measure 1 for salmon habitat protection; Florida’s Amendment 9, which bans offshore oil and gas drilling; and Washington’s Initiative 1631, focused on clean energy, are good examples of important issues on this November’s ballot.

At this point in any discussion of activism, faith community members







often ask if the separation of church and state guaranteed in Article 1 of the U.S. Constitution allows religious groups to engage in political activism. The short answer is to support policies, not people. Religious institutions cannot endorse political parties or partisan candidates. However, people of faith answering the call of grace are well-advised to work for issues and policies that stand in protection of God's creation. Faithful citizens and their houses of worship can endorse initiatives and legislative policies that align with their religious principles. And of course, every person of faith is called by grace to vote their values on behalf of our common home.

Back to our Earth Ministry outreach trip across Washington. As we neared our destination of Spokane, the dark curtain of wildfire smoke hung stagnant, and we worried about breathing this unsafe air. More than ever, we were glad to have spent almost three years with a vibrant and diverse coalition drafting a clean energy initiative for our state, a policy that reflects the presence of grace.

That initiative, Initiative 1631, is grounded in equity and committed to investing in clean energy infrastructure in the places that need it most. We could

deal with the smoke by staying inside air-conditioned cars and buildings. But what of those who couldn't? What of the farm worker, the low-income mother, and the people living in communities of color already on the front lines of pollution? Where you live shouldn't determine if your water is clean and your air is healthy. Initiative 1631 ensures that polluted communities receive priority investment, such that those most harmed by the fossil fuel economy will be among the first to receive the benefits of clean energy investment.

Despite the haze and our health concerns, we cheerfully led several adult education classes for churches on I-1631, which levies a fee on big corporate polluters, investing the

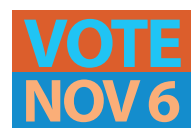
funds raised in new clean energy infrastructure such as solar and wind farms, energy conservation, smart grids, and electric vehicles, as well as healthy forests and watersheds.

During our presentations we told a true story from Earth Ministry's history. Nearly ten years ago, faith leaders joined with public health advocates and environmental groups to phase out Washington's largest polluter, the TransAlta coal-fired power plant in Centralia. It was a tough fight because several dozen good-paying jobs would be lost if the plant closed. But through persistent conversations with labor leaders from the area, a grace-filled decision was made to use decommissioning funds to transition the existing electrical grid to clean energy. Centralia is now building the largest solar plant in Washington, along with a new wind energy facility. This is one reason that many labor unions and small towns support Initiative 1631, because it will create more than 40,000 jobs that are free of the asthma, heart disease, and workplace risks that beset fossil fuel towns.

On our way home from Spokane the air started to clear, so we stopped to admire the beauty of Palouse Falls, taking in a moment of grace and resting our well-worked advocacy muscles. God has given us all we need to be whole. Our responsibility is to continuously do the lifting on behalf of our democracy, our children, and our common home.

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*Jessie Dye is Earth Ministry's Senior Campaign Strategist.*



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*The human heart is the first home of democracy. It is where we embrace our questions: Can we be equitable? Can we be generous? Can we listen with our whole beings, not just our minds, and offer our attention rather than our opinion? And do we have enough resolve in our hearts to act courageously, relentlessly, without giving up, trusting our fellow citizens to join us in our determined pursuit – a living democracy?*

*– Terry Tempest Williams*



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