

Women of Faith Advancing Climate Justice

World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women

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Thank you, Alison, and thank you Federation for the invitation. It is a privilege to be in this space with fellow sisters of faith who are called to care for God's creation. My primary area of work at UMW is advancing climate justice and working on our Just Energy for All campaign. But it might surprise you that my academic training was not in climate science; it was in history, political science and theology. But like many of us here, even if we are not climate scientists, we recognize that the climate crisis is an existential threat impacting all of creation and we have a responsibility as stewards of God's creation to act.

Women, children and youth are already being disproportionately affected. The UN reports that 80% of people already being displaced by climate change are women. And when natural disasters hit, women and children have been 14 times more likely than men to die, more vulnerable to gender-based violence and afterwards there has been as much as 20-30% increase in trafficking. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's report that came out Monday warns that limiting global warming to close to 1.5 degrees Celsius or even 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels "will be beyond reach" in the next two decades without immediate, rapid and large-scale reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

The good news is that we still have a chance to turn the tide on the climate crisis: we can reduce emissions at an individual and corporate level.

To do this, we need to understand our carbon footprint, which is the total amount of planet warming gases known as greenhouse gas emissions (such as carbon dioxide and methane) that generated by human actions and activities. It's called carbon footprint because most of the planet warming pollution is carbon dioxide. The energy sector accounts for nearly three-quarters of worldwide emissions, followed by agriculture. The primary source of emissions come from the energy sector, and chiefly from fossil fuels – coal, oil and increasingly natural gas, used for electricity and heat generation, followed by transportation and manufacturing. In fact, the past IPCC report noted that we must completely eliminate fossil fuels by 2050, and move towards renewable, lower energy demand, change dietary habits and consumption and protect and restore natural ecosystems.



But how we respond also is vastly different based on which country we are from and how much pollution we have created in the past and currently. About 60% of GHG emissions come from just 10 countries, while the 100 least-emitting contribute less than 3%. Some of your communities and countries have polluted the least but are experiencing the worst effects of the climate emergency because of countries like mine, the US. Though we are 4% of the world's population, the US has emitted 25% of cumulative emissions. In fact, we have the highest emissions per capita. The top 10 largest emitters, especially the largest historic emitters, must do more to not only reduce its own emissions, but also to finance and support the mitigation efforts of countries least responsible, and provide them with reparations for loss and damages, and resources for adaptation and resilience.

If you are wondering where your country stands and how it is being impacted, you can go to websites like Our World in Data' and examine the energy mix for a country (<https://ourworldindata.org/energy-mix>). You can also go to websites like the WRI's Climate Watch or the World Bank Climate Change Knowledge portal that gives you the climate profile of your country, and climate commitments they have made (these commitments are known as NDCs – nationally determined contributions).

While the 10 largest emitting countries must take drastic actions, all our countries and all of us can be part of turning the tide on the climate crisis.

The main source of greenhouse gas pollution is from fossil fuels, and for most of us, we are able to participate in this Summit because our energy is currently sourced from fossil fuels. But fossil fuel is not problematic only because it is the main cause of climate change. From extraction, production, transmission to end use, it releases co-pollutants that poison our air and water. 8 million global deaths yearly are caused by fossil fuel pollution.

This coming November, the leaders of our respective countries will be gathering at Glasgow for the 26th UN Conference of Parties, also known as COP 26. Just 6 years ago, world leaders agreed to drastically reduce climate pollution, and we must urge them to increase their commitments in line with the science and the scale of the crisis.

One very concrete step we can take as women and people of faith is to reach out to our government leaders and urge them to commit to eliminating fossil fuels as an energy sources and to transition completely to clean renewable energy sources like wind and solar. We need to move away from fossil fuels to just energy sources that do not harm our health, God's creation or lead to sacrifice communities or countries that must relocate because of sea level rise or are overburdened by toxic pollution for the benefit of other peoples energy consumptions or behaviors. Instead we can envision and advocate for a world where there is equitable energy access, where women are not dying because of smoke inhalation from cooking, or being raped while getting water or kindling. We can advocate for an energy economy that is not extractive but just, where we are stewards, not pillagers, of creation.



As an example, in the U.S., this past April more than 300 UMW leaders from 40 states had 80 visits with Congress urging for the US to do its fair share and move quickly transition to renewable energy that is centered on justice and equity. We also met with car manufacturer Ford at their headquarters and dealerships and Chevron headquarter staff to transition to renewable energy.

As UN Women notes, just climate solutions include ensuring women at the decision making table and providing women with sustainable agriculture techniques, job opportunities in sustainable energy, and overall gender based financing.

In the federation we have members whose island states are being threatened, whose homes are burning, who are suffering from drought, water shortage, or flooding. As a sisterhood of grace, we have the opportunity to be in solidarity with one another. For those whose countries are the historic emitters we have a responsibility to amplify not only how the climate crisis is impacting our own domestic communities, but the realities of our sisters from countries least responsible but most impacted, from Kiribati, Fiji, the Bahamas, Tuvalu, Mozambique, Samoa, the Philippines, Kenya, Sri Lanka, to name a few.

At the personal and communal level, we can determine our carbon footprint – you can do this by using an online carbon footprint calculator. Look for one specific to your country that examines four categories: Transportation; Housing; Food; Goods, services, and leisure. Good calculators will show you where you have a large carbon footprint and areas where you can reduce. Being in the US, advocating for energy policy change is key, but I can also turn off the lights, replace lightbulbs with LEDs, reduce the amount of meat I eat on a weekly basis, especially beef, lamb, and mutton.

Another way to practice this collectively is to examine how we can have more climate friendly and sustainable meetings. United Methodist Women developed the 13 principles to sustainably that we try to incorporate in our meetings and events. We group them into 3 categories – just relationships with one another (meeting participants), just relationship with the community (host community where the meeting is taking place) and just relationship with all of God's creation. This has meant that instead of people driving on their own for a meeting, we encouraged ride shares or public transport, offered mostly plant-based meals. It meant encouraging our vendors to purchase renewable energy or solar, and not using throwaway plastic items.

These practices can be taken into our daily lives.

Another crucial thing we can do is to talk about not only the climate crisis but the climate solutions with our family friends, schools, colleagues, companies and our government leaders.

I want to close by reminding us of John Wesley's three simple rules. Do no harm. Do good. Attend to the ordinances of God.



Our energy system and the current climate crisis is doing incredible harm to God’s creation. As women of faith, we have the opportunity to be like the widow in the parable with the unjust judge. The widow did not get justice because the judge thought she was right, but because of her persistence. Even when we get discouraged, may we persist in demanding that our government officials, fossil fuel companies, churches and communities must address the climate crisis. In the process of calling nations to account while also reducing our own emissions, we have the possibility do no harm, to do good and in the process fulfill God’s call to care for creation.

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