



Can Faith Communities Change the Climate?
A discussion on the moral responsibility to address global warming

Report on the Public Evening Event on Faith and Climate

The Canadian Council of Churches

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This public event is organized by a collaborative interfaith committee on climate justice, including The Commission on Justice and Peace of The Canadian Council of Churches, Citizens for Public Justice, Faith and the Common Good, The Hill Times, and Embassy magazine.

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CAN FAITH COMMUNITIES CHANGE THE CLIMATE?

On October 23 2011, more than 80 leaders and concerned citizens met at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Ottawa to discuss the role of faith communities in addressing the problem of climate change. A panel of faith, political and environmental representatives resourced the evening event, giving insight into both the gravity of the current environmental situation and the catalytic role that faith communities can play in reversing the trend. The event coincided with the release of the [Canadian Interfaith Call for Leadership and Action on Climate Change](#) and preceded the *Interfaith Forum on Faith and Climate* on October 24, 2011. A reception was held for all leaders and participants before and after the discussion.



PANEL: FAITH COMMUNITIES AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Moderator: Jim Creskey, publisher of the Hill Times and senior editor and columnist for Embassy Magazine.

Panelists:

- Executive Archdeacon David Selzer, Anglican Diocese of Ottawa
- Senator Grant Mitchell, Deputy Chair of the Senate Committee on Energy, the Environment and Natural Resources
- Lauryn Drainie, Lead Organizer, Climate Action Network Canada
- Mardi Tindal, Moderator, The United Church of Canada



Executive Archdeacon Archdeacon Selzer addresses the audience beside fellow panelists Lauryn Drainie and Senator Grant Mitchell.

The evening opened with an overview of the current environmental crisis by **Joe Gunn**, Executive Director of Citizens for Public Justice, followed by a beautiful interfaith song led by a Bahá'í choir.

After panel introductions by **Jim Creskey**, **Executive Archdeacon David Selzer** began the discussion by reminding listeners that the earth, created and sustained by God, is sacred. He attributed the destruction of the planet to excessive self-interest, overuse of resources, and pollution. Selzer cautioned faith communities against thinking that they have solved the climate change problem simply because they have made a statement on it. He emphasized the need for faith

communities to go beyond awareness of climate change to interacting with legislators and other organizations and leaders to address it. This includes a moral imperative to work with other nations, he noted, as we are part of a global community.

Senator Mitchell highlighted the reality that clear scientific evidence of climate change and its negative effects on the environment and communities has not been enough to produce significant behavioural change in Canada. Instead, an emphasis on jobs, fear of economic collapse, and allegations of bad science have prevailed. Mitchell asserted that the issue of climate change needs to be reframed in order to spark government action on climate change. He noted that one of the most powerful contributions faith communities bring to the issue of global warming is optimism.

The panel highlighted that as moral and spiritual leaders in the community, faith communities are in a natural position to reframe



Lauryn Drainie addresses the assembly.



Mardi Tindal addresses the assembly.

the issue of climate change in moral terms. **Lauryn Drainie** pointed out that faith communities can use the respect and influence they hold in the community to draw attention to climate justice. She further encouraged faith communities to make alliances with other concerned groups who could benefit from their clout. Drainie also emphasized the valuable resources faith communities can draw upon in their efforts, including a wide network of people to inform and inspire to action as well as physical resources like buildings and land.

Mardi Tindal agreed that faith communities can and must play a pivotal role in reversing the trend of inaction on climate change.

She reiterated that the language of science has not generated action on climate change and reported that environmentalists themselves have acknowledged the need for faith communities to step in. She implored faith communities to set aside their fears about acting and to be encouraged by what congregations are already doing to address the issue. She concluded that faith communities acting in love and justice can bring great hope to the situation.

After the panelists had spoken, audience members were invited to offer questions and comments. Further reflection and discussion continued over coffee and refreshments before the event drew to a close.



MP Elizabeth May, Green Party of Canada, chats with participants