



# Faith, Spirit and Climate Dialogue Series

## Final Report

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Vancouver  
Unitarians

In partnership with the Multifaith Action Society

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*The earth said  
remember me.  
The earth said  
don't let go,*

*said it one day  
when I was  
accidentally  
listening*

- "Poem" (First stanza). "[To] The Last [Be] Human." Jorie Graham. 2022.

# **Mobilizing Faith and Spirit for the Climate Crisis**

## ***Challenging Times, Inspiring Speakers***

### **Vision and Purpose**

Every day we are reminded that we are in a climate emergency. Unprecedented heat waves, droughts, fires, extreme weather events, floods, refugees – the list goes on. Taken together with the current pandemic, it's understandable that many of us feel frightened, overwhelmed, powerless. Where can we find the individual and collective strength to clearly face the truth of the emergency, mourn the damage being done to our blue planet, and inspire ourselves and others to action?

From December 2021 to June 2022 the Vancouver Unitarians in co-sponsorship with the Multi-Faith Action Society hosted a series of talks on this subject by people of religious, faith, and secular backgrounds, including an Indigenous peoples perspective. They were invited to educate, nourish, and inspire us from their respective world views. How are their outlooks challenged by the climate crisis? How might they help us engage more effectively with the crisis and create our way forward to a sustainable future – for ourselves and our families, our communities, our nation, and for the health of our loved ones and our planet?

Three Vancouver Unitarians moderated the series – introducing the speakers, leading discussions after each talk in-person and on-line, and providing continuity over the course of the full program.

Covid restrictions were in effect when the program began and remained partially so to the conclusion. The presentations were live-streamed and are available on the UCV website and our YouTube channel.

### **Appreciation**

The organizers wish to thank all the contributors to the series for the time and thought they gave to this complex and urgent topic. We are also appreciative of the support of the Multifaith Action Society. We are grateful to the volunteers and staff from the Unitarian Church of Vancouver that made this program possible during the particularly challenging time of the Covid Pandemic. Thanks as well to the Tyee online newspaper for promotional support.

## Speakers

October 2021. **Seth Klein.** Team Lead and Director of Strategy, Climate Emergency Unit, David Suzuki Institute. Author, **A Good War – Mobilizing Canada for the Climate Emergency.**

January 2022. **Reverend Dr. Carmen Lansdowne.** Executive Director, First United Community Ministry (now serving as Moderator, United Church of Canada from 2022-2025).

February 2022. **Rabbi Hannah Dresner.** Or Shalom Synagogue.

March 2022. **Sukhvinder Kaur Vinning.** Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Consultant. Member, Sikh community.

April 2022. **Catherine Hembling, Tamiko Suzuki, Corina Bye, Karl Perrin.** Unitarian Church of Vancouver Climate Arrestees.

May 2022. **Dr. Fred Bass.** Judaism, Agnosticism, Quaker Ways and Zen Buddhism perspectives.

June 2022. **Sameer Merchant.** A Muslim Perspective.

November 2022. **Reverend Lara Cowtan,** Interim Minister. Unitarian Church of Vancouver.



## PRESENTATIONS

Below are edited excerpts from the speakers' presentations and from their response to participants' questions that speak specifically to the theme of the series: Faith, Spirit and the Climate Crisis.

**Seth Klein. "A Good War: Mobilizing Canada For The Climate Emergency"** (presentation from his book of this name.)



*"...the transition before us needn't be only about the hard work ahead. Nor is it merely about a transition of our fossil fuels to renewables. Its most precious opportunity is the possibility presented to transform who we are. Like all crises, it is an opening for us to become our best selves and to create a more just society."* [366/7]

- Accepting the fact of having to live with ambiguity. In the climate crisis we don't know if we will survive or how this war will end. Can personally often feel hopeless. Personally walk the razor's edge between hope and despair. I'm motivated by fear and anxiety for my own kids.
- The Jewish culture – a value: the obligation in our time on earth to leave the world a better place (to repair the world).

- We successfully mobilized for two world wars. Need to do the same now. An alchemy occurs, and transforms us.
- World War II prompted a mobilization of the country across all sectors of life, led by the federal government. Government set about galvanizing public support, marshalling the armed services, and retooling the economy, introducing new policies, programs and regulations to meet the unprecedented production needs of the war effort.
- The scale of the challenge then, and now with climate change, is one that only the national government can lead, just as it did then with the cooperation of provincial and municipal authorities, as well as of business, labour, primary producers, manufacturing, the service sector, civil society and of voluntary organizations of all kinds.
- Issues such as inequality and remaking the economy need to be addressed. In the two wars, mobilizing the labour force for a just transition to a war economy and new arrangements for financing the war effort had all to be dealt with over a short period of time.
- The challenge then, of fighting the war, and now of climate change requires a major substantive increase in public spending on green infrastructure, mitigation, climate action at a minimum of 48 billion dollars a year as well as financial assistance for climate mitigation and adaptation to poorer countries. This would still be a much lower share of GDP than Canada spent on the war effort.
- As in funding the war, the configuration and sources for public revenues to address climate change need to be designed, noting the importance that Victory Bonds played in garnering public contributions in the war. A Canadian Green “New Deal” Climate Mobilization Plan and a new global Climate “Marshall Plan” can set the course for climate mobilization at home and abroad.
- I find hope in the doing. By the activism itself. We have to be honest and forthright about the challenge. In the end it is a matter of faith.
- Indigenous leadership is central because of their view of nature and of sustaining the environment. Recognition of indigenous rights and titles needs to be incorporated in the mobilization effort.
- Faith institutions need to tell the truth, speak to provincial and federal governments about the need for a climate emergency plan.
- Tackling this climate emergency isn’t just an obligation, it is a generational chance to re-find a sense of shared purpose...When we act in common purpose, it diminishes our mental anxieties and strengthens our sense of self-worth. Indeed this was an important element of the wartime experience.

**Carmen Lansdowne. Indigenous and Christian Perspectives** (presentation based on a written paper)



Vancouver Unitarians

Faith, Spirit and Climate Dialogue Series

**CARMEN LANSDOWNE**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, FIRST UNITED  
COMMUNITY MINISTRY SOCIETY

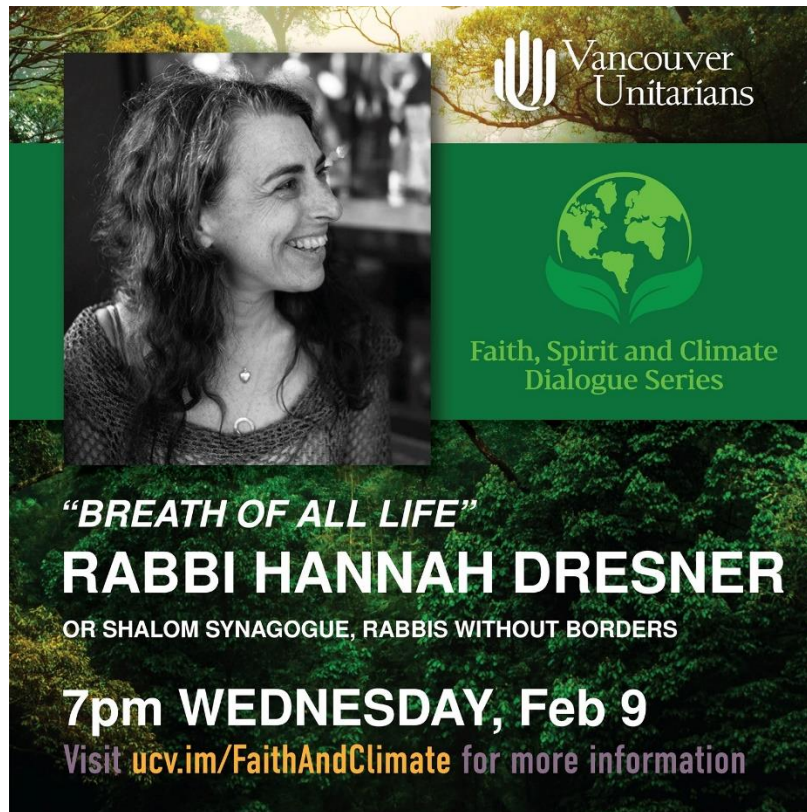
**7pm WEDNESDAY, JAN 26**  
Visit [ucv.im/FaithAndClimate](https://ucv.im/FaithAndClimate) for more information

- While I know there are many good Christians – and indeed good Christian climate activists, I think my religious/spiritual tradition has been largely to blame for the climate crisis. Maybe not the Church or Christianity itself, but the ways in which Christianity and western worldviews have become so enmeshed that to exist within a world that is a product of the European enlightenment that has resulted in this currently bastardized extractivist form of late-stage capitalism is deeply informed by the historical practices of Christianity and vice-versa.
- Re how my faith or spiritual traditions address climate justice, particularly regarding the disparities between the global north and south. I don't want to romanticize our culture – we had perpetual cycles of vicious warfare, and also slavery was part of our tradition. But the ideas that we had in common with most other indigenous peoples were that the world was a place of abundance, and you only took what you needed, and that the only reason for taking more was to take care of others. That is part of what was so threatening and foreign to the Euro-Christian settlers who came to colonize Canada that they put an end to the Potlatch, making it illegal to practice



- But that drive to think of the world as being a place of scarcity is so strong in us, that when the chips are down, we're taught – not even explicitly, but there's a drive almost bred in us to put ourselves first, to take care of our own, and to let others worry about themselves.
- And...despite that, the world can still be a place of immense beauty and generosity...We are standing at some pretty serious forks in the road in terms of our potential to survive and thrive in this world. Despite that generosity and beauty, the truth is if we were living more balanced lives, lives where we centered community and got power and prestige from our ability to care for others and not ourselves, we might not find ourselves in constant crisis. The reality is that the need for charity is created out of exploitation of people and the planet, and a lot – not all but a lot – of the philanthropic money that goes to charities is derived from those very systems that are exploiting people and the planet.
- What would the world look like if we could imagine an outcome where we didn't need charity?
- We are called to radically reorient our lives. And if we want to survive – and especially if we want to thrive as humans – we need to find a way to live in better balance with each other and with creation.
- If anything, this pandemic has shown us that the world won't end because the rat race slowed down. That while there is economic disruption that maybe that disruption also shows possibility – that we don't have to maintain the status quo for fear of what might happen. We know that we take care of each other. We know that we can pivot ... And that in itself is the start of a new creation.
- And today I chose life instead of fear. I choose faith instead of fear. And I trust that the God who assured Abraham he would leave a legacy is the God that will bring to fruition the new creation and the new community we so desperately seek.

**Rabbi Hanna Dresner: The Breath of All Life.** (Presentation based on a written paper)



- ...traditional texts from the Bible onward do, overwhelmingly, single the human out as having been created with the unique power of *imitation dei*, and that's our power to invent and create. With this divine attribute comes tremendous responsibility and the grave risks to the planet and cosmos we have seen borne out by human *irresponsibility*, *disrespect* and *greed*.
- Jewish law is called *Halacha*, which means “path” – a path for walking. Here are ten safeguards against climate crisis that the Jewish path offers, knowing, full-well, the insatiability of our human appetites:
  1. First and foremost, we don't have unrestricted freedom to misuse Creation because there is an absolute sense that nothing belongs to us. In the High Holiday liturgy we pray: “...We are mere sojourners...our days on earth are but a fleeting shadow...”  
The earth is the Lord's.
  2. God's handiwork is “very good” (Genesis) which reflects a wisdom in the order of nature even, even as that wisdom is beyond human understanding. It is presumptuous of us to alter ...that order of which we are – not in charge – but (rather) a *part*.
  3. We are arms of God in the world, and we consecrate our hands every day...

4. The world is God centred, not human centred. This means orienting our experience of the world as a source of wonder rather than as a resource.
  5. Observing the Sabbath mandates weekly respites from striving and utilizing and accruing. These results are also extended to working animals, and, according to the Torah, we're instructed to allow cultivated *earth* to rest one year in seven.
  6. The Torah prohibits wasteful consumption.
  7. We believe in the obligation to save human life. **And isn't in the name of ensuring a viable future for next generations of *our* species that we must stop, and reverse the Climate Crisis?** The command is: "Choose life!"
  8. *And* the Torah prohibits jeopardy of *any* species.
  9. Environmental justice is a Jewish value, with many Biblical laws redressing the power and the economic *imbalances* in society and nature.  
... Globalization has strived to achieve the free movement of people, information, money, goods and services, but it is fallen terribly short of teaching us that we are all connected, one organismic whole – that our fates are connected... The Jewish concept of *Tzedek* – justice, demands that we create a worldwide economy that is sustainable and that is equitable in the distribution of wealth and resources.
  10. Finally, there is the mandate to partner with God in "completing" Creation, perfecting and repairing Creation, establishing a heaven right here on earth.... In our greed, we have damaged the world and silenced many of the voices in the choir of Creation. There is no one to fix it but us.
- On the one hand, we're not naïve; it may be too late. On the other hand, and with your permission, I bless us to be hopeful.
  - So what gives me hope? *This*. Initiatives like this that pull us together in the same room, as it were, to lament, to point to the great wisdom of our traditions and share them as a composite toolbox for our equitable human flourishing as we, collectively, *choose life*.
  - Our moderators have asked me: To what do I turn when I feel discouraged? I turn and return to the breath:
    - A deep and cleansing breath.
    - (breathe)
    - Inter-breathing with our plant world.
    - Inter-breathing with divine images.
    - Inter-breathing with God.
  - If there is a Jewish creed, it's: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one." To my mind, what that means is: Everything is connected. One. Breathing. I know that – intellectually, spiritually and physically. And this is what I teach.

- What do I do when feeling discouraged? I reinvest in observing the Sabbath, consciously stepping back from ambitions which, necessarily, propel me to make use of the world to serve my purpose. In stead, I walk in the world, consciously appreciating all the encounters, registering all as “very good,” and surely beyond my comprehension. From that re-set, everything flows. I know my place, again. I remember that to *live* is holy, *existence* is precious. I remember wonder. And wonder engenders my desire to preserve and protect.
- What do I do when feeling discouraged? I sing. Even when my song is full of grief, the singing arouses both body and soul...From song practice, everything flows. I remember that my expressions and actions make a mark, and can provoke change. These are spiritual practices, in service of acting for the sake of the livable world. In service of grounding me in the core of my human capacity to *appreciate* the ineffable, to *feel* connected to creatures and creation, and to *act* in making reparation to our suffering world.
- Acknowledgement, or confession is a first step toward repentance, but the further steps are restitution and the enactment of change. So, we *must* believe that if we have the capacity to destroy, we also have the capacity to repent and repair...It’s that capacity that this series to talks want to harness.
- The God I believe in is not going to swoop in and unilaterally save us. Sustaining our world is a partnership. God never ceasing to breathe life into our world. And in reciprocity, *we* are entreated to persistently *receive* that gift, making daily choices to relinquishing our human chauvinism, continually embracing our relationships with all creatures and with the dust we came from. We have that capacity; it’s a matter of returning to the people we have not yet been.
- ‘Covid disease and death. Atrocity against the people of this uncaded land. Antisemitism is on the rise. The fires, heat and floods of this past summer destroying two and four-legged lives, and crops.’ We’re cracked open; we’re tired; we’re demoralized; we’re desperate. *And these factors make this a plastic moment*, a moment of potential flexibility, when our hearts are softened so that change is possible – surely more possible than when we are content.
- We attend events like this to make the most of this plastic moment. There’s no time for neutrality...We’re here to raise a collective voice in choosing life.

**Sukhvinder Kaur Vinning. Decolonizing Climate Change: Lessons from Passover, Easter, and Vaisak**



- Sikhism is not a religion. The non-colonialist term to describe Sikhism is the idea of the Sovereign Person. Self-sovereignty is not possible without self-discipline.
- The concept of sin is permeating the climate change discussions: my carbon footprint versus your job. We have a chance to change it. Be able to say “It’s okay, I’m an imperfect person. We have a chance to change it.”
- Am very concerned about some of the ugly behaviour in the climate debate. Climate action is a religious force for some; “I’m right and you are wrong.” A lot of harm is done.
- But you can start asking questions, bringing more diversity into the conversation, getting beyond colonial thinking. We have all been colonized and we are all colonizers. As such we all have “habits” that we have to recognize and change if we are to engage and act successfully. Recognize we are all in this together regardless of skin colour. Have human conversations instead of settler conversations. Climate change is an “and” conversation, not “either-or.”
- We all need to act not only as individuals around our own behaviour, but collectively for system change.



- Here are a series of questions for the attendees to consider and discuss. These are grouped by faith, with stories from each. Each has something to offer about how we respond to climate change:

Passover: Miriam, Pharoah, Suffering.

Easter: Ending, Rebirth, Compassion

Vaisakh: Justice, Courage, Self-discipline, Self-sovereign

#### Passover

**Miriam**: How often do you listen to your inner voice and take action? How often do you look to others for permission to act?

**Pharaoh**: What does it take for you to acknowledge that you are contributing to a problem? Is it the reasonable voices? Or do you need things to start falling apart? Or people screaming at you or marching in the streets?

**Suffering**: Are you able to sit with your suffering? Are you able to sit with the suffering of the world? Or do you avoid it and distract yourself? Do you try to save people or fix situations so you can circumvent the suffering?

#### Easter

**Ending**: What do you need in order to make room for taking action for climate change, or level up your efforts for climate change?

**Rebirth**: What do you need to create or give birth to in order to take action for climate change, or level up your efforts for climate change?

**Compassion**: Do you allow yourself to fully feel? Do you dial down your emotions or avoid them? Do you disconnect from those around you?

#### Vaisakhi

**Justice**: Who do you think does not deserve human decency? Who do you think does not count? Who do you think deserves what they get?

**Courage**: Do you make decisions and take actions based on what people think about you? Are you able to do the hard work, regardless of what people think about you?

**Self-Discipline**: How do you manage your anger, disappointments, hurt feelings and resentments? How do you stop yourself from playing victim Olympics?

**Self-Sovereign**: Do you own yourself fully? Does the buck stop with you? If not, who owns you? Who do you blame when things don't work out?

- As you go forward, what colonial habits are you going to shift?

Catherine Hembling, Tamiko Suzuki, Corina Bye, Karl Perrin. UCV Climate Arrestees.



The presenters shared their motivations for engaging in climate action and their preparedness to be arrested for their convictions, and the place of Unitarianism in sustaining them.

- **Tamiko:** Being out there is all about taking care of my kids. Decided to deliberately get arrested. Love is the essence of the spiritual life – to get us to a point of action.
- **Corina:** Birthing – bringing a child into the world is a compelling motivation. Getting arrested is absolutely an obligation of a mother to her children. UCV values fit my own heart. There is also the challenge of surviving as an Indigenous person, racism – and getting arrested. We are treated differently by police. Am inspired by Indigenous leaders and Indigenous spirituality. We are spiritual beings. What do we do? Keep loving, living, birthing.
- **Catherine:** Motivations: being a grandmother; living our Unitarian values (Truth may evolve over time but our Unitarian values prompt a responsible search for meaning in climate action). Other influences: The outdoors; science (the importance of skepticism; Zen Buddhism (walking; essential in prison). In the protest action felt completely supported, peaceful and one with the Universe. In jail saw Indigenous inmates treated differently. Anger is my cutting edge. The response to any difficult issue such as climate

action is thoughtful action, a spiritual practice. While there are differences between individual actions and actions for system change, both are essential.

- **Karl Perrin:** Why do I care? If TMX is finished, huge greenhouse gases. Where do I get the courage? Inspirations: Gandhi (“Truth is God”); Martin Luther King (Injustice anywhere is justice denied); Joanna Macey (4 stages: gratitude; honour your pain for the world; seeing with new eyes, acting with non-violent direct action as anti-dote to despair). Get courage through active hope. Gives agency to our lives even if we don’t know what the results will be. How do you make anger useful rather than just an expression of despair? Accept it as legitimate.

In sum, the elements for effective action:

1. Social justice
2. Acknowledging and dealing with grief and despair
3. Having mentors
4. Experience an epiphany (openness to insights)
5. Have a spiritual resource for restoration: Indigenous; Unitarian principles; Nature
6. Praxis: action/rest-reflection/action
7. Emotional and social support

**Fred Bass: How Judaism, Agnosticism, Quaker Ways, and Zen Buddhism Help Me Face The Climate Crisis”** (Written version of presentation available upon request)

Vancouver Unitarians

Faith, Spirit and Climate Dialogue Series

**DR. FRED BASS**  
Some Wisdom on the Climate Crisis: Jewish, Agnostic, Quaker, Buddhist

**7PM WEDNESDAY, May 11**

Visit [ucv.im/FaithAndClimate](http://ucv.im/FaithAndClimate) for more information

So, how do my spiritual traditions help me face catastrophe?

- **Judaism:** that the world and its creatures operate according to the laws of nature; that we all have a responsibility to be ethical and to contribute to the community; that study and scholarship are important; that belonging to a minority group is OK, but hazardous.
- **Agnosticism:** If the existence of God is not knowable without good evidence, then looking for evidence is a good basis for knowing things and it's OK to be unsure of things. Furthermore, even without faith in God, I could be deeply connected to sports, music, family, friends, and community – as in Boy Scouts. Later, in my clinical training, the approach to counselling called “Transactional Analysis” provided a strong (almost spiritual) basis for seeing people as inherently OK, not inclined to sin, evil, etc. Unitarians, Quakers, and Buddhists strongly tend to see people as inherently OK.
- **Quakers** (formerly the Religious Society of Friends): meetings are a weekly hour of silence, except when a person feels led to speak their wisdom from their inner voice. So truth comes out of silence. No Quaker creed, but the general theme is shared: “There’s

that of God in every human being.” Six words summarize Quaker values: simplicity, peace, integrity, community, equality, stewardship.

- **Soto Zen Buddhism:** What follows is more physics, psychology, and philosophy than religion. It is distilled wisdom.
  1. Everything is connected
  2. Everything changes
  3. The practice of meditation is irreplaceable
  4. Language is limited
  5. Buddhism’s three splendid virtues: compassion for those who suffer, joy and serenity.
  6. Awakened state: learning about the catastrophes and beauties of the world and how they impact our own outer and inner worlds. May we continuously learn how to care for these outer and inner worlds and help others do the same.

In helping the world there are many ways to take action. Some of us are ready to take non-violent, direct action. Some of us support those who do direct action. Some will meet with MLAs and MPs and city councillors to encourage needed change.

All of us have opportunities to engage everyone we meet, to listen to what they care about, and to related what they care about to the state of the world.

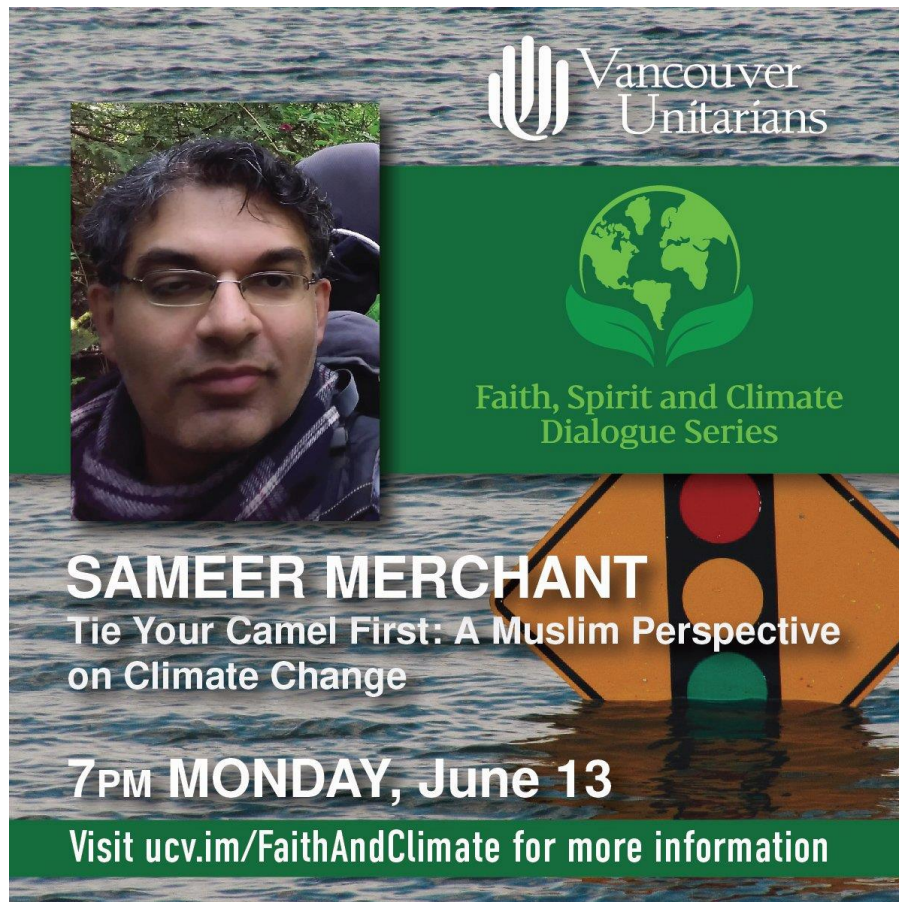
Faith groups can work across boundaries to build connection in the human community.

Three recommendations to you:

1. Keep a personal journal, noting what seems to be important that day (I note my personal mission statement. I always end with a statement of gratitude)
2. Every weekday morning on awakening do a “Morning Page:” what pops out of my pen – a way of tapping into what my mind is holding in reserve.
3. Regularly engage in morning silence/meditation (start with 5 minutes and build up to 15)



**Sameer Merchant. “Tie Your Camel First” – A Muslim Perspective on the Climate Crisis**  
(Presentation Slides available upon request)



- We are stewards of Creation
- Science is a way to understand Creation’s creatures
- We should respond to climate change by: having hope; avoiding excess; taking action

I left my career in order to read and study climate change to understand what I might do. In doing so am discovering hope. We have the tools to address climate change. Avoiding excess means looking critically at our life styles and identifying what is not essential. Taking action: gives us a sense of agency, creates hope and is an example for others. Performing one good deed can have multiple effects (1 good deed can cancel out 10 bad deeds).

Explaining the title of this talk: “Tie Your Camel First.” A Bedouin man asked The Prophet: “Shall I tie my camel first and rely on God, or leave her loose and rely on God.” The answer was “Tie your camel first.” Focus on what you can control – take action – and then trust in God.

Categories for sources of action:

- Yourself (individual actions are necessary but not sufficient)
- Family and Friends
- Community

- Policy

According to research, if non-violent actions can engage 3.5% of the population this is sufficient to bring about change.

Core elements in the practice of the Muslim faith:

- Belief in the one God
- Prayer
- Pilgrimage (to Mecca)
- Fasting
- Charity

Despair is regarded as a hidden form of disbelief

If you have a robust spiritual practice you can draw from this that if you and others are taking action things will turn out.

It is harmful to expect purity of other people. We all will make compromises in how we adjust our life styles to climate action

Islam is uniquely positioned to address climate change because the majority of its followers live in parts of the world that are most affected by climate change now. This is a huge incentive for Muslims to act on climate change. Muslim majority countries hold 60% of the world's proven oil reserves, so there is clout/leverage to go with the mentioned incentive to act. But western countries will not be spared.

The Western lifestyle has become aspirational in many parts of the world. The West needs to help countries mitigate climate impacts and develop the necessary infrastructure to address climate change and their own cultural aspirations.

## Reverend Lara Cowtan. Mobilizing Faith and Spirit for the Climate Crisis



Climate change is real. We no longer need scientists or teenage activists to confirm it, we are all witness to it, even from our sheltered and privileged corner of the globe. Rather than sticking our heads in the sand, or succumbing to paralyzing fear or dismay, we Unitarian Universalists (UU's) are called to act, to engage in ways that will help to create a sustainable future for the generations to come, for the planet and all the precious life it nurtures. The good news is, we are not alone.

This past year, in sponsorship with the Multifaith Action Society, Vancouver Unitarians hosted and facilitated a series of dialogues with inspiring speakers from diverse religious backgrounds called, "Mobilizing Faith and Spirit for the Climate Crisis, facilitated ably by members of our Environment Team, Michael Clague, Olivia Hall and John Boyle..

The question to frame the conversation was,

*"Where can we find the individual and collective strength to clearly face the truth of the emergency, mourn the damage being done to our blue planet, and inspire ourselves and others to action?"*

The invited speakers were engaging, knowledgeable leaders, authors, scholars, community organizers, even some of our own members who were arrested for their actions. All drawing

strength and guidance from their faith traditions. Whether Christian, Jewish, Muslim Buddhist, Sikh, Quaker or agnostic, all feel compelled to act to engage with the climate crisis.

Unitarian Universalists' action for environmental justice is based on the 7th principle that "affirms and promotes the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part." and also one of the six sources of our faith: "spiritual teachings of Earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature."

Through worship, and other spiritual rituals, we nourish and ground ourselves in our call to action, blending our factual understanding of cosmology, astronomy, physics, chemistry, biology and botany with the contemplation, awe, and mystery that speak to our spiritual beings, acknowledging our deep connections with the natural world and with our living planet.

The interdependent web poses a theology of relationship with the earth, rather than ownership of the earth as a resource; not a hierarchical power over other beings, but a mutual respect, reciprocity and responsibility.

There is a proverb of unknown origin that says; "We do not inherit the Earth from our Ancestors, we borrow it from our children"<sup>1</sup>

We are well past the arrogant, self-serving belief that the planet is a commodity to be exploited for our own purposes and gain. But not everyone agrees, and the policies and behaviours of government, business and people haven't changed enough or fast enough.

The Fall/Winter 2022 issue of the UU World magazine<sup>2</sup> is a special edition on Facing the Climate Crisis which examines the complexity of the choices we face and explores how we are called by our faith to make the fight for environmental justice a priority. You can read the whole magazine online, just google UU World. It is filled with articles and interviews responding to, from a different perspective, the same fundamental question: What role can we play, guided by our UU principle of interdependence, in helping redefine society's relationship with the Earth so humanity can survive?

There is a brilliant article on embracing an Indigenous worldview of climate change, righting relationships, and decolonising our cultural practices. One on responding to existential threats with hope, and on having a more spiritual worldview. Also, fascinating information on sustainable architecture and technologies, on green investment, having hard conversations with children, about public health crises, climate policies, ethical eating, perspectives from partners in other faith traditions, actions, lobbies, and different approaches people can take in small and large ways to address the inescapable truth facing us. Peppered all the way through are heartening pieces of poetry and inspiration.

UUA President, Rev. Susan Frederick-Grey writes about dealing with grief relating to the climate crisis in a pastoral and empowering message. She says: "Learning to grieve is an

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<sup>1</sup> <https://quoteinvestigator.com/2013/01/22/borrow-earth/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.uuworld.org/articles/uua-pres-column-fall-2022>

important part of spiritual growth. Grief can feel overwhelming. There is a fear that by giving into it, we may be lost to despair.”

“Climate change, to which this pandemic is not unrelated, is a source of profound loss. It creates collective trauma for us as a people and a planet. And we know there is more yet to come. Those who care about humanity’s future feel anger at those who scoff at the dangers, continue to deny the problem, and make selfish choices that worsen the crisis. Yet accepting doom as “inevitable” is a barrier to effective organizing.”<sup>3</sup>

Susan references eco-philosopher Joanna Macy, author of *Active Hope: How to face the mess we’re in with unexpected resilience and creative power*<sup>4</sup>, which was updated and re-released this year to include reflections on the pandemic. The 93-year-old Macy writes that being able to experience anguish and grief in response to the pain of our world is crucial to staying connected and engaged in life. A scholar of Buddhism, general systems theory, and deep ecology, a respected voice in movements for peace, justice, and the environment, Macy interweaves her scholarship with five decades of activism and shows us how to strengthen our capacity to face this crisis so that we can respond with resilience and creativity. Her foundation offers a free online training.<sup>5</sup>

The experiential work follows a spiral sequence flowing through four stages:

1 COME FROM A PLACE OF GRATITUDE

2 HONOURING OUR PAIN AND GRIEF FOR THE WORLD

3 SEEING WITH NEW EYES

4 GOING BACK OUT TO THE WORLD WITH NEW INSIGHTS AND HOPES,  
RENEWED.

And so, the Spiral begins again, with gratitude. Each stage leads naturally to the next. The journey helps us experience first-hand that we are larger, stronger, more creative – and more deeply interconnected – than we knew.

This is resiliency and vulnerability entwined, our greatest strengths.

Last month I participated in an insightful and inspiring conversation with a group on zoom to discuss an article by bio-ethicists David Schenck and Larry Churchill called *Ethical Maxims for a Marginally Inhabitable Planet*.<sup>6</sup>

Maxims are moral virtues which we can start to cultivate now to help us inwardly prepare for catastrophic events. The authors write:

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.uuworld.org/articles/uua-pres-column-fall-2022>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/13235686-active-hope>

<sup>5</sup> <https://workthatreconnects.org/spiral/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34840153/>



“...our greatest moral threat will likely remain the creeping normalization of catastrophe. Which brings us back to the fundamental questions addressed by the maxims: what kind of person will you be, and what will you teach and model for your colleagues, your students, your families?”

Our discussion group participants on zoom each chose one of the maxims to comment on. As I read them, I encourage you to listen for which one grabs your attention, and maybe share your reflection with someone after the service.

These six maxims are:

1. **Work hard to grasp the immensity of the change;** It is difficult to accept the devastation being imposed on the planet and all its living beings. The enormity and complexity of it boggles the mind. We need clarity about all that we are facing before we can choose our actions.
2. **Cultivate radical hope;** Schenck and Churchill explain that radical hope is the “kind of hope that reappears after optimism has died.” It is not fantasyland or magical thinking. Radical hope is the grace that comes once we hit rock bottom. Radical hope demands that we be courageous.
3. **Have a line in the sand;** Having a line in the sand means coming to some understanding about what you will do and what you will refuse to do. It’s about setting boundaries that require us to use our imaginations about potential scenarios. It is about ultimate ethics of what you can and cannot live with. What would I do if ...?
4. **Appreciate the astonishing opportunity of life at this time;** this one reminds me of Joanna Macy’s stage of coming from a place of gratitude. Take a deep breath and appreciate all the beauty that surrounds you, refill your well, your source of joy. Tend your garden and nurture your soul. Self-care and good living.
5. **Train your body and mind;** The healthier we are – physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually – the better we can cope and deal with the challenges and offer support to others. Resiliency can be learned, honed and practiced.
6. **Act for the future generations of all species.** The authors write, “*It is essential to find creative ways to cultivate an in-depth, emotional as well as intellectual understanding of interconnection, so that...we are acting for everything in the global web.*”<sup>7</sup>

Sound familiar? What is it with webs?

What strikes me is that both of these lists, Joanna Macy’s and the Ethical Maxims, are structured as continuous, repeating loops, rolling forward in an organised pattern. Tools for building and sustaining resiliency for the long haul, to push through the catastrophic collapse of what we currently understand as society and life on this planet so that generations to come will experience

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<sup>7</sup> <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34840153/>

green hills and clean water and fresh air and animals that walk fly swim slither and crawl on the earth with them.

Planning is good. Planning and implementing on a large scale require policy and institutional commitment.

Canada's first "Climate Adaptation Strategy"<sup>8</sup>, unveiled this past week, commits the federal government to new targets for preventing extreme heat deaths, reversing species loss and protecting homes in flood- and wildfire-prone areas. The intention is to build a more climate-resilient society, shoring up Canada's infrastructure and economy and increasing environmental awareness of individuals and organisations.

The conclusion of the report on the Mobilizing Faith and Spirit for the Climate Crises series states, "Religious faith and spiritual values have a substantial role to play in giving people the strength and the resilience to live with the climate crises even if the outcome is uncertain, and they give the motivation to act with meaning, purpose and hope in engaging it. Without informed action, the possibilities for solutions never come into being."<sup>9</sup>

Beyond these tools, beyond the science and research that can only guess at where we are going, what holds the bottom line in our action plan to combat the climate crisis is our belief that it matters that we do something, and our faith that it will make a difference. And we know that we are not alone, we are grateful for our community of support where we can rest, grieve, refocus and then return with renewed purpose and hope.

I will close with words of Joanna Macy:

"Active Hope is waking up to the beauty of life on whose behalf we can act. We belong to this world."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/environment/weather/climatechange/climate-plan/national-adaptation-strategy.html>

<sup>9</sup> Draft 07/10/22 Michael Clague, UCV-in Sponsorship with Multi-Faith Action Society-Report: Faith, Spirit and Climate Crisis Dialogue Series. December 2021-June 2022.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.joannamacy.net/main>

## **THEMES REFLECTED IN THE PRESENTATIONS**

There are themes shared across the presentations:

- The climate crisis is real
- It is not known if human-kind will be successful in dealing with it
- Actions must be both individual and collective if there is to be systemic change
- Social justice and climate action are intertwined: being aware and knowledgeable of disparities in our own country and between our country and others, particularly in the global south.
- Taking care of oneself is essential. Religious and faith practices provide ways of doing this.
- Taking action gives meaning and provides hope
- Praxis: thought and action go together
- Knowing the values of one's faith can provide resilience and sustain one
- Accepting that, regardless of faith or religion, human-kind, nature and the environment are interconnected – humans are “stewards of creation.”
- Children and grandchildren are prime motivators for taking action.
- A need to get beyond our cultural horizons, the blinders of colonialism and our own particular world view and to seek to appreciate and understand those of others.
- A need for an “Awakened state” about ourselves, the world around us and how humans can come together with shared understandings, shared commitments to action.
- Through worship and other spiritual rituals we nourish and ground ourselves in our call to action, blending our understanding of cosmology, astronomy, physics, chemistry, biology and botany with contemplation, awe, and mystery that speak to our spiritual being, acknowledging our deep connections with the natural world and with our living planet.
- It matters that we believe we can do something, and our faith that it will make a difference, knowing we are not alone.
- Avoid righteousness. Climate change is an “and” conversation, not an “either-or.”

## **CONCLUSION**

This program has set out to contribute to creating a ready reception by the public and the media to the topic of the role of faith in the climate crisis and its contribution to nourishing, educating and inspiring people and building resilience and hope.

The content of the presentations reveals that religious faith and spiritual values have a substantial role to play in giving people the strength and the resilience to live with the climate crisis even if the outcome is uncertain. They give us the motivation to act with meaning, purpose and hope. Without informed action, the possibilities for solutions never come into being.

### **UCV ORGANIZING GROUP**

John Boyle, Michael Clague, Olivia Hall, Yvonne Marcus, Derrick O’Keefe with the UCV Environment Team and Social Justice Committee