



Sylvan Green Church Initiative
A Program of Awareness-raising and Action on Climate Change
2008/09

Sylvan United Church is committed to:

- 1) raising awareness within our congregation and our local community about climate change as a social justice issue and the call for us to be stewards of creation; and
- 2) taking action in our church, our homes and in the wider world to live within our creed – “seeking justice” and “living with respect in creation”.

With Church Council’s support, Sylvan’s “Green Team” will:

- 1) provide information to the congregation, in writing and in short creative presentations, on the connections between fossil fuels and climate change, global conflict, ecological destruction and human rights abuses, and what can be done in response;
- 2) attend to these concerns, and our responses to them, in our worship by consciously and consistently weaving our value of and concern for creation, and for the peoples of the world affected by its destruction, into our liturgy;
- 3) Explore our personal and community behaviour and how we can support each other in making changes to live more consistently by our values and our creed, through various activities such as:
 - a. measuring our church and individual carbon footprints;
 - b. holding a “Blessing the Earth Challenge” that gives church families an opportunity to take a pledge to reduce our carbon footprints by one tonne per household per year (tool and material from Memorial United).
 - c. reducing our energy use by taking a *Carbon Sabbath* and/or an energy fast - see KAIROS Re-energize material at: <http://www.kairoscanada.org/e/ecology/climateChange/> ;
 - d. reframing our church and community activities to reduce our energy use – e.g. a 250 km (100 mile) church picnic or supper (where all food is sourced locally);
 - e. undertaking a church building, grounds and operations energy efficiency audit using resources and support provided by KAIROS “*Putting Preaching into Practice: KAIROS initiative for Energy Efficiency for Religious Building*”: <http://www.kairoscanada.org/e/energyEfficiency/preachingPractice.asp> and World Resources Institute’s *Working 9 to 5 on Climate Change: An Office Guide*, with the goal of becoming a carbon-neutral church within two years.
- 4) Sharing what we learn AND
- 5) Advocating with government and other policy making bodies for a just and sustainable energy policy.

Background

Over the past two year a group of Sylvan members, through the auspices of the Christian Education and Faith Formation Team and with the support of Council, undertook a reading and discussion group on Climate Change and its implications for us as a faith community. We shared a film on climate change with the wider church community and the feedback we received was that it is time for community action.

We are now experiencing a second summer where Canada's Arctic sea ice has melted significantly more than the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) predicted (in their Feb 2007 report) that it would likely melt over the next ten years. The permafrost is doing the same. These changes are having devastating effects on Canada's northern communities, on northern biodiversity and infrastructure. Huge stores of methane and CO2 will be released from the thawing permafrost. At the same time the oceans, which we rely on to absorb a significant percentage of our annual carbon emissions, are acidifying, which will reduce their capacity to absorb carbon dioxide.

Canadian Inuit leader, Sheila Watt-Cloutier, former chair of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference (ICC), representing internationally the 155,000 Inuit from Alaska, Canada, Greenland, and the Far Eastern Russian Federation, speaks eloquently of how the world's polar regions are heating up several times faster than the rest of the planet. As the ice and snow melt they take with them the white reflectivity that bounces sunlight back into space. The darker surfaces of exposed water and soil absorb and hold the sun's heat, amplifying circumpolar warming through this feedback loop. While the planet as a whole has warmed an average of one degree, average temperatures in the north have risen five full degrees since the 1970s, with devastating effects on the bio-region and on aboriginal communities. Watt-Cloutier says, "...what is happening in the Arctic is a snapshot of the future of the planet, and that, indeed, we are all connected. Climate change is a matter of survival of humanity as a whole. It is the most important global issue we face today. Protect the Arctic and we will save the planet." <http://inuitcircumpolar.com/>

Climate scientists tell us that the rest of Canada will see increased rains, storms and floods in some areas and increased drought and forest fires in others. Africa is devastated by global warming driven droughts and desertification, exacerbating ethnic conflicts. Island nations are disappearing as sea levels rise, their citizens becoming refugees.

IPCC climate scientists state that a rise in global temperature of greater than two degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels is an important limit beyond which damage to human health and the planet's ecosystems becomes especially dangerous. There is also serious concern that crossing this 2 degree threshold would increase the likelihood of dangerous feedback loops accelerating climate change where our ability to reduce level and stabilize climate become less likely. Average global temperatures have already increased about one degree C since 1900. Business-as-usual will add another degree C increase by 2020, and put another 240 million people under acute "water stress". <http://www.ipcc.ch/>

It is now widely accepted that world-wide a reduction of GHG emissions of 80% or more is required.

Canada's carbon emissions (as of 2007) are 19.05 tonnes per capita per year. While emissions in Europe have declined, ours have continued to rise. The sustainable limit for carbon emissions worldwide is about 1.2 tonnes per person, 1/16 of what we produce. To reach a sustainable level as Canadians we realistically need to reduce our emissions by 85 to 90% by 2030.

As a people of faith we must act. Action is needed on many levels – personal, local, national, and global. We have a very short time to stabilize the climate so that our children have a habitable world. Stay tuned and work with the Green Team.

References and Resources

Message from the Chair Inuit Circumpolar Council (Canada) <http://inuitcircumpolar.com/>

Climate Change 2007: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change: <http://www.ipcc.ch/>

Climate Change: Impacts and Solutions, David Suzuki Foundation, 2007
http://www.davidsuzuki.org/Climate_Change/

Climate Justice for All, KAIROS, 2006
Re-Energize Campaign Workshop PDF 2007
Time for a Carbon Sabbath – Bible Study and Plan for Action PDF 2007
<http://www.kairoscanada.org/e/ecology/climateChange/>

Putting Preaching into Practice: KAIROS initiative for Energy Efficiency for Religious Buildings, KAIROS, 2007 <http://www.kairoscanada.org/e/energyEfficiency/preachingPractice.asp>

Greening Congregations Handbook, Tanya M. Barnett, editor, Earth Ministry, 2002

The Natural Step Framework's Four Conditions for Sustainability or "System Conditions". The Alliance for Sustainability, 2007, <http://homepages.mtn.org/iasa/tnssystemcondtions.html>

Working 9-5 on Climate Change: an Office Guide, World Resources Institute, ISBN 1-56973-530-1, 70 pages, 2003 - This Guide is written for non-technical staff at small and medium-sized office-based organizations. It provides an introduction to climate change and step-by-step guidance on how to calculate, manage and reduce an organization's CO2 emissions. There is also a section on business travel. While based on WRI's own experience in its CO2 reduction commitment, it also draws on and is consistent with WRI's GHG Protocol Corporate Accounting and Reporting Standard.

Toolkit for Reducing Business Air Travel, Institute of Travel Management, Project Icarus
http://www.itm.org.uk/icarus/icarus_toolkit.asp - resources for internet conferencing

Carbon Offsets: <http://www.offsetters.ca/> see: *Climate Change – The Role of Carbon Offsets in Reducing Our Ecological Footprint*

Our Ecological Footprint: Reducing Human Impact on the Earth by Mathis Wackernagel & William Rees, 1996