

BLAME WALL STREET ACTION CAMPAIGN

BACKGROUND AND SAMPLE ACTION FOR CHURCHES

By the Rev. Michael Mulberry

SUMMARY

The realities of climate change require prophetic and strategic action by people of faith seeking to be faithful to the everlasting covenant God has made with us, with every living creature, and with all future generations. Meanwhile, the fossil fuel industry continues to receive subsidies and financial investment to further despoil God's good earth. If the fossil fuel industry simply fulfills its purpose, earth's climate will continue its radical alterations and earth itself will become inhospitable to human life. Urgent action toward fasting, reformation, repentance, and reconciliation is required.

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL RATIONALE

In the second creation story found in Genesis, humankind is made out of the fertile soil (Genesis 2:7).¹ We are children of earth full of possibility and promise. Our creation stories teach that as life goes for all of creation so goes life for humankind. Conversely, as life goes for humankind, so goes life for all of creation. Theologian Michael Northcutt has said, "If we throw Mother Nature out the window, she comes back in the door with a pitchfork."²

The first creation story found in Genesis has God beginning the creation story by making order out of chaos. The Creator sets boundaries and limits. These boundaries and limits are put into place to provide a safe, abundant, viable, and fruitful place for human habitation—a place without scarcity (Deuteronomy 8:7-11).³ Jeremiah, the prophet, sees the order, boundaries, and limits established by God's wisdom, power, and understanding. The intersectional injustice of Judah's ruling elite and their "comfort clerics" has led to an undoing of those boundaries

¹ Biblical scholar, Professor Ellen F. Davis, shares this translation in her book, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading Of The Bible* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

² Michael Northcutt, *A Political Theology of Climate Change* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2013), p. 45ff.

³ Walter Brueggeman, *Like Fire in the Bones* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006)

and limits. Creation becomes undone. Chaos returns. “Disaster overtakes disaster,” and the earth returns to becoming “waste and void” (Jeremiah 4:20, 23ff).

Our deep tradition shares the warning. Jesus also shared the glory by telling us we would know the goodness and care of God by reflecting on the wildflowers or the birds (Luke 12:27ff).

When the disciples asked Jesus why they could not drive out certain demons, Jesus told them that only prayer and fasting could drive them out (Mark 9:29). Prayer, politically, is solidarity. Mystic Julian of Norwich referenced prayer as a “oneing ourselves to God.” Fasting, politically, is detachment from the Domination System, a way of purifying intent and reflecting true sources of power and nourishment. To pray for God’s good earth then is to show our solidarity with its present and future. To ask for divestment then is to reflect a spiritual practice of prayer and fasting.

Through many resolutions over decades, the General Synod of the United Church of Christ has recognized what Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, the spiritual leader of 300 million Orthodox Christians, declares boldly: that wrecking creation is a sin. Many of the 38 environmental resolutions passed also decry the unjust, disproportionate impact climate change is already having on those living in poverty and in the least developed countries, the elderly and children and those least responsible for the emissions of greenhouse gases. For these and other reasons, the United Church of Christ is ever more committed to care for God’s creation. This can be seen in the articulated Core Purpose of the United Church of Christ (2012): “... we serve God in the co-creation of a just and sustainable world as made manifest in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:21).

BACKGROUND

While vested interests may have created uncertainty and disbelief about the advent of climate change and the reasons for that change, the scientific consensus on human-caused climate change is greater than 99%. That consensus spans a broad spectrum of scientific inquiry and study.⁴ In a commercial setting where 3 out of 4

⁴ Mark Lynas *et al* 2021 *Environ. Res. Lett.* 16 114005; Naomi Oreskes, “The Scientific Consensus on Climate Change,” *Science*, December 3, 2004, Vol. 306, Issue 5702, p. 1686, <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.1103618>.

dentists recommend sugarless gum for their patients who chew gum as a definitive statement, this amount of scientific certainty has rarely been known as part of public policy decisions or wider public knowledge.

The International Monetary Fund detailed that the fossil fuel industry receives subsidies of 11 million dollars every minute.⁵ The major financial institutions funding the fossil fuel industry and providing capital are all found in the United States—Chase, Citi, Wells-Fargo, and Bank of America.⁶



The United States provides a number of tax subsidies to the fossil fuel industry as a means of encouraging domestic energy production. These include both direct subsidies to corporations, as well as other tax benefits to the fossil fuel industry. Conservative estimates put U.S. direct subsidies to the fossil fuel industry at roughly \$20 billion per year; with 20 percent currently allocated to coal and 80 percent to natural gas and crude oil. European Union subsidies are estimated to total 55 billion euros annually.⁷

⁵ Damian Carrington, “Fossil fuel industry gets subsidies of \$11m a minute, IMF finds,” *The Guardian*, October 6, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/oct/06/fossil-fuel-industry-subsidies-of-11m-dollars-a-minute-imf-finds>.

⁶ Bill McKibben, “Banking on Climate Change,” *Sojourners*, August 2022, p. 16.

⁷ Environmental and Energy Study Institute, “Fact Sheet | Fossil Fuel Subsidies: A Closer Look at Tax Breaks and Societal Costs,” July 29, 2019; <https://www.eesi.org/papers/view/fact-sheet-fossil-fuel-subsidies-a-closer-look-at-tax-breaks-and-societal-costs>.

While fossil fuels have created wealth, luxury, and a lifestyle of ease for certain people, they have also led to widespread destruction of the earth, pollution and toxicity in air, land, and water, and disease and death among vulnerable populations. In the State of Michigan, communities like Flint and Benton Harbor have become sacrifice zones. The basic need of clean water for these two important communities was sacrificed in favor of values like expediency, profit, and racism.

Divestment works. The late, great Archbishop Desmond Tutu credited divestment for turning the tide in South Africa. Particularly in an economy driven by profit margin, divestment is a way of saying that we still have agency and power. Way back in 2014, Tutu called for an apartheid-style boycott and divestment campaign against the fossil fuel industry.⁸

Also, Winona LaDuke, Anishinaabekwe (Ojibwe) leader and Honor the Earth Executive Director, Winona LaDuke, has actively stated that we have already won. It is no longer profitable to do pipelines or invest in fossil fuel. It is a bad investment. What fossil fuel giants are doing right now is mining the system in a hurry while there is still profit to be made from a crumbling and dying infrastructure. The amount of governmental and big bank spending it takes to prop up this fossil fuel infrastructure proves this to be true. Without massive amounts of this money, fossil fuels are not sustainable presently. If we dedicated that same amount of money to sustainable and renewable energy sources, the transition would have already been made. Fossil fuels can't even make a profit without huge bailouts and help.

Plus, we already know that fossil fuels do tremendous damage and are certainly not sustainable in the long run. These are finite resources that will come to an end.

We are dealing with matters of utmost significance to justice. It is about justice for those communities who are harmed by economies of extraction (Missing and Murdered Indigenous People, Cancer Alley, fracking, wild rice farming, waterways with pipelines, coal mining, etc.). It is about justice that bends the arc of the moral universe and offers energy that is much more sustainable, resilient, and reliable.

⁸ Damian Carrington, "Desmond Tutu calls for anti-apartheid style boycott of fossil fuel industry," *The Guardian*, April 10, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2014/apr/10/desmond-tutu-anti-apartheid-style-boycott-fossil-fuel-industry>.

Plastics are made from dirty fossil fuels.⁹ As the world transitions away from fossil fuels as an energy source, the fossil fuel industry is eyeing plastics as a potential growth market.¹⁰ Already, we know the tremendous damage that plastics are creating as garbage and waste materials on God's good earth. For example, twenty-two million pounds of plastics enter the Great Lakes each year, most of it into Lake Michigan.¹¹ The presence of micro-plastics has become denser in our air and water.¹² Micro-plastics are now a prevalent toxic presence in the Great Lakes, changing and deforming wildlife.¹³ Just recently, micro-plastics, which can do serious damage to human cells, have been found in blood.¹⁴

In President George W. Bush's State of the Union speech in January 2006, he stated that America is addicted to oil.¹⁵ It is time to call for a fast.

At the time of the writing, we had 100 million Americans under extreme heat last week, and we're about to see those kinds of record temperatures across the region in the coming days. We have 60 million Americans experiencing a once-in-a-1200-year megadrought in the West right now. This past week once-in-a-lifetime floods in Kentucky have caused double digit deaths and destroyed hundreds of homes. Multiple wildfires at McKinney, Yeti, Miller Road, Moose, Drumheller, Dismal, Redhorn, Fish, and Elmo continue to burn in the West. Creation is groaning.

As people of faith who care for God's good earth, land defenders, water protectors, neighbors in animal and tree, a general fast needs to be called. Sound the trumpet and declare fasting/divestment, repentance, reformation, and reconciliation so that

⁹ Risha Narayanan, "Does Plastic Come from Fossil Fuels? Yes – Here's What You Need to Know," *Conservative Law Foundation*, April 18, 2022, <https://www.clf.org/blog/plastic-comes-from-fossil-fuels/#:~:text=Plastics%20are%20part%20of%20a,plastic%20using%20dirty%20fossil%20fuels>.

¹⁰ Katie Brigham, "How the fossil fuel industry is pushing plastics on the world," *CNBC*, January 29, 2022.

¹¹ Tony Briscoe, "22 million pounds of plastics enter the Great Lakes each year. Most of the pollution pours into Lake Michigan," *Chicago Tribune*, September 4, 2019.

¹² Garrett Ellison, "We're eating and drinking Great Lakes plastic. How alarmed should we be?," *mLive*, January 26, 2022. <https://www.mlive.com/public-interest/2021/09/were-eating-and-drinking-great-lakes-plastic-how-alarmed-should-we-be.html>.

¹³ Sharon Oosthoek, "Scientists find more complexity in microplastics polluting the Great Lakes," *Bridge Michigan*, May 4, 2021, https://www.bridgemi.com/michigan-environment-watch/scientists-find-more-complexity-microplastics-polluting-great-lakes?gclid=CjwKCAjwlqOXBhBqEiwA-hhitHTGJASYmFZYWIP6zLch5WRtNeK2NzbBNa8TFj1s6AtHFEDfZSlujBoCi2MQAvD_BwE.

¹⁴ Dave Lucas, "Alarm as microplastics are found in human blood for the first time," *WAMC Public Radio*, March 30, 2022, <https://www.wamc.org/news/2022-03-30/alarm-as-microplastics-are-found-in-human-blood-for-the-first-time>; Damian Carrington, "Microplastics cause damage to human cells, study shows," *The Guardian*, December 8, 2021. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/dec/08/microplastics-damage-human-cells-study-plastic>.

¹⁵ George W. Bush, "State of the Union 2006," January 31, 2006, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/stateoftheunion/2006/>.

we might mitigate the pain and suffering created by the deepening climate catastrophe.

Jericho Walk Action

Introduction & preparation

Two weeks before you do this action, write a Letter to the Editor to your local newspapers detailing what you will do and why. If you have an interfaith group participating in this event, seek out as many faith leaders as you can for a joint Op-Ed. You can find samples for such writings here: <https://gofossilfree.org/writing-letters-to-the-editor-op-eds/>. Ask other faith leaders to join with you in asking their denominations to divest/fast from financial institutions that provide capital for the fossil fuel industry. In seeking out a financial institution for this action, you can turn to this article and chart to see the worst offenders (top four, JP Morgan, Chase, Citi, Wells Fargo): [Big banks' trillion-dollar finance for fossil fuels 'shocking', says report | Fossil fuels | The Guardian](#)

If you are doing this as an interfaith action, you may want to ask Jewish and Muslim leaders if they wish to provide liturgical pieces to go with this action. For example, Jewish leaders in San Diego had participants in an immigration action eat bitter roots to connote the violence and death done to the immigrant community. Also, if Jewish leaders are willing, a time for the sounding of the shofar is used to connote a call to repentance. Please do not use this liturgical piece unless there is consent is given by a Jewish leader and a willingness to provide someone to blow the shofar.

In preparation for the pilgrimage to the financial institution or after the Jericho Walk is concluded, provide postcards or letter writing material so that participants may send correspondence to their local representatives or to local institutions where they have relationships. These institutions may include universities, denominational leaders, or leaders of the very institution around which you will be doing the Jericho Walk. Provide names and addresses for all of these local relationships. As participants share in this action, remind them that this is an act of love and compassion to bring about the Beloved Community with all of our relatives. Print out the Unison Prayer so that all may participate in it at the completion of each circuit of the building.

liturgy

MUSIC

Welcome those gathering with music from a earth-centered playlist:



Spotify Playlist:

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/58TaygwFqY2L413HoDYCOF?si=a788d57c15fb47bd>



TIDAL Playlist: <https://tidal.com/browse/playlist/9118c499-237c-404dbf6b-584b525d6569>

To begin, use the Blame Wall Street campaign song also listed above in the resources. There are two versions [here](#) and [here](#).

CALL AND RESPONSE

One: The International Monetary Fund estimates that the fossil fuel industry gets subsidies of 11 million dollars a minute.

All: This comes out to about \$5.9 trillion a year.

One: A report released last year by Rainforest Action Network, BankTrack, Indigenous Environmental Network, Oil Change International, Sierra Club, and Honor the Earth, and endorsed by over 160 organizations around the world, reveals that 33 global banks have provided \$1.9 trillion to fossil fuel companies since the adoption of the Paris climate accord at the end of 2015. The amount of financing has risen in each of the past two years.

All: The private sector acts like a zombie. Without heart or head, financial institutions foolishly throw money at the fossil fuel industry.

One: In the 5 years since the Paris Agreement, the world's 60 biggest banks have financed fossil fuels to the tune of \$3.8 trillion. Runaway funding for fossil fuel extraction and infrastructure fuels climate chaos and threatens the lives and livelihoods of millions. (Chase, Wells Fargo, Bank of America and Citibank are) This bank (name the bank) is one of the largest funders of fossil fuels and deforestation in the world. This cultural temple has become a den of thieves.

All: Flip the tables in the marketplace. Today we demand climate justice! Today we fast! No more death! No more devastation!

One: We are told in the 6th chapter of Joshua that the Creator of the Universe said to Joshua, "See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men. March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six

days. Have seven priests carry trumpets of rams' horns in front of the ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets. When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have the whole army give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse and the army will go up, everyone straight in."

That is what they did. After 40 years of wandering, they arrived at an impregnable fortress that was promised as their home. They followed Joshua silently walking around an armed city following the impossible and impractical command of God. Some with hope and some without. Unsure and sure, they walked.

And that is what we are called to do now.

That is what we will do now - march around this temple of profit and violence seven times, end with a loud shout, imagining a future with no need to fund the earth's destruction. We will shake the city with our silence, our determination, and we will listen to the voice of our heart as we go together.

In whose name or in what part of creation's name do you this walk today?

We invite you to shout that name now.

At each completion of the circle, the shofar (if the Jewish community is participating and willing to lead out)/trumpets will sound, and we'll pray together at the same time:

All: Creator, in gratitude, we thank you for our sacred relatives in earth, sky, animals, and water. In humility, we remember that we were created from the fertile soil and your divine wind; and will return to this soil upon our death. Give us the strength to fast from these economies of destruction. Bring these walls of injustice down and re-weave us together with cords of justice, health, and balance. Amen.

Pray it together now (practice).

One: Please get into a line two abreast. As you walk silently, we invite you to sit in that silence and listen. Imagine/reflect meditate on what an impractical, impossible command you might be called to, we might be called to? To go into yourself and sit and gather your feelings in the center of your body. Are you ready to answer the call from our sacred relatives? In a world full of shouting, silence has its own power.

Start walking.

Each stop FACE THE BUILDING Pray the prayer.

After Final Stop:

One: "By faith the walls of Jericho fell after the people marched around them for seven days." Heb 11:30

On the seventh day, they got up at daybreak and marched around the city seven times in the same manner, except that on that day they circled the city seven times. The seventh time around, when the priests sounded the trumpet blast, Joshua commanded the army, "Shout! For the Living God has given you the city!"

One: Now dig inside you to your heart and be ready to shout once more.

SHOUT the names of those sacred relatives you love.

SHOUT our pain.

SHOUT out our hopes.

Leave space for some chanting, righteous anger, speaking.

Closing Prayer: Creator of the Universe, at the completion of creation, you declared all of this very good. You show us that all of us together are one people on this, our sacred home. Great Spirit, who knows all hearts, shine your light upon all to make our path clear. We ask that these walls become a portal to a new economy of shared goodness, solidarity with your good earth, and a healthy relationship with your sacred relatives. We ask that those at work in these financial institutions join us in transformative justice to bring about right relationship. May our work here today liberate them to new possibilities. Amen.