



## Profits Over Responsibility

**Karen Georgia Thompson**  
General Minister and President

The climate crisis has been [identified as the most pressing global issue of our time. Global warming and the rising temperatures it brings are contributing to the Arctic melting, rising sea levels, natural disasters as well as food and water insecurity.](#) As evidence of this crisis continues to be seen in communities around the world, there is an ongoing call for concrete action that will reverse the effects of climate change being witnessed around the world. There is grave concern that the damages done to the environment over these many years will take time to reverse, although there is optimism that this fight for climate change is one that can be won.

Attention to this crisis is universal. As attention began turning to how it can be addressed, [journalists discovered internal memos showing that the Exxon oil company knew from studies it conducted in the 1970s that its fossil fuel products could lead to the kind of global warming we are seeing today. Their studies showed that the use of gas, coal, and other forms of fossil fuels would have a severe impact on the planet.](#) Even with the results of these studies in hand, [Exxon was silent about the burgeoning crisis and went as far as downplaying the voices of those who were warning global warming was coming fast.](#) Now, in addition to the impacts facing the earth, there are warnings about the negative effects global warming will have on the health of some of the most vulnerable among us.

Lawsuits have been filed by countries and municipalities against Exxon, including one by the [mayors of Puerto Rico](#). In their lawsuit, the plaintiffs cite: “Decades ago, each of the Defendants’ companies and their subsidiaries sought and obtained scientific information establishing that products they marketed and sold in Puerto Rico accelerated climate change and the concomitant likelihood that Puerto Rico and thus the Plaintiff Municipalities would be ravaged by dangerous, deadly storms. Once the Defendants obtained this information, they jointly and severally

embarked on a corporate worldwide strategy to hide that information from the Plaintiffs through a campaign of climate change denial and obfuscation of the ominous threat of storms to Puerto Rico.”

At General Synod 29 in 2013, [the United Church of Christ became the first denomination to call for divestment from fossil fuel companies.](#)

This action was to reinforce the UCC’s commitment to reversing climate change and ensuring the dependence on fossil fuels be decreased. With the evidence before us that Exxon was intentional in its strategies of misinformation and had knowledge climate change would happen as it did, more must be done to hold Exxon accountable for the impacts of the climate crisis.

The lives of millions are at stake, and this number is increasing with each day as global warming worsens. As people of faith and advocates for justice and human rights, we must continue to call for reduced dependency on fossil fuel products, and our voices must be heard in the call for accountability from Exxon and others for their complicity in hiding what they knew from the projections in those studies they conducted over fifty years ago. They chose profits over responsibility for what they knew, and they must be held accountable for the results being experienced globally as the earth continues to warm.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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