

Climate Justice Curriculum (Single Session)



Introduction for the leader

As Christians we have a spiritual and moral obligation to care for all of God's creation – plants, animals, and humans – and the land, water and air on which all life depends. Extracting fossil fuels is devastating our land, water and air and burning fossil fuels is the major culprit in creating climate change. If we are to slow the effects of climate change, the most effective way is to keep fossil fuels in the ground, minimize burning them, and switch to renewable energy. There are many ways this can be done individually and as a society. Divestment - selling investments in fossil fuel companies - is one way to put pressure on these companies to develop newer and cleaner technologies for producing energy.

This curriculum is designed to be completed in about an hour. It covers the Biblical basis for caring for creation, the science of climate change, actions individuals can take, and divestment as a strategy to increase investments in clean energy. Handouts of the proposed divestment overture are provided for use toward the end of the class.

Materials

- Laptop computer and projector or large screen TV for showing 2 short videos
- Flipchart or whiteboard and markers
- Index card and pen/pencil for each person in the class

Preparation before Class

- Print and read the list of actions on pages 1-2 from the Power to Change, for your reference http://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/acswp/pdf/energyreport.pdf
- Print enough double-sided copies for each of the class participants of:
 - 2016 PCUSA Fossil Divestment Overture and Rationale (pages 5 & 6)
 - 2016 PCUSA Fossil Divestment Overture + Commentary (pages 7 & 8)

Lesson Plan

Opening Prayer

1 minute

God, in the beginning you created the universe out of love. You call us to live in harmony with creation and you. Help us learn more about how you call us, how you forgive our ecological sins, and how you empower us to be reconciled with you and with creation. Amen.

Biblical and Theological Foundations for Earth Care

Overview

1 minute

The opening chapters of Genesis give us a staggering amount of theologically-based environmental principles. It is helpful to know first that there are two creation stories: Genesis 1-2:4a and 2:4b-25. The first creation story is written like a poem and called a "priestly" account (Bruggemann, 14-15; von Rad, 24-28), written to give hope to the Israelites in exile, or just after the exile in Babylonia. Two main themes in the poem are, first of all, that all of creation (including human beings) is good; and second, that human beings are given a vocation of caring for the earth.

The Goodness Theme—All Creation Is Good

Reading the Text

5 minutes

Read Genesis 1:1—2:4a as a group and notice the goodness theme, letting different people read each verse or section (like a "day," such as verses 1:1-5 and 1:6-8 and so on). Identify how many times creation is called "good" (and "very good!").

This poem is not meant to be a scientific account but a theological declaration—revealing the relationship between God and humanity and all creation. This relationship is based on this idea of goodness, which means that order is brought to the chaos that existed before God acted (v.2). The story of creation tells us that if we are connected with God, then order or goodness flows. If we are disconnected from God, sin emerges and the possibility of evil arises. Chaos emerges.

The Theme of Our Vocation—Subdue and Have Dominion

Reading the Text

5 minutes

Focus now on Genesis 1:28. God gives humankind its vocation: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth” (NRSV). The ideas of subduing and having dominion over creation have been misused to justify humankind’s exploitation of the earth.

Both verbs (“to subdue” and “to have dominion”) concern the use of power (Bruggemann, 32-33). Made in the image of God, humanity is God’s representative on earth, exercising God’s authority and freedom. But humanity’s exercise of power is to be done as God would do it. God would never exploit the earth. As God’s representatives all of creation is to be cared for by us. Having dominion only has to do with the animals of the earth. Humanity is to act as a shepherd, watching over, protecting and caring for the living creatures as the shepherd king does in Ezekiel 34.

Question for Engagement

5 minutes

In what ways has humanity exploited the earth, using power and freedom in a way that does not reflect God’s ways?

List the ways on a flipchart or whiteboard. If the list does not include exploiting fossil fuels (coal, oil, gas) through actions such as extraction, electricity generation, transportation, and agriculture, add them. Ask the group to help you identify the actions involving exploiting fossil fuels and mark them.

Exploring the consequences of our actions

10 minutes

Show a four-minute video that is on the Internet, entitled Climate 101 by the Science Guy, Bill Nye www.ClimateRealityProject.org/video/climate-101-bill-nye. As you watch the video, ask each person to write down one new thing they learn from the video on an index card that you provide.

After the video ask folks to share what they learned. With everybody working together compile a list of the main points that all should know about climate change from the video and write on a flipchart or whiteboard. The group list should look pretty much like the list below. Add any missed points to the groups’ list and share with the group.

Here are the main points everyone should know about climate change:

- Our burning of fossil fuels such as coal, oil and gas are responsible for climate change.
- Burning fossil fuels releases greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide and methane.
- Greenhouse gases hold heat around the planet that otherwise would have escaped back into space.
- This heat increases as the volume of gases increases as we burn more and more fossil fuels, raising the temperature of the earth and oceans.
- This warming is changing our climate and raising sea levels.
- Our weather is now more extreme – heavier rain and snowfalls, longer droughts and more wildfires, more violent storms and more heat waves.
- Sea level is routinely flooding coastal areas such as Miami Beach and New York City.
- We can stop this by switching to renewable energy.
- The technology to make the switch already exists, but because we have waited so long, it won't be easy or cheap.
- Congress must lead our nation in switching to renewable energy.

Brainstorming what we can do as individuals

10 minutes

- While referring to the list of ways humans have exploited fossil fuels, ask the group to brainstorm what actions we can take as individuals to limit our use of coal, oil, and gas and record on a flipchart or white board. During the brainstorming, challenge the group to think beyond primary uses of fossil fuels for energy and consider the manufacturing of products and agricultural practices. Suggest actions in the list that you printed earlier from *The Power to Change*, if the class does not.
- Group actions into 4 areas such as those listed below by circling with a different colored marker for each area, or draw lines connecting each action in a group with a different color for each group.
 - Where we live (home energy and water use; yard care; sustainable consumption)
 - How we move (vehicle gas mileage, carpooling, public transit, biking, walking)
 - What we eat (less meat, more plants; local food, sustainable farming)
 - How we respond (advocacy, policy and divestment)
- Ask for one volunteer, for each group above, to describe in 2- 3 sentences what they are doing.
- Discuss the importance of individual actions but emphasize that the urgency of climate change requires collective action such as advocacy, policy change, and divestment.

Fossil Fuel Divestment as a Clean Energy Strategy

6 minutes

An area in which PCUSA can respond to climate change is in the area of investments, held in its retirement fund and in its Foundation. According to the PCUSA policy document: [The Divestment Strategy: Principles and Criteria](#), "...The imperatives of the gospel demand that we weigh the church's involvement in a particular investment with the church's engagement in the larger society."

Divestment is a moral and prophetic act of refusing to invest in or profit from companies that rely on fossil fuels for income. One of the spokespeople for that movement is Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who was also a leader of the divestment movement in South Africa. Show this 4 minute video:

http://salsa4.salsalabs.com/o/51199/p/salsa/web/common/public/content?content_item_KEY=13198

Explain background: In June 2014, an overture, endorsed by 12 Presbyteries, urging PC(USA) to divest from the top 200 fossil fuel companies was brought to General Assembly. It was discussed and referred to MRTI (Mission Responsibility Through Investment committee) for further study and a report from MRTI will be brought to the floor of GA in June 2016. Because a new divestment overture will be coming up in our Presbyteries and at the next General Assembly, it would be well for us to familiarize ourselves with this overture and the reasons it has been proposed.

The 2016 Fossil Fuel Divestment Overture

15 minutes

Distribute the “PCUSA 2016 Fossil Divestment Overture” document (pages 5 & 6) and the “Overture + Commentary” document (pages 7 & 8). Ask the class to turn to the “Rationale” side of the overture and read it silently. After about 4 minutes, ask for discussion on whether the rationale is consistent with other materials discussed in today’s lesson. As follow-up, ask which items in the rationale they found most compelling or most jarring.

Ask the class to find the Overture and Commentary page. Request that they concentrate on section 2.a. and 2.b. i – v, and find the one item that most jumps out at them. Provide opportunity for class members to comment on a given item and discuss.

Closing Prayer

1 minute

Close this final lesson with a prayer for denominational wisdom as we move forward in discernment on this important issue impacting God’s good creation. If there’s a class member who would feel comfortable doing so, you may want to ask them to close.

2016 PCUSA Fossil Fuel Divestment Overture



The Presbytery of _____ overtures the 222nd General Assembly (2016) to:

1. **Express its profound concern about the destructive effects of climate change on all God’s creation, including a disproportionate impact 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. The 222nd General Assembly (2016) thus recognizes the moral mandate for humanity to shift to a sustainable energy regime in a way that is both just and compassionate. This mandate compels us to action as a denomination to divest from the fossil fuel industry even as we reduce our use of fossil fuels and shrink our carbon footprint.**
2. **Call upon the Board of Pensions and the Presbyterian Church (USA) Foundation to:**
 - a. **Immediately stop any new direct investment in fossil fuel companies**
 - b. **Work to ensure that within three years, none of the Board’s or the Foundation’s directly held or commingled assets includes holdings of either equities or corporate bonds in the fossil fuel companies identified in the Carbon Underground 200 list¹ by:**
 - i. **Working with current and prospective asset managers to develop and implement institutional fossil free investment options**
 - ii. Establishing within one year fossil free investment options for fund participants
 - iii. **Actively seeking out and investing in renewable and energy efficiency related securities**
 - iv. Notwithstanding the above provisions, retaining or acquiring minimal sufficient investment in fossil fuel companies to participate in shareholder engagement activities
 - v. Notwithstanding the above provisions, taking no action inconsistent with fiduciary duty or principles of sound investment, including the real and substantial risk of stranded carbon assets
 - c. **Incorporate into public financial reports regular updates detailing progress made towards these ends**
3. **Call upon the Stated Clerk of the PC(USA) to inform affected fossil fuel companies and the larger public of the passage and implementation of this resolution**
4. Call upon, and provide instructional materials to assist all levels of the denomination (presbyteries, congregations, and individual members) in taking action to slow climate change, including: divestment of fossil fuel holdings; shareholder activism; investments in renewable energy; advocacy at local, state, and federal levels for policies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions; and local efforts to reduce carbon footprint consistent with the 2006 call² for denominational carbon neutrality, and the 2008 “Power to Change” recommendations.³

¹ <http://fossilfreeindexes.com/the-carbon-underground-2014/> or current equivalent (referenced 03-14-2015)

² <http://www.pcusa.org/resource/guide-going-carbon-neutral/> (referenced 03-14-2015)

³ http://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/acswp/pdf/energyreport.pdf (referenced 03-14-2015)

2016 PCUSA Fossil Fuel Divestment Rationale



In 1981, our church made clear through the document “The Power to Speak Truth to Power” the importance of transitioning away from a fossil fuel based economy.

In 2008, our church made clear through the document “The Power to Change” that the catastrophic effects of Climate Change make this transition essential to the preservation of human life and God’s good creation.

For over two decades, our church’s committee on Mission Responsibility Through Investment has engaged in shareholder action with fossil fuel companies. They have done an exemplary job, but have made no impact in addressing Climate Change. When the best people we have make so little progress, the fault lies with an intractable industry, hell-bent on profit, creation be damned.

Our church has voiced support for legislation addressing the need to transition to a fossil free economy, but has no power to enact it. Our church has voiced support for taxes on carbon emissions, but has no power to levy them. Our church has voiced the need for all members of our denomination to do what they can at an individual level, but individuals acting alone can do little to shift the course of an entire economy.

Our church invests hundreds of millions of dollars in fossil fuel companies.

We, as Christians, have the privilege, responsibility, and obligation to speak with moral authority on issues of great importance. However, the power and clarity of prophetic voice is easily stained by hypocrisy.

Many claim that it is hypocritical to divest from fossil fuels while we are members of a society that is addicted to them. This is true. But it is equally hypocritical to attempt to rehabilitate that society while invested in its addiction.

Even as we continue working to mitigate the climate crisis, we must shed the burden of our investments in climate destruction. This act will speak more loudly and more clearly than any prophetic declaration we have voiced to date.

It’s time to put our money where our mouth is. It’s time to divest from fossil fuels.

“Can we hear the grave warnings in reports like this one [Power to Change] from Christians who have carefully studied these matters? And then can we act as stewards of God’s earth, witnessing to Christ in the re-direction of our lives toward a more sustainable future? I pray that we can, and that our church’s good work can help in this great change.” -Gradye Parsons, Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, April 2009

[For more information, see Extended Rationale for Fossil Fuel Divestment]

2016 PCUSA Fossil Fuel Divestment Overture and Commentary

The Presbytery of _____ overtures the 222nd General Assembly (2016) to:

Overture	Commentary
<p>1. Express its profound concern about the destructive effects of climate change on all God’s creation, including a disproportionate impact 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. The 222nd General Assembly (2016) thus recognizes the moral mandate for humanity to shift to a sustainable energy regime in a way that is both just and compassionate. This mandate compels us to action as a denomination to divest from the fossil fuel industry even as we reduce our use of fossil fuels and shrink our carbon footprint.</p>	<p>This is essentially the same as the language in the 2014 overture, approved by 12 presbyteries.</p> <p>Minutes from GA2014 regarding the 2014 overture and its referral to MRTI can be found here: https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B997DYTjhCQhVUdWNk1nbzFmeDQ/view?usp=sharing</p> <p>Or directly at the pc-biz website here: http://www.pc-biz.org/PC-Biz.WebApp_deploy/%28S%2855xgjsxsb2nboovq23utk22j%29%29/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=4587</p>
<p>2. Call upon the Board of Pensions and the Presbyterian Church (USA) Foundation to:</p>	
<p>a. Immediately stop any new direct investment in fossil fuel companies</p>	<p>This clause refers to directly held shares only; as opposed to shares commingled in other funds. The 2014 overture recommended “immediately stop[ing] any new investment in fossil fuel companies.” Staff of the Presbyterian Foundation (PF) and Board of Pensions (BOP) pointed out that such language would prevent them from using money markets or index funds or other commingled assets as short-term holding accounts.</p>
<p>b. Work to ensure that within three years, none of the Board’s or the Foundation’s directly held or commingled assets includes holdings of either equities or corporate bonds in the fossil fuel companies identified in the Carbon Underground 200 list⁴ by:</p>	<p>The need for action is urgent and increasing. The 2014 overture asked for divestment within five years. GA2014 instructed the Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI) committee to study the subject matter of the 2014 overture for two years, and report back. After two years of study, divestment should be possible within another three years.</p> <p>The Carbon Underground 200, compiled and updated by Fossil Free Indexes, LLC, is the successor to the 2009 Carbon Tracker Initiative list of the 200 global companies with the largest undeveloped reserves of coal, oil, and natural gas. It is the reference list used by most fossil fuel divestment efforts.</p>
<p>i. Working with current and prospective asset managers to develop and implement institutional fossil free investment options</p>	<p>This clause acknowledges that most BOP and PF funds are invested by external fund managers. These managers must provide fossil free investment options. If they don’t, new managers may need to be identified.</p>
<p>ii. Establishing within one year fossil free investment options for fund participants</p>	<p>Fossil free investment “sleeves” are easy to create. This option will soon be available for investors in the Presbyterian Foundation. It should also be made available to clergy invested in the pension fund.</p>
<p>iii. Actively seeking out and investing in renewable</p>	<p>This clause echoes the 2012 call by GA for positive</p>

⁴ <http://fossilfreeindexes.com/the-carbon-underground-2014/> or current equivalent (referenced 03-14-2015)

Overture	Commentary
and energy efficiency related securities	reinvestment in Palestine that has been successfully implemented by PF. It was not included in the 2012 overture, but is endorsed by the PF, by the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) and by GreenFaith.
iv. Notwithstanding the above provisions, retaining or acquiring minimal sufficient investment in fossil fuel companies to participate in shareholder engagement activities	<p>This clause acknowledges the faithful work and accomplishment of MRTI in shareholder action. It is possible to divest <i>and</i> keep our “seat at the table” by holding minimal shares. According to Securities and Exchange Commission guidelines, an entity holding as little as \$2,000 of a company’s assets may engage in shareholder advocacy.</p> <p>This provision allows the church funds to keep or buy stocks in order to pursue shareholder advocacy.</p>
v. Notwithstanding the above provisions, taking no action inconsistent with fiduciary duty or principles of sound investment, including the real and substantial risk of stranded carbon assets	<p>This clause ensures that we do not expect the PF and BOP to violate their legal fiduciary responsibility.</p> <p>Fiduciary duty, is often narrowly interpreted as simply maximizing return on investment. A broader definition includes consistency with the goals of the investing organization and avoiding foreseeable risks, such as the “stranded assets” that will occur as the world acknowledges that the majority of currently identified fossil fuel reserves cannot be developed.</p>
c. Incorporate into public financial reports regular updates detailing progress made towards these ends	Fossil fuel divestment is primarily a moral act. We ask for a mechanism to ensure transparency and communication within the church.
3. Call upon the Stated Clerk of the PC(USA) to inform affected fossil fuel companies and the larger public of the passage and implementation of this resolution	As called for in principle 7.b of the denominational “Divestment Strategy” document: http://www.pcusa.org/media/uploads/acswp/pdf/divestment_strategy.pdf
4. Call upon, and provide instructional materials to assist all levels of the denomination (presbyteries, congregations, and individual members) in taking action to slow climate change, including: divestment of fossil fuel holdings; shareholder activism; investments in renewable energy; advocacy at local, state, and federal levels for policies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions; and local efforts to reduce carbon footprint consistent with the 2006 call ⁵ for denominational carbon neutrality, and the 2008 “Power to Change” recommendations. ⁶	As requested from the floor of GA2014, this broadens divestment beyond the PF and BOP to all levels of the church. It incorporates ideas expressed by ACSWP in their concurrence with the 2014 overture, and echoes the call for political involvement, such as calling for a price on carbon, in the 2008 “Power to Change”

⁵ <http://www.pcusa.org/resource/guide-going-carbon-neutral/> (referenced 03-14-2015)

⁶ http://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/acswp/pdf/energyreport.pdf (referenced 03-14-2015)

