



North Carolina Religious Coalition on Creation Care

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Press Advisory and Report

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Raleigh, NC – On Monday, October 13, religious leaders from across North Carolina and the Southeast gathered to discuss the moral and ethical principles that must shape a responsible attitude toward climate change in North Carolina.

Meeting at the Church of the Good Shepherd in downtown Raleigh, Dr. Seth Bible, professor of Christian Ethics at the Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, talked about the importance of caring for the earth as part of our service to God. “It is a duty of all Christians,” he said, to care for what God has placed into our stewardship. This has to include the air and the water, and it certainly has to include the stability of the climate.”



He continued, saying, “We cannot properly worship God without caring for God’s creation. The Church ought to be an example that demonstrates the healing of creation.”

Dr. Lise Van Susteren, MD, a psychiatrist who has studied the psychological implications of climate change, declared that what we are doing to the planet is wrong. Clergy and political leaders alike need to hear that “what we are doing to the planet is wrong.”



Dr. Van Susteren’s research shows that as temperatures get warmer, crime goes up. In warmer weather people become more aggressive. At the same time food production goes down. In the changes that are happening now, who will be hurt the most? It is the young people. There already is rising anxiety about the future. How do we deal with the fact that so many people are still asleep?

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“The first thing that we all need to do is tell it like it is.” This is what is needed now as without clean and accurate information, people are not able to make informed judgements about the issues that North Carolina faces.” This is everyone’s responsibility, but it is especially the responsibility of churches to present with accuracy the issues which society is facing.

“As a medical doctor, I can tell you that we are seeing physical changes in North Carolina and all around the world that are unprecedented in history.” As we witness the unraveling of climate stability, she said, “my research shows that we will soon be faced with an unraveling of human stability. This is what gives me such concern about the climate crisis that we are facing.”

Dr. Jessica Whitehead, from NOAA Sea Grant, discussed the dire implications of sea level rise on the North Carolina shore. Whether we like it or not, the sea level is rising. Storm surges will be greater and storm intensities will increase. Some coastal areas will no longer be protected.

Dr. Steven Jerovics, a professor of physics at North Carolina State University and member of the North Carolina Interfaith Power and Light Board of Directors, observed that the event constituted, “an opportunity to reinforce the awareness that climate change is a religious issue as well as an environmental one. If people motivated more by faith than science joined those motivated more by science than faith, we would stand a far better chance of responding to this crisis in the limited time available.”

Amy Adams, a member of the Southern Baptist Church and a former regional DENR supervisor, focused on North Carolina’s coastal plains and emphasized the need to leave a proper legacy for future generations. “The potential impacts of climate change on people's everyday lives is real and tangible. We must begin to break down the obstacles that are deterring open communication on this critical issue. I believe that under scrutiny, the fences that we perceive separate our beliefs regarding climate change will fall apart, allowing for honest conversations about our common future.”

“Science,” she said, “tells us what is happening.” It is the job of religion to examine what science sees, and to affirm the moral and ethical values in a proper response.

The impacts of climate change will involve health concerns, the spread of tropical diseases, health care issues, and the spread of violence. The military says that there are national security issues in global climate change.



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Sheila Reed, representing the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Raleigh, quoted from Pope Benedict XVI who declared several years ago that our earth is speaking to us. “We must listen if we are going to survive.”

“Before him,” she said, “Pope John Paul II called all people of faith to what he called ‘an ecological conversion.’”

Ms. Reed then quoted from Pope Francis who said that market forces will be unable to address the problem of global climate change. This is because “climate change is first a moral problem and it requires a moral and spiritual response.”

The Reverend Richard Cizik, formerly the vice president for the National Association of Evangelicals and now the president of the New Evangelical Alliance, called for a new awakening. “A paradigm shift is needed,” he declared. A shift in attitude is needed, he said. “We should not fear to make this switch. We must be as partners with God in this shift.”



At the end of conference, conferees gathered into committees and assembled a declaration which pledged to uphold religious principles that inform a proper response to climate change.

The unanimously approved declaration, affirmed, “Our Earth is in an unprecedented time of crisis.” And that, “Humans, as earthly stewards, must heed the call to protect God’s creation and take immediate action” on climate change.

It ends with a pledge to “Pray together and act together for the collective good of humanity and our Earth, to empower people to engage our community and our government to make the changes needed, to vote our conscience concerning climate change, and the social cost of carbon pollution.”

Currently, churches, religious groups, interfaith institutions, and concerned North Carolinians are now taking up the pledge and finding ways to reach out to those they know.

Don Addu, a conference coordinator who helped to design this conference, from Durham, observed after the conference, that it is clear, “Climate change is the most important issue facing North Carolina. It is already impacting everything from our beautiful coast to our serene mountains. The NC Conference on Religion and Climate Change will bring together scientists and faith leaders from across the state to discuss the moral imperative of addressing global warming and inspire us to protect these sacred places.”

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Mr. Addu, who coordinated the conference's science panel, added, "Climate change will undermine that which we have all strived to achieve, especially a better life for our sons and daughters. It is our duty to not turn a blind eye to the mounting threat before us, but instead face it directly and band together as a community and as state to ensure a stable climate for generations to come."

The work of this interfaith conference will continue in the months ahead. In three weeks the Charlotte Interfaith Panel on Climate Change will take place, on Thursday, November 13th.

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The full text of the North Carolina Declaration on Religion and Climate Change is immediately below. Its implementation guidelines are also appended below. This declaration is becoming a pledge to change behavior and to promote it to others across the state.

For questions please contact Alicia Krueger, the Conference Coordinator for the NCRCCC at northcarolinacreationcare@gmail.com .