

CLIMATE CALL TO ACTION

Peace and Social Justice Committee Endorsed 1/28/2021, Session Approved 2/2/2021, Congregation Approved 4/25/21.

INTRODUCTION:

In its recent overture to the San Francisco Presbytery and the PCUSA General Assembly, the MPC Session declared:

“Climate Change is the existential crisis of our time. Today we are seeing the early signs of an impending global calamity - rising seas, record-breaking heat waves, major fire events, devastating storms and severe habitat loss. Increasingly, millions of people, especially poor people in the developing world, are losing their homes, their incomes and even their lives.”

The COVID-19-induced economic downturn is projected to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions by 8% in 2020. Climate science tells us that to avoid irreversible and catastrophic temperature increases, the world must continue to reduce its emissions by *another 8% annually for the next eight years*: a tremendous task requiring all our effort.

As the climate crisis unfolds, we cannot be in denial. For the global community, including our own children and grandchildren, we must act and act boldly. As we consider possible actions, we recall the spiritual imperatives of our faith: the Bible tells us that Earth is God’s creation and calls us to be its stewards. We cannot continue to abuse it, but must acknowledge our complicity in Earth-damaging behaviors and commit to changing them.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

To our MPC members, friends, and church community as a whole, we strongly endorse the following actions:

1. Transportation is a major contributor to the average American’s climate footprint. We can dramatically reduce these emissions in two ways:

- **Automobile travel.** Cars and trucks are now California’s largest source of carbon emissions. At the same time, low-emission plug-in hybrid and electric cars are widely available. We urge our members to consider transitioning to such a vehicle if financially feasible. Examples of affordable used vehicles of these types were displayed at our 2019 electric car show in the MPC courtyard.¹ Such a purchase reduces significantly one’s carbon footprint and helps inspire friends and family members to follow. Use of public transportation is an effective way to cut emissions as well.

- **Air travel.** At MPC, we are a demographic that engages in much more air travel than average. Flying is responsible for about 5% of human-caused climate change globally,² an enormous contribution considering that only 5% of the global population flies each year. Just one round trip from San Francisco to Europe adds about 25% to the average American’s annual carbon footprint. The greenhouse-gas emissions per passenger from that single flight exceed the entire annual carbon footprint of the average resident of India.

This is an impact by our community that we can change by avoiding or limiting our air travel. Some of our members have recently committed to vacationing only to destinations reachable by car. Others have resolved to fly no more than a few thousand miles per year. These practices may not be possible for all, but for those who can, they are the most effective way to reduce instantly and very significantly one’s carbon footprint. Finally, as a church, we can plan church-sponsored trips that use alternatives to air travel.

2. Plant-based foods and food waste. Each year vast areas of land are converted to feed production for meat and dairy cattle and other food animals. Cumulative emissions from animal agriculture, including land conversion and the methane produced by ruminant livestock, are now major contributors to climate change.³

We urge our members to reduce their meat consumption and move toward a plant-based diet. There are now many great cookbooks, websites, and restaurants focused on delicious plant-based foods.⁴ Innovative plant-based products that resemble meat in texture and taste have begun to proliferate.⁵

These exciting developments can facilitate greatly reduced dietary carbon footprints. We encourage our members to check out these resources and products. We can also use our MPC functions to educate ourselves, serving plant-based foods at church events and potlucks instead of carbon-intensive proteins such as red meat. Replacing red meat with poultry or sustainably caught, low-emissions fish can also help significantly.⁶

Food waste causes 10% of global carbon emissions, and American consumers waste over 30% of the food they buy. We must be vigilant about buying only food we can use and composting scraps to reduce landfill emissions.

3. Renewable energy. In 2014, MPC installed a large rooftop solar array providing the majority of our facility's electricity. We now ask MPC family members who own homes to consider installing residential rooftop solar.⁷ Such an expenditure may turn out to be financially or practically infeasible, but please explore this option, assessing the costs (including rebates) and environmental benefits. It is much more affordable now than in the past.

We also urge you to opt for renewable power from your energy utility.⁸ For example, PG&E's "Solar Choice" plan adds only \$40/year to the average residential bill and helps create high demand for solar power plants.

Everyone, including those who rent and can't install a solar array or choose their power mix, can still act. Currently 31% of California's electricity is from renewable energy. We can all push PG&E to adopt 100% renewables by 2030. And we can all find additional ways to reduce our carbon footprints at www.mpcfamly.org/calculator.

4. Plastics. Since the mid-1990s, the use of plastic—especially single-use plastics—has exploded. Our recycling industry cannot recycle most of these products given their huge volume and the technical difficulty of doing so. Plastic items enter our oceans and invade the digestive tracts of sea animals, sickening and often killing them. Our oceans now contain vast flotillas of plastic. The Pacific Garbage Patch, now twice the area of Texas, is one example. Plastic's contribution to climate change is also projected to increase rapidly in the near future unless action is taken now.

The true story of plastics leads to one incontrovertible conclusion: We must move away from these products and toward sustainable packaging. Some of our members have found the book *Life Without Plastic* (Plamondon & Sinha, 2017) to be a very useful guide.

Finally, and especially in our church functions, we need to avoid single-use plastic items and use only items that can be cleaned and reused. This change can serve as a model for our members and visitors alike.

5. Elections and political pressure. The climate change crisis cannot be resolved without the direct action and leadership of national, state and local governments. Inter-governmental cooperation is especially critical.

Our new federal administration is rejoining the global community to work collectively to combat climate change. As individuals and as a congregation, we must exert political pressure to rebuild our economy in a way that protects the climate, including a "green" infrastructure bill, and campaign vigorously to keep climate-oriented leaders in office.⁹

CONCLUSION:

Psalm 24:1 states: "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world and all who live in it; for the Lord founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters." Genesis 2:15 sets forth the ethic of our stewardship of the planet: "And the Lord God took them in and put them into the garden, to work it and to take care of it."

We face a critical juncture in the life of our planet. We are damaging and despoiling large areas of our global garden. Our fate on this bountiful earth will be determined by the collective actions of all of us and our leaders in the next ten years. We ask all in our congregation to redouble our positive efforts, keeping in mind the imperatives above, to arrest the progression of climate change and spare our planet and ourselves from irrevocable harm.

The Earth Care Committee
January 28, 2021

¹ There are many helpful EV buying guides. See e.g. content.sierraclub.org/evguide/

² Aviation is commonly cited to be responsible for 2.5%-3% of global greenhouse gas emissions, but this figure accounts for only the burning of jet fuel. When accounting for the heat-trapping effects of condensation trails, nitrogen oxides, water vapor, and particulate emissions, aviation's contribution to global climate change is closer to 5%.

³ See: www.climatenexus.org/climate-issues/food/animal-agricultures-impact-on-climate-change/.

⁴ E.g., <https://cooking.nytimes.com/topics/climate-friendly-cooking>.

⁵ A good summary of brands & ingredients is <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/22/dining/veggie-burger-taste-test.html>.

⁶ Consult www.seafoodco2.dal.ca for low CO2-emission seafood choices and then cross-check them at www.seafoodwatch.org for sustainability in other environmental respects.

⁷ See: www.interfaithpower.org/resources/solar-resource-guide/.

⁸ See e.g. ebce.org/power-mix/ or visit your utility's webpage for info on selecting a renewable power mix.

⁹ See: <http://www.faithclimatevoter.org/> and www.environmentalvoter.org to help.