Starting the Climate Change Conversation: First Steps for Friends' Communities

Friends and Investing with Integrity: Starting the Conversation

Please join us for this important conversation about how to mitigate climate change. We encourage Friends to bring this conversation to Monthly, Quarterly, and Yearly Meetings as well as Friends’ schools and other Friends’ institutions.

Consider hosting a series of reflections and worship sharing on your Meeting’s investments to guide your discernment process on where your investments belong. Encourage Friends’ institutions (schools, retirement homes, pre-schools, advocacy and witness groups, etc.) to engage in this conversation as well.

Where to start: Understanding Climate Change and the Carbon Budget

Most Friends are generally aware of the concern for climate change. Many, however, are less familiar with the recent analysis that quantifies how much carbon can be emitted without tipping the balance beyond repair. This is referred to as a carbon budget. This information was published by the Carbon Tracker Initiative and the Grantham Research Institute in a report titled “Unburnable carbon 2013: Wasted capital and stranded assets” (http://www.carbontracker.org/wastedcapital). Here were the big take-aways from the report:

“If the world is to limit global warming to 2C, it must keep greenhouse gases in the atmosphere to under 450 parts per million. We are currently at 392, and rising fast. To have a good (80%) chance of staying within the 2C limit, that means the world can emit only another 565 gigatonnes of carbon dioxide. But global fossil fuel reserves are much bigger than that, equivalent to 2,795 gigatonnes, or five times the safe amount. In other words, we can only avoid devastating climate change if we keep most of the world's fossil fuels, including almost all of its coal, in the ground.” (http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/dec/02/climate-renewable-energy-carbon-emissions)

For an excellent and clear summary of this critical information, see http://www.informationisbeautiful.net/visualizations/how-many-gigatons-of-co2/

Bill McKibben then popularized this study and its implications in his article entitled “Global Warming’s Terrifying New Math” (http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/global-warmings-terrifying-new-math-20120719)

McKibben and the student-led organization 350.org began a series of public lectures called “Do the Math” to present this is new information beginning at the end of 2012.

The Rationale for Fossil Fuel Divestment

Struggling with how little change has occurred over the last few decades, despite a wealth of disturbing scientific information, the strategy that 350.org proposed was to withdraw our support from the industry that is creating this dangerous situation. The fossil fuel industry in the United States, with its enormous resources, has resisted creating an alternative energy economy by various means. The industry has lobbied against regulation, paid large campaign contributions to climate deniers, systematically funded climate change denial for years and undermined the development of the renewable energy sector.

Rather than investing in any meaningful way in sustainable fuels, the industry insists on pursuing extreme extraction practices such as mountaintop removal for coal, tar sands, deep sea drilling, and the fracking of natural gas. If the industry were truly committed to generating energy for consumers,
it would be shifting to renewable fuels as other countries have. In his presentation, McKibben referred to European countries such as Germany, where wind and solar are rapidly replacing fossil fuels for Germans’ electrical needs. Germany’s rationality helps us to see the irrationality and pretense that mark the behavior of the fossil fuels industry.

By asking faith communities, colleges and universities, and municipalities to divest from the fossil fuel companies, we are withdrawing our consent from their business model that puts all of life in jeopardy. We contribute to the creation of a nonviolent movement that aims to shift away from complete dependence on fossil fuels and towards a low carbon future.

Faith communities step up

Friends have joined with other faith groups by collaborating with GreenFaith (http://greenfaith.org/programs/divest-and-reinvest) to promote the conversation about the moral and spiritual dimensions of this new movement. This campaign is called Divest and Reinvest Now. Another name being used is Move our Money and Protect our Planet Campaign? (MOM and POP). https://theshalomcenter.org/content/move-our-money-protect-our-planet-god-earth-strategy

Suggestions for the Discernment Process

Based on recent experience, we suggest that the discernment process include opportunities to:

1. Become familiar with the most recent climate data and information regarding fossil fuel reserves to understand the urgency of action.
2. Understand what screens you currently have in place and where your funds are invested.
3. Consider where to begin the conversation (Finance, Social Concerns, Earthcare, Business Meeting, etc.).
4. Ground your reflections and worship in testimonies and previous minutes.
5. Understand the financial need of the institution and seek a transition that will continue to meet its needs, but understanding that principle can occasion the need for sacrifice.
6. Consider options for reinvestment.
7. Minute your concern and decision.
8. Share your minute and decision with the wider community, the relevant businesses and your elected officials.
9. Follow up on the decision.
10. Consider other witness opportunities.

Possible Queries for Worship Sharing

In what ways do moral implications enter into the investments we make as Friends?

- How do Friends’ testimonies and queries provide spiritual guidance in the ways we invest our money?
- In what ways is our money invested for purposes we really support?
- Does our Meeting serve social, economic and environmental justice in its investments?
- What, if any, instructions have we given to our fund managers regarding screens for the environment for our investments?
- What is our financial involvement in the fossil fuel industry? How are we led in regard to these investments?
- Is it immoral for Friends groups to invest in fossil fuel companies?
- Are we ready to minute our concern for the urgency of action on climate change?

Resources for your discernment process
Monthly Meetings have used a number of films to foster conversation about climate change and understand the divestment movement. You can order two of these films from Fossil Free Friends. Please send an email message to kline.paula[at]gmail.com for more information.

Out of Balance: ExxonMobil’s Impact on Climate Change by Quaker Film Maker Tom Jackson

ExxonMobil is a world leader not only in profit, but also in its attempts to ward off changes from fossil fuels to renewable energy. “Out of Balance: shows the influence that the largest company in the world has on governments, the media and citizens and what can be done about global warming. While the Earth’s climate is pushed further out of balance by increasing use of fossil fuels, ExxonMobil continues to assert undue influence around the world—making record profits while ignoring climate science for which there has been overwhelming consensus for over ten years.

“Out of Balance” does not just critique ExxonMobil, it also offers challenging, large-scale ideas for the global social changes that must take place if there’s any chance of having a livable planet for future generations.

“Imagine Michael Moore with humility. Tom Jackson goes on a personal quest to find out more about climate change and the huge forces that are blocking imperative change. Jackson exposes the most dangerous practice of our time: record profits at ANY cost.”
- Norman Solomon, Public Accuracy

Do the Math

Do The Math movie is a 42-minute documentary film about the rising movement to change the terrifying math of the climate crisis and challenge the fossil fuel industry.

[Fossil Free Friends will charge $10.00 to send both films.]

Other materials can be found on our Resources page.