

Churches, faith groups across nation plan 'preach-in' on global warming

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Events that ended with the suffix "-in" were a staple of the late 1960s and early '70s. But organizers think the time is right for a "preach-in" on the effects of climate change and global warming.

Interfaith Power & Light, which is sponsoring the nationwide event Feb. 9-10, has already lined up one Catholic parish and one convent as early signers-on to the preach-in.

At the Church of the Epiphany in Louisville, Ky., there won't be any preaching per se. "The liturgy was already planned" before the parish signed up for the event, said Larry Kerr-Howe, the parish's social responsibility minister.

"We're just doing the postcards" at the weekend Masses Feb. 9-10, Kerr-Howe told Catholic News Service in a Jan. 29 telephone interview from Louisville. The postcards ask President Barack Obama to "please act boldly to protect the climate. ... As you acknowledged on the night you won re-election, 'we must protect our children from the destructive power of a warming planet.'"

Among the ways to protect the climate as suggested by the postcard are "speeding the transition to clean energy, limiting carbon pollution and supporting vulnerable people who need assistance." On an international scale, the postcard says the United States should be "sharing clean technology with the developing world, protecting global forests and supporting climate refugees."

The Church of the Epiphany is well-positioned to address these issues, according to Kerr-Howe. In this decade alone, the parish's Environmental Concerns Committee has conducted battery recycling, electronic trash collection, carbon footprint measuring, and sponsored programs on linking food and faith with the environment, and on Buddhism and the response to global warming.

Last year, a busload of parishioners traveled to eastern Kentucky to see the results of mountaintop-removal coal mining, and another busload will travel to the state capital in Frankfort as part of a Kentucky Interfaith Power & Light delegation to push for environmental bills awaiting action in the state Legislature.

At Our Lady of Angels Convent in Aston, Pa., outside of Philadelphia, the Franciscan sisters who reside there will have a little bit of preaching at their Feb. 9 Mass, but will sponsor a viewing and discussion of an Interfaith Power & Light-supplied documentary, "The Hungry Tide," Feb. 10. The movie shows how the warming climate it causing the ocean levels to rise, threatening the well-being of residents of the Kiribati Sea Islands in the Pacific Ocean.

"(On) one of the islands the tide has already washed out their road," said Franciscan Sr. Betty Kane, the convent's director of evangelical life services. "Another island, because the tide came to their well, they don't have any drinking water."

Kane added, "One of our sisters made her own (video). She's in Alaska. That, too, is showing the effect of water level rising, affecting the tribes in Alaska. They're not just losing their land, they're losing their lifestyle."

Although St. Francis of Assisi didn't exactly put it in these words, the Franciscans, both men and women, have made care for creation part of their charism. "Franciscans have always done this," Kane said. But "it has to be everybody's issue, not just the Franciscans'. The Franciscans have always had a respectful love of creation because creation reflects the face of God for all people," she added. And, through their preach-in activities, she said her convent hopes to "show that there's a human face connected with global warming."

Even without the aid of a preach-in, faiths can work jointly on climate issues.

On Jan. 18, the outgoing bishop of Marquette, Mich., Alexander K. Sample, helped announce "EarthKeepers II," an interfaith energy conservation and community garden initiative sponsored by the Environmental Protection Agency's Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, the U.S. Forest Service, the nonprofit Cedar Tree Institute, and 10 faith traditions, including the Roman Catholic Church.

The projects involves 30 community gardens and energy conservation audits at 40 houses of worship with grants to help pay for changes recommended by those energy conservation surveys.

Appointed Jan. 29 to be the new archbishop of Portland, Ore., now-Archbishop Sample will installed in April.

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