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Preach-in asks: Spend Valentine's Day loving creation

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Eco Catholic

Forget about the roses and chocolates this weekend. Instead, "make God your Valentine" urges the Rev. Sally Bingham, an Episcopal priest and president/founder of Interfaith Power and Light, based in San Francisco.

In a Feb. 2 homily, Bingham asks people to move beyond their personal selves for the three days, and flip the meaning of a commercially driven holiday filled with lacy greeting cards, posies and sweets by "doing something to restore our fragile island home."

A few of her recommendations: "Go for a walk in the woods and see the wonder that is outside of the stores. Plant a tree, pick up trash on the beach, make a commitment to no longer use plastic bottles, screw in a few [compact fluorescent] light bulbs."

Her urgings come from part of a sermon she presented a couple of weekends ago to set the tone for Interfaith Power and Light's annual National Preach-in on Climate Change, which began Friday and continues through the weekend.

They encourage all faith groups to discuss the spiritual side of climate change at services, while as push for greater support from local and national policymakers.

Already, 1,500 congregations across the country have signed up to participate. At PreachIn.org, groups can access a free download of the documentary "Chasing Ice." Following religious services, participants plan to sign "Love Creation" valentines addressed to their senators in Washington, urging them to support the Environmental Protection Agency in enacting carbon pollution limits on new power plants. The EPA proposed the new limits in September, after President Barack Obama included them as part of his climate action plan.

The pray-in also comes as news broke that Obama will ask Congress for a \$1 billion Climate Resilience Fund in his budget, expected out next month.

Interfaith Power and Light is a national ecology-focused organization that now has 15,000 chapters in 40 state affiliates. Originally formed in 1998 as Episcopal Power and Light at Grace Cathedral in San Francisco, it helps parishes, congregations, synagogues and mosques to look at ways they can scale back their energy use, such as installing solar panels or other green forms of lighting fixtures, to combat climate change.

Jesuit Fr. John Coleman, an interfaith advisory member and assistant pastor at San Francisco's Holy Redeemer Parish, has participated in previous preach-ins. In one of his homilies from 2011 (download it here), Coleman said that various parishes connected with Interfaith Power and Light have reduced their carbon footprints by 64 million pounds just by cutting back on energy use.

While a number of people believe their personal actions can't do much about climate change without significant commitments from governments and large corporations,

Coleman believes that the long Christian tradition "of ascetic practices which, while small, raise [people's] consciousness and conscience to problems."

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He said he has seen parishes and congregations try to address global warming and other ecological issues in a variety of ways:

- holding a car-free Sunday;
- touring local toxic waste dumps;
- partnering with a parish from the developing world by planting carbon sink trees to absorb carbon dioxide
- growing organic gardens on church grounds
- banning plastic cups from parish facilities

Coleman stressed that the Christian response to global warming must emphasize stewardship of God's creation, while acting in ways that provide real hope and reveal "real spiritual practices which lift up the issue.

"The hope is that such small actions will make us aware of the larger response called for if we will avoid "I consciously choose this word" blaspheming" God's good creation. We are to join ourselves to the grandeur of God and like the Holy Spirit brood over our bent world," he said.

Returning to Bingham's Feb. 2 homily, Jesus in the Beatitudes addressed a skewed view of the kingdom of heaven. Quoting Marcus Borg, Bingham reminds us "Jesus inverted the notions of kingdoms and

instead announced 'what life would be like on earth if God were Lord and the lords of this earth didn't exist.?

'This 'kingdom' where God presides would be a place where God's passion for justice and God's concern for the poor are realized, and everyone has enough,' she said.

Her sermons -- as well as many others (including occasional Eco Catholic blogger Fr. Charles Morris) from numerous faiths stored at the preach-in and Interfaith Power and Light's websites -- serve as a great outpost for those wanting to participate in the preach-in, especially those not fortunate enough to have a participating homilist at your own parish or congregation.

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