



People of Faith Declare a Climate Emergency Discussion Guide for Facilitators

Thank you for your interest, as a person of faith, in leading a discussion about Declaring a Climate Emergency.

The purpose of this discussion guide is to enable you to:

- Provide an opportunity for people of diverse faiths and spiritualities to identify the values which they think should guide our collective response to climate change
- Introduce the moral values which GreenFaith views as fundamental in this regard
- Create space for people to imagine the magnitude of the emergency
- Introduce the guiding principles and the basic components of declaring a Climate Emergency
- Invite participants to discuss their response and to indicate their interest in further involvement on this issue.

This guide is designed to support a group discussion of 5-20 people for a period of 45-60 minutes. The facilitator should make adjustments as needed to various elements of the guide as warranted in their local setting.

Welcome (5-10 mins)

The facilitator should welcome everyone and invite everyone to introduce themselves. During the introductions, each person should say in one sentence why they decided to attend this discussion, and why they care about the issue of climate change.

What are our Deepest Values? (10-15 mins)

The facilitator should say, “As people of faith and spirit, we are guided by abiding, deep values. As we consider what kind of response the climate emergency calls for, we will first reflect on our most cherished values.”

The facilitator should invite participants to select one text from the handout “Sacred and Inspirational Texts and a Climate Emergency” that is on the GreenFaith website. Each person should read the text of their choice and then share in one sentence why that passage is meaningful to them.

Conclude this section by thanking people for their reflections and sharing, and by asking them to keep these values in mind as we move through the rest of the discussion.

How Dangerous is the Climate Emergency? (15 mins)

The facilitator says, “The following collection of facts represents a partial list of scientific projections of what will happen if urgent, aggressive action is not taken to address climate change. Please read this aloud, with a different person reading each paragraph.”

Under the 2015 Paris Agreement, every country in the world agreed to keep global temperatures well below 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit (2 degrees Celsius) (with the ambition of limiting temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius). Current national pledges to cut CO₂ emissions will push global warming to at least 5.4 degrees Fahrenheit (3 degrees Celsius) by 2100. ¹

However, the world's countries are not even on course to meet their Paris Agreement commitments. On their current trajectory, scientists found that the mean global temperature rise would likely be more than 8 degrees Fahrenheit by 2100. The latter estimate is catastrophic, and would lead to sea level rise of over 30 feet, potentially putting the homes of 600 million people underwater. ²

“Since 1980, the planet has experienced a 50-fold increase in the number of places experiencing dangerous or extreme heat; a bigger increase is to come. The five warmest summers in Europe since 1500 have all occurred since 2002, and soon, ... simply being outdoors that time of year will be unhealthy for much of the globe. Even if we meet the Paris goals of two degrees warming, cities like Karachi and Kolkata will become close to

uninhabitable, annually encountering deadly heat waves like those that crippled them in 2015. At four degrees, the deadly European heat wave of 2003, which killed as many as 2,000 people a day, will be a normal summer.”³

“Drought might be an even bigger problem than heat, with some of the world’s most arable land turning quickly to desert. ... (P)redictions for later this century are basically unanimous: unprecedented droughts nearly everywhere food is today produced. By 2080, without dramatic reductions in emissions, southern Europe will be in permanent extreme drought, much worse than the American dust bowl ever was. The same will be true in Iraq and Syria and much of the rest of the Middle East; some of the most densely populated parts of Australia, Africa, and South America; and the breadbasket regions of China. None of these places, which today supply much of the world’s food, will be reliable sources of any.”⁴

“By 2090, as many as 2 billion people globally will be breathing air above the WHO “safe” level. ... Already, more than 10,000 people die each day from the small particles emitted from fossil-fuel burning; each year, 339,000 people die from wildfire smoke, in part because climate change has extended forest-fire season (in the U.S., it’s increased by 78 days since 1970). By 2050, according to the U.S. Forest Service, wildfires will be twice as destructive as they are today; in some places, the area burned could grow fivefold.”⁵

The facilitator says: “These facts, collectively, are sending a very clear message: the danger that we face is substantially worse than most people believe, or consider on a daily basis.”

Then, the facilitator should invite people to sit in silence and reflect on this information for one minute.

Following the minute of silence, the facilitator invites each person in the group to share one word that describes how they feel having reflected on this information.

After everyone has shared a feeling, invite each person to share, on a scale of 1-10, the urgency of the situation. 1 is minimal; 10 is deeply urgent.

After people have given their numerical urgency estimates, invite each person to say a few words about why they chose the number they chose, and to explain how their number is related to their ethical and religious values.

Conclude this section by saying

“Thank you for having the willingness and courage to face and discuss this difficult issue directly. It is not easy to hear this information, and usually, and understandably, people either tune it out, deny it, or feel hopelessness and despair. As people of faith and spirit, we know that our religious traditions and communities can give us strength to face difficult situations and to do the right thing. In that spirit, we are going to take time now to discuss the kind of response that is needed.”

4. What response is needed? (20-25 mins)

The facilitator can start this session by inviting participants to read the following, with each person reading one of the paragraphs below (in quotation marks)

“As we’ve learned, we face an enormous and critical emergency that requires a values-driven, multi-faceted response. In order to address climate change at the scope and speed that is required, strong legislative action is needed.”

“GreenFaith believes that as people of faith and spirit, the kinds of laws that should guide our response to the climate emergency should address three moral priorities:

- Dramatically reducing greenhouse gas emissions and related pollution;
- Ensuring that the jobs created as part of this massive transition pay fair, family-sustaining wages and do not perpetuate the massive and unjust income inequality that has come to plague many modern economies;
- Investing in the communities of color and poor communities among us that have contributed least to the climate emergency but who are already suffering its worst effects. Our response needs to support the continued emergence of local leadership and power to ensure that the solutions to this crisis work for everyone.”

“Green infrastructure: On a concrete level, legislation is needed that will build infrastructure to power and support a clean, just economy. We need a renewable energy system, upgraded and renewably-powered transportation systems, and water infrastructure that reduce and eliminate greenhouse gas emissions and the deadly air pollution that kills thousands and sickens millions across the country.”

“Climate-resilient food and agriculture systems: Factory farms are massive climate polluters; climate-friendly farms can actually reduce overall greenhouse gas emissions. “By turning manure into compost, planting cover crops between harvests, and avoiding tilling, family farms can become sponges for climate pollution.”⁶”

“Buildings that are energy misers: New building codes would not only create massive reductions in greenhouse gas emissions but would also reduce air pollution while creating skilled trade jobs on a large, national scale. If these and other responses to the climate emergency are implemented urgently and at scale, we can give ourselves a chance at avoiding the worst effects. Without such a response, we face certain disaster.”

“The values and approach described here represent the heart of a robust, compassionate, and just response to the Climate Emergency. At present, the U.S. Congressional Resolution represents a starting gun for the next stage of the race to save our planet. It’s up to all of us to support this initial declaration, and then keep the pressure on government and business leaders to implement real systemic reforms based on that declaration. This is only the beginning.”

The facilitator can then invite people to respond to the following questions.

- Do you agree that an urgent, values-driven response to the climate emergency is necessary to avoid disaster?
- What excites you about the vision articulated here?
- What questions do you have?
- Would you be interested in building support for this kind of response to climate change?

The facilitator should write down the names of the people who express interest in being further involved for future use.

5. Final Reflection and Closing (5-10 mins)

The facilitator should invite people to take a minute in silence, and then to share in one or two sentences about what they have learned from this discussion, and what they have found valuable about it. After each person has spoken, the facilitator should invite the group to end the discussion by listening as the facilitator or participants read a total of 2-3 verses or pieces from the Sacred and Inspirational Texts document that expresses their deepest values. The facilitator should then thank people for participating and ask them to write a letter to the editor using GreenFaith's quick & easy tool.

For more helpful resources to support declaring a climate emergency, please visit www.GreenFaith.org/ClimateEmergency

Footnotes

1. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/2018/10/ipcc-report-climate-change-impacts-forests-emissions/>
2. https://motherboard.vice.com/en_us/article/xwvx5q/earth-will-likely-be-much-warmer-in-2100-ipcc-projections
3. <http://nymag.com/intelligencer/2017/07/climate-change-earth-too-hot-for-humans.html>
4. <http://nymag.com/intelligencer/2017/07/climate-change-earth-too-hot-for-humans.html>
5. <http://nymag.com/intelligencer/2017/07/climate-change-earth-too-hot-for-humans.html>
6. <https://www.sierraclub.org/articles/2019/01/five-big-ideas-for-green-new-deal>