

Small Group Ministry Session

“Hotel Earth and the Threat of Global Warming”

Prepared by Peter Bowden in collaboration with
the Unitarian Universalist Association Washington Office

Opening Words: "Any intelligent fool can make things bigger, more complex, and more violent. It takes a touch of genius -- and a lot of courage -- to move in the opposite direction."

Albert Einstein

Check-In

Introduction: In 2004 delegates from our congregations chose “Global Warming” as an issue to be studied by our association over the next two years. After this study / action issue is examined our association will consider drafting a “statement of conscience” offering an official position on the issue. Each of our congregations has been invited to discuss this issue in more depth, reviewing material provided by our Commission on Social Witness and the UUA Washington Office. More information on this issue and our association’s social action process is available through the website of our Commission on Social Witness, online at <http://uua.org/csw>.

Focus/Topic: If Earth was run like a hotel we would each have to provide a valid credit card at the beginning of our stay. Then, if we caused any harm during our visit, we would be charged damages at check out. If this were so, chances are we would each be more careful knowing that even the smallest of actions harming “Hotel Earth” would appear as an item on our bill. In this scenario the owner fixes the hotel using the damage fees charged to the guest accounts.

This is clearly not how it works. Still, how we view our relationship with the Earth greatly impacts the choices we make and whether or not we take action in the face of local and global environmental challenges.

1. How do you conceptually think of the planet Earth and your relationship to it?
2. In what way is this view related to your personal spirituality, beliefs, the Unitarian Universalist Principles and the way you live your life?
3. What aspects of your lifestyle, habits and consumption positively or negatively impact the Earth?
4. Who do you feel is ultimately responsible for caring for the Earth and the ecosystem on which we depend on?

Likes and Wishes:

Before we close I'd like to invite each of you to briefly share what you liked about this session, and how, if at all, you would like to be involved in our association's larger social justice process.

Closing Words:

"If we don't change direction, we're likely to end up where we're going."

A Chinese proverb

Study/Action Issue Summary

2004-2006 Study/Action Issue: Threat of Global Warming

Issue: What can Unitarian Universalists do to promote individual and collective changes in the way we live and work in order to slow and ultimately reverse global warming?

Background and Reasons for Study: Greenhouse gases, particularly carbon dioxide generated by burning fossil fuels, are trapping heat in earth's atmosphere and raising temperatures. The evidence is everywhere – retreating glaciers, thinning polar ice, and warming oceans and lakes. Scientists have estimated that global warming could increase worldwide average temperatures as much as eleven degrees Fahrenheit by the year 2100. Predicted effects include extreme weather, spreading disease, widespread species extinction, and large areas of the planet becoming uninhabitable because of rising sea levels or drought. Changes in plant and animal life are well underway, including alterations in the range and distribution of plants; dying coral reefs; shifting migration patterns of birds; declining numbers of some species such as Arctic ringed seals; and a potentially devastating impact on countless others, from polar bears to manatees and from salmon to krill (the base of the Antarctic food chain). Increasing acidity of the oceans from carbon dioxide absorption could eventually threaten the survival of shelled marine animals and calcium-containing plankton. Wildfires, which are difficult or impossible to control in earth's northern forests, will become more likely as the environment become drier. Yet many political and business leaders in this country have failed to take seriously a problem we ignore at our peril. Our experiences with the insecticide DDT and synthetic fluorocarbons should have taught us how much damage human activity can do to the environment. The risk global warming poses to virtually all life is a greater potential danger than any other we face today or perhaps ever have.

Significance to Unitarian Universalism: Transcendentalism awakened 19th century Unitarians to the experience of the sacred through the unfolding of the natural world. Our seventh Principle challenges contemporary Unitarian Universalists to remember that we are part of the interdependent web of all existence. The choices we make, coupled with the choices made by government and the private sector, profoundly affect our environment. We have a moral responsibility to future generations to mitigate global warming while there is still time.

General Suggestions for Further Study

- Educate yourself about the issue using the resources listed in this guide.
- Host a discussion, or form an ongoing study group using a speaker, video, book, or curriculum as a catalyst.
- Host a speaker or hold a forum. Have multiple presenters for a balanced perspective.
- Find out what organizations in your community are doing on the issue, and talk to those people or groups who are most affected. Don't step on the toes of existing groups; instead work to support and expand what's already there. Don't identify solutions for others.
- Write an article for your congregation's newsletter.
- Educate yourself about current UUA policy on the issue. The Washington Office website has summaries of statements on many subject areas at www.uua.org/uuawo. For a complete list of UU Social Justice Statements, see www.uua.org/action.
- Educate yourself about recent or pending legislation at the state and national level.

Related Websites - Learn More and Take Action!

UUA Commission on Social Witness
UUA Washington Office
UUA Small Group Ministry
UU Small Group Ministry Network
Seventh Principle Project

<http://www.uua.org/csw>
<http://www.uua.org/uuawo>
<http://www.uua.org/cde/sgm>
<http://www.smallgroupministry.net>
<http://www.uuaspp.org>