

Climate Change Sabbath

Nebraska UCC Board of Directors

Call To Worship

Rev. Lisa Hadler

Nebraska's climate is warming. Nebraska currently experiences an average of 10-20 days per year higher than 95 degrees. By mid-century, this number will double and average temperatures will be 2 to 5 degrees higher in general.



I'm here at Lake McConaughy, Nebraska's largest human-made reservoir, approximately 21 miles long and 3 miles wide. As a relatively shallow body of water, with climate change's higher temperatures it will lose more water through evaporation. In addition, as the Rocky Mountain snowpack continues to decline and melt earlier in the year, the reduced flow of the North Platte River will affect the water level of the lake particularly in late summer and fall.

One: God we gather in the midst of your creation, to build each other up in the faith you have given us.

Many: God we come, not alone but as part of your community.

One: We come from isolated lives and self-centered living seeking community, so that together we might be kept safe in God's love.

Many: God we come, not alone but as part of your community.

One: As we build together may we pray in the power of the Holy Spirit, and await the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ open our eyes to see you.

Many: God we come, not alone but as part of your community.

One: No one can lay any foundation other than the one we already have – Jesus Christ. Who takes our anxious thoughts and the worries that blind our sight.

Many: God we come, not alone but as part of your community.

One: Rescue us dear God from the tumult of our busy lives. Bind us together as we breathe your quiet presence.

Many: God we come, not alone but as part of your community.

One: Heavenly God, you who are community shelter us; Christ before us and behind us, Holy Spirit deep within us.

Many: God we come, not alone but as part of your community.

Invocation

Rev. Rebecca McNeil

I'm standing here at the Bridge over the Elkhorn River on Highway 275 near Oakdale where two years ago, during the March 12th-15th, 2019 winter storm, two men from the community spent three and half hours in the middle of the night using a front-loader to move ice chunks from one side of the bridge to the other, saving the bridge on a main transportation route through this part of the state and saving the town of Oakdale from major flooding.



The three-day 2019 storm was a kind of “perfect storm.” There was a combination of extremely cold temperatures in March causing a deep earth freeze with a heavy snow pack full of liquid water, and the Platte and the Missouri Rivers with a solid icy surface. I remember the winter storm with heavy rain, blizzards, strong winds. While this type of storm is common in our region, what was unique was the warm air which caused rapid snow and ice melt in addition to the rain. When the river ice broke apart, it acted like battering rams taking down the Spencer Dam and other bridges. There were 24 all-time high water marks along the Platte, Missouri and Loup rivers. In Nebraska, the flooding killed 4 people. Floodwaters damaged more than 7,000 homes. Of Nebraska’s 93 counties, 84 qualified for federal disaster assistance. Road and bridge repair will require more than \$236 million. The disasters total losses near \$3.4 Billion.¹²³

¹ Wunderlin, C. , 2019, A Framework for Looking at the Effects of Climate Change during the Mid-West cyclone using the Weather Research and Forecasting Model, class paper, METR 879.

² Master, J, 2019, Historic Flooding in Nebraska, Iowa and South Dakota in Wake of Bomb Cyclone, Weather Underground, <https://www.wunderground.com/cat6/Historic-Flooding-Nebraska-Iowa-and-South-Dakota-Wake-Bomb-Cyclone>

³ * the Omaha World Herald Editorial staff, Editorial: These relief efforts deserve funding as Nebraska pursues flood recovery, January 15, 2020.

Prayer of Stewardship by Catholic Relief Services

God of all Creation,

At the beginning if time

You placed a single mandate on humankind to be stewards of Creation;

To replenish and nurture all generations with what you have made

We kneel today amid that same Creation -

A world that is, in many ways, more splendid than ever - But, in too many ways, scarred beyond recognition. Turn us from our unmindfulness.

Help our faith be light.

Help us renew the world that supports us

So that we may one more know Creation as it was in the beginning. Amen.

“Morning Has Broken”

Rev. Katie Miller

Words by Eleanor Farjeon

“Bunessan” Trad. Scottish Gaelic

Morning has broken like the first morning
Blackbird has spoken like the first bird
Praise for the singing, praise for the morning
Praise for them springing fresh from the world

Sweet the rains new fall, sunlit from Heaven
Like the first dewfall on the first grass
Praise for the sweetness of the wet garden
Sprung in completeness where Their feet pass

Mine is the sunlight, mine is the morning
Born of the one light, Eden saw play
Praise with elation, praise every morning
God's recreation of the new day

Confession and Pardon

Rev. Fay Ann Blaylock

Adapted from UCC Litany of Environmental Confession



In a warmer future, the length of the growing season will increase by several weeks. Winter and spring will probably be wetter while summer may be up to 15% drier than now, increasing the demand for irrigation. And since spring will have more heavy rainy days, soil cover will be crucial to reduce run-off and increase the water's infiltration into the soil and aquifers. With higher temperatures, there may be heat waves. There will also be a greater probability of drought and less chance for precipitation. So we can expect both extremes – precipitation and drought - to wreak more havoc with the farming season.⁴

One: God, you created our planet, the birds, fish, and other animals and you saw all that you had created and called it good. God of life, you also formed us, the human family to be your co-regents in ruling over the works of your hands, and to act compassionately and gently to all forms of life.

Many: Remind us, O God, and help us to change.

One: We confess that we often forget that we are utterly dependent upon you and interdependent with the rest of your creation. We confess that instead of acting compassionately and gently, we have instead over-used and abused creation, forgetting that our lifestyles impact others around the globe.

Many: Forgive us, O God, and help us to change.

One: We confess that we have not done enough to protect our planet. We confess that we have failed to insist that our government act urgently and swiftly on climate. We confess that we, as consumers, have not held companies accountable for their reckless pollution and carbon consumption, nor have we worked hard enough to limit our own consumption and pollution.

Many: Forgive us, O God, and help us to change.

One: God of wisdom, help us understand that whatever we do to the web of life we do to ourselves. God of power, help us acknowledge that we must act now and wake up to our moral obligation to the future of the planet, which you have entrusted to our hands.

Many: Forgive us O God, and help us to change.

⁴ This paragraph was largely drawn from Shulski, M., Nebraska State Climatologist, 2018, Nebraska's Changing Climate- Highlights from the 4th National Climate Assessment.

Assurance of Pardon

Rev. Melanie Miller

Climate change causes ‘weather weirding’, bringing new weather patterns such as the extreme cold we experienced this year in the middle of calving season, which puts ranchers and cattle alike at risk of frostbite and worse. It has also caused spring to come earlier in NE, so calving may start earlier as well. On the other hand, in heat waves, cattle can become heat stressed which will affect their reproductive capability.⁵



Almighty God — creator, shaper and sustainer of all life: Thank you for the forgiveness and grace you offer through your Son – the redeemer of all creation. We receive your grace to us, and your love for us as we are, for you love us as we are. And today we open our eyes, ears, and hearts to the pain of the planet amid the changing climate. We open our hearts to your truth, to see in you the way of healing and hope for our planet. Change us now into what you would have us be. – Move us to love and care for your world We are beloved children of God, forgiven, renewed, and sent out into the world to work for the healing of our planet and for justice, in faithfulness to God. Amen.

Scripture

Rev. David Butz

Kamp Kaleo is located near a remarkable river in Nebraska, the North Loup. The Middle Loup, North Loup and Dismal River have been characterized as the most constantly flowing streams in the world.⁶ These rivers are fed by a multitude of springs and seeps that bring groundwater to the surface throughout the sandhills, which are all connected to the Ogallala aquifer, containing over 2 billion acre feet of groundwater and responsible for much of the irrigation in Nebraska. The 2012 drought resulted in the driest growing season on record in



⁵ Bernabucci, U, 2019, Climate change: impact on livestock and how can we adapt, *Animal Frontiers*, v. 9, Is 1, p. 3-5.

⁶ Personal conversation with James Goeke, March 15, 2021, Emeritus Research Hydrogeologist, Conservation and Survey Division, the University of Nebraska.

*Nebraska, with a corresponding record one-year decline in groundwater levels the following spring in the heavily irrigated parts of the state.*⁷

Genesis 17: 1-7, 15-17

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. **2** And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous.” **3** Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, **4** “As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. **5** No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. **6** I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. **7** I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.

15 God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. **16** I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.” **17** Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said to himself, “Can a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Can Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?”

Matthew 25:37-40

37 Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? **38** And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? **39** And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ **40** And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’

“It’s a New Day” (Psalm 104)

Richard Bruxvoort Colligan

Refrain:

Breathe into the earth, Holy One, and renew us. It’s a new day.

The whole planet prospers in your care

Thriving within your design

Your own trees, your rivers and your birds

Everything is satisfied

⁷ Bathke, D.J., et al., 2014, Understanding and Assessing Climate Change: Implications for Nebraska, The University of Nebraska – Lincoln.

All of life in rhythm with your breath
Everything is in its place
All our days, our nights, our seasons turn
Life and death and holy change

We will sing for you for all our lives
Sing as long as we have breath
We will sing for you for all our lives
Sing as long as we have breath

Sermon: “If even one person, Lord?”

Rev. Jessica Palys

Good morning. My name is Jessica Palys, and I serve as pastor First Congregational UCC in Hastings, NE and on the board of the Nebraska UCC. Thank you for worshipping with us this morning as we think about our commitment to God’s Creation with this Climate Change Sabbath.

Here in the UCC, as I often tell my confirmation classes, we love to talk about Covenant. Covenant is promises made between two parties with commitments to uphold on both ends. Our God is a covenantal God and we are a people who strive to honor that covenant. In the UCC, it is all the scaffolding on which our denomination is built; Pastors are in covenant with their congregation, our churches are in covenant with the Association and the Statewide conference of the UCC as they are to us; and our conference exists in covenant, of course, with all the other congregations of the UCC to become the body of the church. From Noah to Abraham to Moses to Jesus, God promises to be with us to guide and protect and multiply; to offer parameters and expectations for how we live with each other in care and respect. The New Covenant, made in the blood of Jesus Christ as we repeat during communion, reveals the extent of God’s commitment to us, and the extent that God expects from us; to respond to the least of these with servant love, as we would to Jesus himself. Throughout our history, have committed to always care for God's Creation; not only to subdue the earth, but to till the soil, to nurture life, and to sustain it. We have promised not only to respect our brothers and sisters, but also to honor our mothers and fathers, and to care for our children and grand children and great grandchildren. Our covenant is not just for us, but for the generations that come after - generations that will number like the stars.

So what does it mean to be people who uphold God’s covenants at this point in history?

In the fall of 2017 I started Naomi Klein’s book, *This Changes Everything*, which I remember specifically because it pinpointed the year 2017 as the year the effects of 1 degree warmer climate would begin to be noticeable. And wow, were they right. That was the year when we

saw the worst hurricane season ever on record - the year that Hurricane Harvey took up residence over Houston for days, dumping so much water that flash flooding took the lives of 14 people and 30% of Harris County was submerged. One month later, Hurricane Maria destroyed Puerto Rico, hovering over it for days longer than usual. Scientists warn that stronger, slower, wetter storm systems are an effect of climate change. Since then, we've had record forest fires - a double whammy for climate because of the trees destroyed and the carbon and heat added to the atmosphere; unheard of high temperatures in the arctic that has accelerated glacier melt and defrosting of the permafrost; and interruptions of weather patterns that have brought extreme temperatures and - as predicted - power outages across the United States.

While climate change is caused by a global increase of mere degrees, the effects of that warming is not that we will all live in warmer places. The effect of global warming is rising, warming seas which cause weather 'weirding'. Climate change is climate chaos; the disruption of our normal weather patterns, droughts where there should be rain, heat where there should be cold, and polar cold where it should be midwestern cold. Earlier this year it was 20 degrees in the Arctic, negative 30 degrees in Hastings and ice froze the people in Texas. To many here in Nebraska, many who live close to the land, who make their living nurturing and harvesting, we are intimately aware of the weather patterns over decades. But here, at least, we are equipped to adjust to it.

Whatever happens with the climate patterns, it will first and foremost impact 'the least of these' – those already made vulnerable by a lack of resources, weak infrastructure, political instability, war or famine. For instance, drier and hotter conditions in the horn of Africa will exacerbate water shortages, reducing livestock and crop production in an already malnourished population.⁸ In South America, 4 million people rely on water from the Andes glacial melt, which shrank by a third from 2000 to 2016,⁹ foreshadowing serious water scarcity for millions. For the half of the world's population that lives within 40 miles of the sea, rising sea levels will cause more flooding and coastal erosion, leading to forced migration for survival.¹⁰ And for places with already fragile roads, bridges and buildings, extreme weather events like hurricanes will sink those communities further into destruction, debt, and disease. "According to a [report](#) by Oxfam in 2009, when a disaster strikes a high-income country 23, people die on average, while 1,052 die on average in the least-developed countries."¹¹ People of limited means and limited personal power have the least amount of capacity to prepare, adapt and survive the natural disasters and food shortages anticipated in our climate chaos future.

⁸ <https://www.onedayswages.org/2017/04/04/why-were-giving-away-food-in-malawi/>

⁹ <https://e360.yale.edu/features/andes-meltdown-new-insights-into-rapidly-retreating-glaciers#:~:text=One%20study%20suggests%20that%20nearly,seasons%20comes%20from%20glacial%20melt.>

¹⁰ <https://www.onedayswages.org/2017/06/09/5-ways-climate-change-affects-poverty/>

¹¹ <https://www.onedayswages.org/2017/06/09/5-ways-climate-change-affects-poverty/>

So, as people in covenant with God, we need to ask ourselves, what does it mean to uphold God's covenants at this point in history? That is what the Nebraska UCC Board of Directors asks you to contemplate today with this Climate Sabbath. What is our obligation to God's creation, our brothers and sisters, grandparents and grandchildren, and the least of these? We talk about climate and covenant in church because church is a place where we respond. Church is where we find a way to feed those in need, respond to families in crisis, offer our love and compassion, to provide for the least of these while we look for justice in the world. Church is a place where we act for good. Church is the place where we come together for fairness, grace and kindness for every neighbor and every part of God's creation. We do amazing things when we harness our love for God and pool that effort together as a church to make a big impact.

There is incredible power in our churches to bring about the changes critical to our world. There is incredible power in the pews of America to grasp the truth, get to work, and believe in the promise that God puts before us. In this country, people of faith have been the instigator for massive changes that have shaped the country we have today. The ending of slavery was rooted in the Quakers, the Methodists, and yes, the Congregationalists. The first hospitals were created by people of faith who felt called to care for the sick and dying. Child labor laws were initiated by faithful progressives in the 20's. The Civil Rights movement centered around a group of pastors that made up the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Orphanages, universal education, mission work, efforts to feed people in starving countries, rehabilitation for prisoners, worker protections and labor laws; all of these have their roots in our collective communities of faith. There is immense power in the voices of the faithful in this country, acting on deeply rooted religious values and calling our country to meet its nobler ideas. When the church awakes to a need, things change, because our commitment is based on our values and deeply held covenant with God. And especially for a time such as this, where we seem profoundly divided as a nation and fearful of the 'other', we still like our neighbor and love the person sitting next to us in the pew. The church is where we embrace what it means to love each other and remember that we are in covenant with each other, as we are in covenant with God.

And while this problem of climate change seems daunting, as Christians, we are people who know how to hope in darkness. We are an Easter people, people who have faith and certainty beyond that which we can see. We know how Jesus calls us to lean into the kingdom of God that is near but not yet; that God has done and will do great things. We know that as often as we have failed, God has used us twice as often to accomplish feats beyond expectation, beyond human comprehension, and will use our commitment to covenant to mitigate our climate crisis. It's big, but it's not too big for us all to make the small changes that, collectively, will make a difference. It's complicated, but it's not too complicated for us to see that our individual choices can have an effect. And it's serious, but it's not too far gone to not try.

In the 30th chapter of Deuteronomy, God says, "Choose life so that you and your descendants will live."

We can all do small things to choose life. And to choose to nurture the life we love, the lifestyle we love and the way of life that honors God, by making small changes. Just a little effort -

turning off lights and unplugging unused household appliances; lowering the thermostat 3 degrees and putting on a sweater; shutting off your car rather than idling; buying local produce and skipping meat once a week - all makes a difference in our energy consumption. Small changes, when multiplied by the number of people in our pews and the love in our hearts, can make a huge difference. We can choose to invest in renewing God's creation, to spend our money to draw energy from the sky rather than the ground. We can let our elected officials know that our vote depends on care for God's creation. We can plant trees with congregations across the state to decrease carbon levels in Nebraska - indeed, that's what many of you are doing this week. And we can share our excitement about our little changes with others and let them know that we are doing it as an expression of our faith. When we harness the power of our churches, we are able to make an impact that reaches far beyond ourselves.

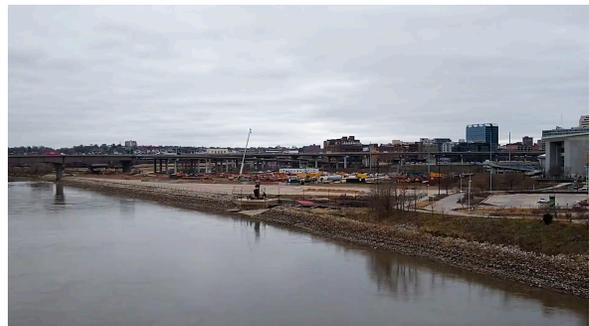
So this Sunday morning, I invite you to join in taking action for the climate, and choose to nurture life - yours and that of your children, your grandchildren and great grandchildren, of your nieces and nephews and descendants of all varieties - and that of the children of your congregation. Let us work to invest in their well-being to uphold the covenant God made with us. Amen.

Offering

Rev. Scott Jones

The great Missouri flood from 2011 remains in the memory of Omaha and all the communities and farms along the river. From May 31st to September 10th the river here in Omaha stayed above flood stage. It's amazing that our over-taxed levies and flood control systems held up.

Otherwise significant parts of Omaha would have been devastated. As it was, the flood caused over 2 billion dollars in damage, flooded 4,000 homes, and killed five people. Today, we ask you to give in support of UCC Disaster Ministries which has aided NE churches and families as we've had to respond to the growing number of disasters in a changing climate. Visit www.ucctcm.org/donate to make an offering.



Creating one, all that is came into being through your Naming: skies and planets, oceans and dry land. Your creating spirit is honored as we live with integrity toward all life. Shape our lives to be stewards in your image, that all may be safe and nurtured under our watchful care, in the name of Jesus Christ who reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, for all eternity. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

Rev. Les Parmenter

The Sand Hills is the largest dune field in the Northern hemisphere with dunes as long as 20 miles and as high as 400 feet. Held in place by grass and other

vegetation, the sand hills do not drift. “Even as the winds shriek over the landscape, the short thicket of stems renders the underlying sand immobile.”¹² In between the dunes are wetlands, ponds and lakes available to cattle and bison, and wildlife.



However, as recently as 800 years ago, the dunes were moving. Drought conditions were such that grass and other vegetation dried up, ponds and lakes evaporated, and the dunes began to move. Using a special dating technique, geologists can tell when the dunes were actively moving and when they were stable. Over the last 10,000 years, there have been a number of times when the prevailing winds pushed the dunes in a southeast direction.¹³ Depending upon the frequency of heat waves and drought and how long they will last, this environment could become more like a desert - not at all like what we are seeing today – and begin another period of dune migration.

As we seek to relax our grip so that the earth, our fragile sister, might rest from our labors, help us to see our world more vividly than we have done in the past.

Grant us vision for the challenges of this age and give us hearts full of courage for the future.

As we seek to be wise stewards of the gifts of the earth in timber and oil, coal, and gas, help us to know your world more humanely than we have in the past.

Make us learn that wisdom which we see among those wise and humble people of the earth, that we might walk with care and reverence so as to caress our fair sister.

Sharing God, draw us to contemplation and silence so that we might see, in wonder, our lives intertwined with the squirrels and the cardinal, the creatures great and small, the beauty of each season. Help us to see the birth, growth, death, and rebirth so as to give us courage in the ongoing creation of our Creator.

¹² Loope, D.B., et al., 2000, Thinking Like a Dune field: Geologic History in the Nebraska Sand Hills, *Great Plains Research*, v. 10, p. 5-35.

¹³ Miao, X., et al., 2007, A 10,000 year record of dune activity, dust storms, and severe drought in the central Great Plains, *Geology*, v.35, n.2, p. 119-122.

Deepen our faith and enliven our thinking, nourish our bodies and strengthen our souls, that we may be your message in the world, your servants for the common wellness of the earth. Make us weavers of a new order, crafters of a new earth.

Let us go forth with steady hand, uplifted heart, clear eye and alert mind, firm step, and willing hands. May we arrive at fresh springs of renewal through God's holy Word, in our communities of faith, and in deep solidarity with all creation. Call us to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, in caring for the earth and our siblings, as we pray in the way he taught us:

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those
who sin against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.

“The Earth Is Full” (Psalm 33)

Words and music by Richard Bruxvoort Colligan

Refrain:

The earth is full of covenant love The earth is full of promise
The earth is full of covenant love The earth is full of promise

From the sky-breath of life to the ancient ocean floor
Our joy is in our hoping
Sing a song of the waves and the patience of the shore.
Our joy is in our hoping

It's the seed in the soil come to fertilize the world
Our joy is in our waiting
Sing a song of the roots and the stem as it uncurls
Our joy is in our waiting

It's the body of God and it's pregnant with the Christ
Our joy is in the process
Sing a song of the heart as we ripen into life
Our joy is in our process

Benediction

Rev. Coral Parmenter

Climate change also affects forests, through tree mortality caused by drought and severe weather events. Also, higher day and night temperatures can lead to insect infestations, and disease outbreaks. Fire will also be a factor as it was in the 2012 severe flash drought.¹⁴



The Nebraska National forest is a unique eco-system created by humans. It is an example of afforestation, creating a forest where none existed and it has been surprisingly resilient over the years. Creating forests where none existed is a strategy used in many parts of the world to fight climate change. If the trees and the forest can survive, photosynthesis takes in CO2 creating a carbon sink, wherein CO2 can be stored - which is why today, UCC churches across Nebraska are planting 50 trees to take action for our Climate Sabbath. Thank you for joining us in this activity!

You were made for this earth, and this earth was made for you. Go forth to love and serve it, safeguard and protect it, securing it in covenant for all the generations to come, knowing in your deepest heart that God has blessed us from the beginning of time. In the name of the One who called all things good. Amen.

Thank you for joining us today!

¹⁴ Bathke, D.J., et al., 2014, Understanding and Assessing Climate Change: Implications for Nebraska, The University of Nebraska – Lincoln.