

Presented by Sam Swanson at the Shelburne Methodist Church for the Shelburne Thanksgiving Interfaith Service, sponsored by Shelburne Methodist Church, St. Catherine of Siena Catholic Church, All Souls Interfaith Gathering, and Trinity Episcopal Church.

Shelburne Interfaith Thanksgiving Worship Service Message - Sam Swanson

November 19, 2023

Thank you very much for inviting Vermont Interfaith Power and Light to join with you in this interfaith celebration of Thanksgiving

This afternoon we pause to give thanks for all that we have and commit to helping those who struggle.

Vermont Interfaith Power and Light exists to give voice to a multi-faith commitment to address the immediate impacts of a changing climate, in Vermont and beyond and to support action needed now to avoid worse impacts in the future.

So what is Vermont Interfaith Power & Light . . .

We are volunteers from Vermont's many different faith and spirit traditions. Our Board of Directors over time has included people from Jewish, Episcopalian, Methodist, Catholic, United Church of Christ, Lutheran, Unitarian Universalist, Islamic, and Budhists congregations.

Vermont Interfaith Power and Light exists to support individual congregation action to confront the climate crisis.

Leaders of our major faith traditions are speaking out, calling for climate action, the action required • to halt the now rapidly increasing global temperatures, and • to remedy the already apparent injustice being meted out by the impacts of a changing climate, and • to ensure the climate remedies address the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable. Faith leaders recognize that the rapidly warming planet is at heart a spiritual crisis.

We celebrate the Earth as a precious gift. We acknowledge our responsibility to care for each other and for the other creatures with whom we share this precious planet.

It has become abundantly clear that the impacts of climate change the flooding of streams and rivers close to home here in Vermont,

\the extreme heat waves in the south and west, the growing number of forest fires in many parts of the world, rising tides that flood coastal communities . . . hurt most the vulnerable among us. The injustice is stark - the most vulnerable have done the least to cause a warming planet but are impacted the most and are least able to recover from the hurts that befall them.

Clearly, the drivers of a rapidly changing climate and its impact on life systems are based on the science of a changing atmosphere and the complex chain of cause and effects that are disrupting life systems. It is all too clear that the actions of the more than 8 billion people who live, love, and work on Earth that are driving these changes. The climate crisis is ultimately a moral crisis that confronts all faith traditions.

This is about the choices we make, in our individual lives, in the businesses that provide us with products and services, and in the policies and programs our government leaders plan and adopt.

Climate scientists now tell us that we have only a short time to slow and reverse global temperatures. In the words of climate scientist Michael Maan, we now find ourselves in what may be termed *a fragile moment*, a very brief remaining time when we have the opportunity to take bold steps to avert increasingly severe climate changes, to sustain the climate conditions that have over eons enabled human civilization to prosper.

VTIPL exists to empower our Vermont faith and spirit community to act. By working together as a multi-faith community of congregations committed to taking action, we aim to improve the quality of the work each of us is doing, helping each other, empowering the communities of faith to act effectively.

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The first pathway . . .

Empowering our community to advocate

We are most effective when voices from individual congregations are advocating action. VTIPL works to help us do this work effectively.

VTIPL participates in the community of public interest organizations, working to make sure that faith community is at the table when plans are being made and key issues evaluated. The Vermont Clean Heat Standard legislation developed and adopted last year provides a good example. Faith community voices successfully pressed for ensuring that the needs of people with the fewest resources, people already struggling to feed and house their families will be addressed in plans to accelerate a switch from fossil fueled heating to clean energy sources

Again and again we hear from legislative leaders that they listen to faith community voices because our views are credible and tied to deeply held values. We have learned that the letters and phone calls to our local representatives are effective at influencing outcomes at key moments in the legislative process. VTIPL works to ensure that your advocacy is timely and connected to the important climate program decisions our government leaders are making.

On this upcoming February 28th Vermont Interfaith Power and Light with Vermont Interfaith Action will host a **Faith Climate Action Day** at the Vermont Statehouse. We invite you to join us for this day of meetings and conversations with our elected representatives. This gathering of

people from diverse Vermont faith communities communicates powerfully our message that we need to act, and that such action must address the needs of those who are hurt most by a changing climate, the people who are least able to protect themselves and their families. Plan to join us on February 28.

While much of our work is focuses on Vermont, we also track national policies and programs that are being put forward to address climate justice nationwide. VTIPL is part of a national network of more than 40 state IPL organizations that are supported by thousands of faiths communities nationwide. This network enables Vermont congregations to speak effectively on national policy and programs.

Transition The second pathway for our work....

Helping congregations walk the talk on climate change

Vermont Interfaith Power and Light has from our start worked at helping individual congregations to make improvements in their buildings and operations that will reduce their carbon emissions, what we call the carbon footprint.

We have provided more than 200 free energy assessments to congregations statewide. These on-site assessments help congregations identify action opportunities for carbon emission reductions in their buildings.

We also help congregations with funding support to make these improvements. VTIPL's Climate Action Grant program offers matching grants to enable Vermont faith and spiritual communities to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. For example, these grants can help congregations

- Obtain professional energy audits of their facilities,
- Reduce energy use by weatherizing congregation building and purchase high efficiency heating equipment, and
- Switch from using fossil fuels to renewable energy.

VTIPL's Climate Action Grant program has awarded more than \$200,000 in 40 matching grants to Vermont congregations. We have provided grants that range from a few hundred dollars to obtain a professional energy audits to grants of several thousand dollars for actual building improvements.

These grants are having a big impact. I offer the example of my home congregation, Ascension Lutheran Church in South Burlington. With funding help from this Climate Action Grant Program Ascension has successfully cut by half our climate emissions. The resulting energy bill reductions have repaid the cost to our congregation many times over, freeing up funds we now use to support our church life.

Transition

The third component of our work **Supporting congregation volunteers who are stepping up to do this important work** extends to everything VTIPL does.

All of our work in one way or another aims to support these congregation volunteers who have embraced this commitment to confront climate injustice, to advocate for community action that will halt reverse the increasing global temperatures, and to help congregations reduce their contributions to the problem.

Beyond communicating news about emerging issues and new action opportunities in newsletters, email communications, and workshop and webinar meetings, VTIPL is also recognizes that this is difficult work. Our work brings us very much in touch with what has already been lost or what we may soon lose: clean air, cool waters, beloved birds, treasured forests, vulnerable communities, not to mention our own optimism and innocence. It can be difficult to sustain hope in the face of accumulating reasons to despair.

In September VTIPL convened a gathering at the Rock Point Commons, **Finding Balance in a Times in Time of Darkness: An Equinox Lament & Celebration of Earth**. This gathering was facilitated by Jewish, Christian and other spiritual leaders from the VTIPL community. The gathering sought to connect us with nature and one another in ways that leave us newly energized for this important work.

WRAP UP

In closing I want to acknowledge and thank you for support VTIPL has received over the years from people in the Shelburne community.

We have only one part-time staff so much of the work we do is performed by volunteers, especially members of our Board of Directors, which is comprised of clergy and congregation lay leaders. Rev Dick Hibbert, a member of your Shelburne Methodist congregation, plays an important role in sustaining the work of VTIPL. on our Board. Rev Hibbert led the VTIPL as Board President for several years and continues to contribute to supporting the multi-faith community of congregations VTIPL serves.

And, the donations Shelburne's faith and spirit communities make each year help us to sustain the work we do . We have a small operating budget, depending heavily on volunteers. Your donations make a large contribution to our work.

Thank you.