



Vermont Interfaith Power & Light
A faith-based response to global warming



Photo courtesy Donna C. Roberts

Green Mountains, Blue Water

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**Pope Francis to COP28
Climate Conference, World
Religions: Unite Against
Environmental Devastation**

Despite intentions to be present at the COP28 climate conference in Dubai, Pope Francis's words were shared with the conference, and during the opening of

the Faith Pavilion, a first for a COP gathering, saying it is essential for all world religions to unite in opposing the "rapacious" devastation of the environment. The 86-year-old pope planned to preside at the opening of the Faith Pavilion, but had to stay at the Vatican due to a lung inflammation. Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin read the pope's messages. The following excerpt is from a Reuters article.

"'Religions, as voices of conscience for humanity, remind us that we are finite creatures, possessed of a need for the infinite,' the Pope said, noting that a Faith Pavilion was a first at a COP conference. 'For we are indeed mortal, we

have our limits, and protecting life also entails opposing the rapacious illusion of omnipotence that is devastating our planet,' he said.

Religions, he said, 'need, urgently, to act for the sake of the environment', educate their members to 'sober and fraternal lifestyles' instead of wasteful ones and work for a return to the individual contemplation of nature's grandeur.

'This is an essential obligation for religions, which are called to teach contemplation, since creation is not only an ecosystem to preserve, but also a gift to embrace,' Francis said."

[Reuters article.](#)



National Interfaith Power & Light at COP 28

National Interfaith Power & Light has a strong contingent of IPL representatives in Dubai for the COP28 climate conference, including IPL President Rev. Susan

Hendershot who is sharing regular blogs about her experiences, especially as relates to the urgency with which communities of faith view the climate crisis and calls for urgent action. See the link below for her blog posts.

IPL recently collected 4,000 signatures of people of faith and conscience on a letter to President Biden and the State Department urging greater ambition by the U.S. Government at COP28. IPL and partners delivered the letter in person to Trigg Talley, Senior Advisor to the Special Presidential Envoy for Climate and Director of U.S. Climate Negotiations at COP28. "In the letter, we not only urge the U.S. to increase ambition but to support increased climate investments in the Green Climate Fund, to support the Loss and Damage Fund (which was established on Day One of the summit), and to prioritize climate justice and a just transition off of fossil fuels. In his remarks to our group, Mr. Talley said that the faith voice is crucial in these climate talks, as

our advocacy at home is what allows their team to effectively do their work at COP. The U.S. is unable to make commitments to the global community that cannot be delivered on at home,” said Rev. Hendershot. For example, while the \$17.5 million pledged to the Loss and Damage Fund has already been allocated through Congress, the \$3 billion pledge made to the Green Climate Fund faces opposition at home.

“We have been talking with members of the Biden Administration, U.S. governors, mayors, and state legislators, speaking at the Faith Pavilion about fossil-free places of worship, meeting with faith and secular partners to strengthen coalitions, and learning about climate impacts from our global siblings experiencing first-hand devastation to communities and cultures.” [IPL Blogs.](#)



Climate Reality & Vice President Gore at COP28

If you ever doubt that we as human beings have the political will to do this, never forget that political will is itself a renewable resource. -Climate Reality Founder, Chairman Al Gore.

Several VT IPL leaders, including Board members Pr. Nancy Wright and Sylvia Burkman, and Coordinator Donna Roberts are graduates of the Climate Reality Leadership Training. It is no surprise that the group is at COP28 in Dubai with Climate Reality’s Founder and Chairman, former Vice-President Al Gore, with its *24 Hours of Reality: On the Ground at COP 28*. Gore’s quote above (and video linked below) is a reminder of the potential for impactful climate action at this year’s UN climate summit. More than 250 Climate Reality Leaders are in Dubai. [COP28 Climate Reality site & Al Gore video.](#)



View from All Souls Interfaith

VTIPL Retreat & 2024 Plans. Save-the-date for Faith Climate Action Lobby Day, Feb. 28

In late October, VTIPL's Board of Directors gathered at All Souls Interfaith Gathering's gorgeous location in Shelburne overlooking Lake Champlain to reflect on the past year's work and to chart plans for 2024. While considering a lengthy list

of projects, in-person and virtual events, activities, and partnerships, we share news of two of VTIPL's signature activities on which we're already focusing.

Save-the-date for Faith Climate Action Lobby Day, on February 28, 2024. VTIPL will again participate in a Faith Climate Action Day of activities at the Statehouse in Montpelier. Please plan to join us if you can when we will reiterate to our state legislators that communities and people of faith and conscience demand action now to address the urgent climate crisis. In 2023, we held our second Faith Climate Action Day, after a first event in February 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic prevented us from making it an annual lobby day. Faith Climate Action Day is a collaboration with our partner organizations Vermont Interfaith Action (VIA) which has recently identified climate as a priority issue for the organization, Vermont Public Interest Research Group (VPIRG), Vermont Conservation Voters, and others.

Stay tuned for news about an in-person Celebrating Sacred Waters gathering later next year. During our recent Rock Point-based Equinox Lament and Celebration of Earth, a main comment from participants was how valuable it is to actually BE together, especially coming together in the natural world that we cherish and are dedicated to protecting. Celebrating Sacred Waters is an answer to that call. We also hope to have other in-person gatherings routinely and outdoors as possible and appropriate. We need each other, and we need the inspiration and community of nature and our sacred Mother Earth.

Climate Action Update - Opposition to McNeil District Heating Project

Rev. Kim Hornung-Marcy is leading efforts among Burlington-area faith communities to oppose the construction of a \$40 million project to deliver steam produced by the McNeil wood-fired power plant in Burlington to replace steam produced by the UVM Hospital's natural gas fueled boilers. Opponents want the McNeil plant closed as soon as possible because wood fuel combustion produces large amounts of carbon dioxide and fine particulate pollution, exacerbating the climate crisis.

In October, the Burlington City Council voted to proceed with the McNeil project even in the face of strong opposition. A coalition continues efforts to halt this project. VTIPL acknowledges that this is a complex conversation, yet we appreciate all efforts to reduce fossil fuel emissions. For more information and/or to get involved, contact [Rev. Hornung-Marcy](#)



IPL Cool Congregations Challenge Deadline, December 15

There is one week left for congregations to apply for

a chance to win \$1,000 in the Cool Congregations Challenge. It's also a great opportunity to be recognized for efforts to become climate leaders. National IPL encourages all congregations to consider applying for the contest. Is your congregation planning to take advantage of new federal funding available for nonprofits to upgrade facilities to reduce energy use? If you have plans for energy audits, written action plans, and fundraising, apply for the Cool Planner category. There are six categories; in each, the winner receives \$1,000 while three runners-up receive \$500:

- Energy Saver: lighting, insulation, windows & doors, heating & cooling systems
- Renewable Role Model: solar, wind, geothermal, solar water heating
- Sacred Grounds: native landscaping, organic gardening, water conservation, bike racks, wildlife habitats, composting
- Community Inspiration: inspire congregants to reduce at home, help

communities transition from fossil fuels to clean energy & prepare for impacts of climate change

- Cool Congregations Planner: audits, planning reports, fundraising
- Electric Vehicle Leader: EVs, charging stations, education, advocacy, outreach.

Projects can take place inside worship spaces or other buildings, on grounds, in congregants' homes, or in the community. Eligibility includes projects completed in 2021, 2022, and 2023. Congregations which previously applied but did not win are eligible to apply again for projects completed in those three years. In the last Challenge, South Burlington's Ascension Lutheran Church was a Cool Congregations winner. Read more on [VTIPL's website](#). The deadline to apply for the Challenge is December 15. [Apply for Cool Congregations Challenge](#).

Vermont Community EV Chargers Program Open to Non-profits

Help grow electric vehicle chargers and electric transportation across Vermont. Non-profit organizations, such as congregations, are now eligible for grants from the Department of Housing and Community Development to help cover most, if not all, of the cost to install Electric Vehicle chargers. Complete the pre-application to the best of your ability; help is available for technical and financial assistance. The grant is open to applicants from all of Vermont.

Requirements for applicant matching funding amounts are as follows:

- Nonprofits require a 5% applicant match meaning the grant pays an incredible 95% of the cost. For example, the cost to Ascension Lutheran for charging equipment and installation brought the quoted cost down from \$30,000 to less than \$2,000;
- For-profit organizations need a 10% applicant match;
- Women and minority-owned organizations are exempt from matching fund requirements. [Email](#) or call 802-655-8722.

NEWS FROM ALLIED ORGANIZATIONS:



Sierra Club Lands & Conservation Outings Launch, December 14

The Vermont Sierra Club is relaunching a lands conservation and outings program to help foster a greater connection with nature. They invite the public to North Branch Nature Center in Montpelier at 6 p.m. on December 14 for casual conversation and sandwiches. The launch will include a discussion with Sierra Club's Our Wild America Senior Campaign Representative Alex Craven. Hear how the group will achieve the goal of conserving 30% of land by 2030. You can also join the event virtually at 7 p.m. for the live-streamed discussion. To get involved with the campaign, email [Robb Kidd. Event registration.](#)

Preservation Trust of Vermont Grants, Deadline December 21

The Preservation Trust announces the 2024 Paul Bruhn Historic Revitalization grant round. Awards of \$50,000-\$100,000 will be made to preserve and rehabilitate community gathering spaces of economic and social significance in rural communities. Of particular interest are projects aiming to increase the economic vitality of a community or that bring new economic and community activity to village centers. A total of \$625,000 will be awarded to nonprofits and municipalities in towns with populations less than 7,500 people. The Trust also announces new eligibility criteria in 2024 for privately-owned commercial and mixed-use buildings in Designated Downtowns or Village Centers in communities with a population of less than 7,500 people. Application deadline is December 21. Contact [Preservation Trust.](#)



Ongoing Gatherings for Creation Care

Pr. Nancy Wright, VT IPL's Vice-president, leads EcoSpirituality gatherings on the 2nd Sunday of the month at 7 p.m. as a way to stay connected with those who value a spirituality grounded in appreciation of the natural world. She also leads

Green Team meetings on the last Tuesday of the month at 7 p.m. Drop ins are welcome. To receive the link, write Pr. Nancy with "Creation Care" or "EcoSpirituality" meetings in subject line. [Email.](#) Gatherings are co-sponsored by VT IPL and the Green Team of the New England Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Ecological Hope & Spiritual Evolution - Climate Leader Christiana Figueres

Many of us enjoy listening to *On Being* interviews with Krista Tippett. Of all those I've heard over the years, this one stood out. Maybe it's because I'm a longtime environmental activist like her guest, the extraordinary climate leader Christiana Figueres, whose father was president of Costa Rica and prompted the country to disband its army. But more so, I think it's because Figueres offers us hope at a time of such profound ecological crisis while connecting it to her, and our, spiritual life. Here's the program description: "The ecological crisis we are standing before is at once civilizational and personal - intimately close to each of us in the places we love and inhabit, and unfolding at a species level. And as much as anyone alive on the planet now, Christiana Figueres has felt the overwhelm of this and stepped into service. She gives voice so eloquently to the grief that we feel and must allow to bind us to each other — and what she sees as a spiritual evolution the natural world is calling us to. If you have wondered how to keep hope alive amidst a thousand reasons to despair, if you are ready to take your despair as fuel — intrigued by the idea of stepping into love and immediate realities of abundance and regeneration — this conversation is for you."

Get a cup of tea, sit back, and be inspired. [Listen to podcast.](#)



Equinox event planning committee members l. to r.: VTIPL Board members Pr. Nancy Wright, Prof. Rebecca Gould, Coordinator Donna Roberts & Board member Rev. Dick Hibbert.

A Message from VTIPL Coordinator Donna Roberts

Dear Friends of Vermont Interfaith Power & Light,

December is my last month working as coordinator of VTIPL, a position I've held for nearly four years. When I began work in January of 2020, who could have predicted we were about to face a global pandemic? You could say I've been VTIPL's pandemic coordinator helping the organization transition to

presenting virtual programs from timely documentary film screenings and panel discussions, to webinars on topics such as climate justice, PFAS in water, rooting out racism in American agriculture, and heat pumps for faith communities...always with a view to how faith and care for Earth and all of life inform VTIPL's work. It's also been wonderful creating in-person events, our Celebrating Sacred Waters gatherings, recent Equinox Lament & Celebration of Earth at Rock Point, and VTIPL's 2022 Conference, Limits to Growth: Pathways to a Sustainable Future. Going forward, I plan to collaborate with VTIPL on special project work. Stepping aside from this position will allow me to devote more time to an MFA in Creative Writing (Nonfiction), telling stories about decades of climate activism and hiking with my father, as well as documentary filmmaking. I also need time to continue advocating for my autistic son Gabriel, helping secure vocational opportunities (his dream is to have a food truck while addressing food insecurity) and supported community living; both major gaps in Vermont.

It has been such an honor to work with the devoted volunteer members of VTIPL's Board. Having been an environmental activist and educator for 3+ decades, I must continue working on the climate crisis, or as my Irish writing mentor says, the "climate catastrophe". We are all responsible for caring for Creation. If you or someone you know may be interested in working part time with VTIPL, please contact Board President [Ron McGarvey](#).

Many blessings to all at this time of great change, challenge, and opportunity.

Happy Holidays! Donna

Thank you for supporting Vermont Interfaith Power & Light. We are grateful to collaborate with you on behalf of the human community and all of Creation.



Photo courtesy Donna C. Roberts

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