

The Energy Transition: Religious and Cultural Perspectives

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GREENING FAITH: TURNING BELIEF INTO ACTION FOR THE EARTH

by Fletcher Harper

Abstract. As religious-environmental awareness in the United States becomes more widespread, many faith-based institutions find themselves unaware of the range of environmental actions that they can take, and methods for organizing their efforts for greatest impact. This essay conceptualizes Spirit, Stewardship, and Justice as organizing values for understanding religious-environmental efforts. The essay then reviews environmental action steps that faith-based institutions can take, including the integration of environmental focus into worship, religious education, spiritual practices, energy and water conservation, food practices, waste management, toxics reduction, environmental justice education, alliance building, advocacy, and community organizing. The essay concludes with a review of research on community-based social marketing and organizational transformation, offering these as methods for increasing the impact of religious efforts to address energy and protect the environment.

Keywords: certification; community-based social marketing; congregation; eco-spirituality; environmental; environmental justice; faith-based; GreenFaith; interfaith; organizational transformation; religious-environmental; spirit; stewardship

It happens repeatedly. Members of a congregation decide they want to address environmental issues. They hear a sermon describing the moral and theological basis for environmental stewardship, and they affirm in

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coffee hour following worship that they believe that caring for the earth is a religious duty. Or, they take an Ecological Footprint Quiz (e.g., www.myfootprint.org) that measures the environmental impact of their consumption habits. They learn that if everyone on the planet consumed at their same level, between four and five Earths would be needed to meet the demand for resources. They feel overwhelmed, guilty, motivated for action.

And then . . . nothing happens.

Over the past decade, religious engagement of the environment in the United States has grown rapidly. A generation of eco-theological PhD's has been minted. Scholarly papers about the religion-environment link have proliferated. Increasing numbers of "green" sermons have been preached. The 2006 national American Environmental Values Survey found that 81 percent of all people—not just people of faith—affirmed that "Taking good care of nature is part of our duty to God," while 87 percent affirmed that "The beauty of nature is a gift from God" (ecoAmerica and SRI Consulting 2006). These figures suggest that a national consensus has emerged that care for the environment is a religious value. A country of believers, U.S. citizens appear to believe that God wants us to protect the Earth.

And yet, in working with hundreds of houses of worship from diverse traditions, I have found that the vast majority of congregations have not taken basic steps to develop an ongoing environmental ministry or program, despite increasingly sincere beliefs to the contrary. We appear to be residents of a religious culture characterized by the words spoken to Jesus by the father whose son is afflicted with demons—"Lord I believe; help my unbelief" (Mk 9:24).

Why? For some, the issue is lack of genuine or deep concern. For others, competing priorities press for time. Two main roadblocks regularly appear. First, for many, the issue is knowledge—knowledge about where to start, and what to do. For others, there is individual and institutional inertia, the simple fact that changing habits on an organizational level is hard. These two factors, lack of knowledge about what to do coupled with inertia and lack of capacity for organizational change, combine to make environmental programming a fledgling reality in most religious institutions. So, it follows that if religious groups are to make a meaningful contribution to the development of an environmentally sustainable society in the United States, these two roadblocks are of real significance, and remedies to each critically important.

A response to both of these factors involves three interconnected elements. First, to structure the broad field of religious engagement of the environment, I propose a three-dimensional values system for this field of activity, a structure that is comprehensive as well as attractively simple. Second, I describe a holistic range of opportunities for environmental engagement available to all houses of worship, in the belief that these ideas

can provide a meaningful set of steps enabling people to put what they believe into action. Third, I share thinking from two theorists that I have found helpful in organizing my thinking about how religious institutions can become effective environmental change agents, overcoming inertia that too often afflicts their eco-leadership.

NEEDED: BRIDGE OVER TROUBLING WATERS

The topic of the environment is large, complex, and multifaceted. It includes multiple areas of science, economics, and politics, many of them requiring professional expertise or experience to comprehend. If that is not enough, the environment is also a broadly controversial topic, plagued by the perception and reality that as a subject for public engagement, it foments polarization. This combination of intellectual complexity and emotional lability renders “the environment” a challenging topic for houses of worship and their leaders, most of whom lack the knowledge to address environmental concerns with calming confidence.

In the midst of this intellectual complexity and emotional intensity, religious leaders need a way to articulate an approach to the environment that allows both easy comprehension and more complex theological growth and development, a basic conceptual structure that provides a foundation for genuinely religious environmental efforts.

THREE CORE VALUES

Three core values provide this structure. They carry different names in different traditions, but their underlying concepts, and the ethos these values promote, are similar. These three—Spirit, Stewardship, and Justice—bear explanation before describing the actions that incarnate them and the methods that promulgate them effectively.

Spirit. As a religious-environmental value, Spirit carries a dual meaning. It has a strong experiential connotation, as it refers to the experiences of the sacred that people have outdoors. It also refers to the basis in traditional sacred writings and religious teachings that point to an ethic of awe and respect for the Earth as an essential part of religious belief. These two aspects—experiential and traditional—reinforce each other in significant ways.

In 2003–2005, I conducted over 50 interviews with people from a wide range of religious and socioeconomic backgrounds. Since 2002, I have conducted discussion groups in over one hundred houses of worship. I have found that regardless of race, age, religion, and socioeconomic background, nearly all people have spiritual experiences in the natural world—experiences that they classify as among the most significant in

their lives but which they rarely discuss. It is a core value of religious environmentalism to affirm the importance of these experiences.

In listening to people describe their outdoor spiritual experiences, several themes quickly emerge. For many people, these experiences are ones of intense and indelible beauty, with an aspect of nature as its vehicle and expression. These experiences highlight an appreciation of the beauty of God as Creator, a theme frequently neglected in contemporary theology. Another common theme is that of awe in the face of the size, scope, or complexity of the Earth or universe. Frequently, these experiences of awe render their subjects both humbled and grateful—humbled because of the experience's power, grateful because awe relieves the ego of its exhausting self-centeredness. A third theme, also common but less commonly advertised, is that of extended communion, in which people feel a personal connection with a member of the beyond-human community of creation—whether animal, plant, landscape, or weather. Because society is often reluctant to affirm such experiences outside of pets and gardens, these experiences are double-edged. Because of social resistance to the reality of these bonds, such experiences remind us that there can be an emotional price to pay for affirming our love for the Earth.

These experiential themes combine with a text-based affirmation of the multifaceted value of the Earth from faith's perspective. Religious environmentalism holds that the Bible, and other traditional sacred writings, contains the material required to support an ethic of universe-fostered knowledge of God, and respect and compassion for Creation. Looking specifically at the Bible, these themes remain largely untaught at the seminary and congregational levels. In the Hebrew texts, we see repeated affirmations of God as Earth's Creator, Owner, and Sustainer (Genesis 1–2, Psalm 24:1); Earth as source of awe and wonder (Psalm 8); creation as a worshipping community (Psalm 148); and human beings as compassionate caretakers responsible for the earth's well-being (Genesis 2:15). In the New Testament, we see themes related to Christ as the source of cosmic coherence (Colossians 1:15–20); salvation as Christ's gift to the universe (John 1:14, 3:16); the natural world as the locus of divine healing, instruction, and revelation (Matthew 5:1–2; Luke 6:12; Matthew 17:1–3); paradise as a place in which humanity and nature reach mutually enhancing perfection (Revelation 21–22). The Bible contains a ready supply of texts and themes that affirm the religious basis for the Earth's care.

The Bible's positive Earth-related witness comes as unexpected to many people. This stands in tension with the personal experiences described above, in which many people retain a quick and canny familiarity with memories from years past. By contrast, the story of the Bible's witness strikes most as an unknown tale, representing a new frontier for faith. This combination of powerful past memory with a new face of faith represents the central elements of the value of Spirit in relationship to the

environment, where experience and tradition come together to awaken people's bond with the earth.

Stewardship. A growing number of U.S. citizens view themselves as consumers who have changed their consumption habits because they want their consumption habits to be consistent with their values. This relationship between values and consumption is at the heart of the religious-environmental value of "Stewardship." Simply put, Stewardship refers to the fact that God calls human beings to make responsible use of Creation, mindful of the needs of Creation and the most vulnerable among us today, and of the rights of future generations to inherit a healthy planet. Communities of faith are called to develop consumption habits that model this responsible, sustainable use.

In probing more deeply about the meaning of this value within religious communities, two themes—the personal and social dimensions of consumption—stand out. Most religious language about Stewardship focuses on the social dimension, the environmental, and human impacts of various consumption choices. Choices related to energy and food are common examples of this, in which certain choices, such as organic produce and renewable fuels, are viewed as environmentally preferable to industrial farming and oil-based energy that cause human and ecological suffering. This dimension of the value of Stewardship focuses on the outer impacts of our personal choices.

There is also an inner dimension to Stewardship, which blends language from the realm of virtue ethics with that of environmental sustainability. From this vantage point, Stewardship means cultivating restraint, mindfulness, and compassion in our role as consumers, developing virtue by resisting the pressures of consumer culture. A story told by Gary Gardner, former director of research at the Worldwatch Institute, connects these personal and social themes

Recently, I had a good friend visit me from out of town; we had invited him to stay the night at our home. He eats cereal for breakfast in the morning, which I do not, so before he arrived I went out to the grocery store to buy him a box of cereal.

I walked into the supermarket aisle where the cereals are displayed. I was stunned when I was faced with the huge array of breakfast cereals—many different brands and options. Out of curiosity I began to count, to see how many different types of cereal there were. I counted over 120 different brands, all on display in that one aisle.

This made me think. In my work, which focuses in part on Third World and global development and the environment, one of the operating assumptions is that a country becomes more developed when its citizens have more choices. The conventional thinking is that the more choices you have, the better off you are. This is obviously true in a number of important ways, but when I stood in that supermarket looking at the shelves of different breakfast cereals, I began to see that

there were real limits to the truth of this understanding of linking development, choice and consumption.

Then, I began to think about some of the most important choices I've made in my own life—choices about my job, my marriage, my family. I realized that when I chose my job, I didn't have 120 options—I had only a couple—and choosing from between this small number forced me to become clear about who I was and what kind of work I valued most. When I was choosing who to marry, I didn't have 120 options—I had one person that I chose, and committing to that single choice, over the years, has shaped me in deeply important ways. These experiences of limited choice have been some of the most important occasions for spiritual growth in my entire life. I wouldn't be the person I am today if I hadn't wrestled with these choices with very limited options. (Related to the author 5/14/2007; used with permission)

The value of Stewardship connects our use of resources, our consumption, with its personal and social consequences. It serves as the second core value of religious environmentalism.

Environmental Justice. In 1987, and again in 2007, researchers commissioned by the United Church of Christ plotted the location of all known U.S. toxic waste sites on a map, a map that also contained data on the race and income levels of each U.S. zip code zone. The findings were a reminder that when it comes to pollution, all communities are not created equal. Communities of color and low-income communities—in that order—suffer measurably higher levels of exposure to toxic contamination than whiter, wealthier communities (Bullard et al. 2007, vii; Chavis and Lee 1987, x). This grim reality, and a countervailing vision of a more environmentally just world, provides the basis for a religion-environmental commitment to justice.

This focus on environmental justice (EJ) establishes three important connections. First, it connects the meaning of “environment” with pollution. When asked to say the first things that come into their minds when they hear the word “environment,” many people name a range of landscapes or animals, many in exotic places, not smog and contaminated sites. A focus on EJ, by comparison, requires a focus on pollution—the painful side of a religious focus on the earth. GreenFaith regularly offers EJ tours in which we bring people to a range of contaminated sites and share the history of the pollution there, its impact on the community's health, and the lack of remediation that has taken place. Jokingly, we note that most people do not visit pollution on purpose. While people smile in response, I have repeatedly seen these tours serve as awakenings to the reality of pollution and its impacts. If religion's role, in part, is to create the space within society for the acknowledgement of suffering and pain, EJ creates that space within religion's engagement of the environment.

The second connection that EJ makes is between the environment and health. For wealthier communities, the environment often represents an issue of protecting places for recreation, for activities that are pleasurable and not, strictly speaking, essential for human survival. EJ focuses on the reality that pollution sickens people, shortens their lives, and can even be fatal. This shifts the status of the “environment” from luxury good toward essential, and interjects a serious and sobering tone into its consideration. EJ reminds us that a recreative view of the environment is incomplete and that our health depends in significant part on the Earth’s health.

Third, EJ connects the environment with poverty, a topic that religious groups have engaged for millennia. As noted above, repeated studies have shown that society’s most vulnerable communities suffer pollution’s worst impacts, a reality that aligns the interests of religious-environmentalism solidly with those of religious leaders who address issues of poverty. This third connection can enable religious communities to broaden the scope of their traditional understanding of poverty to include an environmental dimension, and to address the link between poverty and pollution.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION

With these values in place, the focus can turn to action. Here are action steps that houses of worship can take, organized around the three values described above.

1. Spirit. Activities, including worship, religious education, and spiritual practices, are all connected to the value of Spirit described above.

Worship. Worshipping communities can integrate nature into rituals, adapt or create rituals to include an environmental focus, and worship outdoors.

Integrating nature into worship. Most simply, worshipping communities can integrate references to nature into prayers, hymns, and other verbal elements of rituals. Worship leaders can also place “raw” natural elements into worship spaces, such as containers of water, earth, plants, leaves from local trees, or other natural elements, deepening worshippers’ relationship with God. Worship leaders can also use “refined” nature—natural products or services shaped by human effort—to strengthen worshippers’ bond with the Earth. For example, worship leaders can use cuttings of local, seasonal flowers and greenery, real wax candles, or locally baked bread to model respect for Creation. Technology makes it possible to increase worshippers’ sense of nature’s presence. Houses of worship can use PowerPoint slides with photographs of nature alongside the words of hymns or prayers.

Sometimes, words are not necessary—these photographs or images can also be used on their own—as visual preludes, postludes, or prayers.

Adapting or creating rituals with an environmental focus. Certain holy days lend themselves well to a focus on Creation. For example, churches can designate an October Sunday dedicated to St. Francis, or an April Sunday close to Earth Day as times for an ecological observance. Synagogues increasingly utilize holidays such as Tu B'shvat and Sukkot to focus on Jewish environmental teachings, and some Hindu temples are beginning to do the same with Diwali and Hindu eco-teachings. In each of these cases, existing rituals can be adapted, or new rituals created to emphasize the relationship between religion and the Earth.

Worshipping outdoors is another method communities can use to connect their congregations with the natural world. Whether congregations are based in urban, suburban, or rural settings, worshipping outdoors heightens people's awareness of their natural surroundings, and of their own body's response to these.

Religious education. There are three ways in which religious education can address environmental concerns. First, religious education programs can educate about the basis in sacred writings and theology for a proenvironmental ethic, exploring traditional teachings, or offering new interpretations of ancient texts.

Second, education programs can introduce the scientific basis for various environmental issues, and various considerations for public policy. Many people have not had the opportunity to learn about the basic science behind topics ranging from climate change to toxic contamination to biodiversity, and many scientists are willing to offer educational presentations in faith-based settings. A secondary benefit of such programs is that they bridge the well-publicized divide between science and religion on an issue of common concern.

Third, education programs can address issues of personal consumption, advising congregants about steps they can take to "green" their lives. These programs can provide the practical tools people need to change their consumption habits, while also providing a community to support individuals' efforts in this regard.

There are many excellent secular environmental education resources, any number of which can be adapted for use in religious settings. Using these resources can be a good way for churches to start educating their members about the environment. Presently, there are far fewer environmental education resources designed specifically for religious audiences. However, more publishers are recognizing the need for quality curricula and there are likely to be more options in the years to come.

Spiritual practices. As noted above, many people have powerful spiritual experiences outdoors, and yet do not have the opportunity to reflect on what God is saying to them through these experiences. Houses of worship have wonderful opportunities to organize hikes, congregational gardens, reflection days, or retreats that give their members the opportunity to connect more deeply with God through Creation, and to discuss their outdoor spiritual experiences with their fellow congregants. These activities can be highly enriching, and deserve serious consideration as a regular part of a congregation's spiritual practice.

2. *Stewardship.* Growing out of the value of Stewardship, houses of worship can take a host of actions to develop more environmentally sustainable consumption habits, and to encourage their members to do the same at home. These actions include energy conservation, the use of renewable energy, transportation, food, water, green purchasing, waste reduction, and more.

Energy. What is the highest fixed cost for most congregations after personnel? And how does the average congregation make its greatest negative environmental impact? The answer is energy use, which makes energy conservation, and the use of renewable energy, a valuable focus for many congregational efforts. An energy audit is often one of the best investments that a house of worship can make, as it simultaneously identifies opportunities for financial and energy savings and greenhouse gas emissions reductions. Following the audit, religious institutions can take a number of steps to reduce their energy use through temperature control, energy efficient lighting and appliances, and more.

There are two ways that religious institutions can use renewable energy, both of them representing a tougher challenge than energy conservation. Some congregations purchase a portion of their energy from renewable sources, paying a premium cost for environmentally friendlier energy. Some institutions offset these costs through savings gained from conservation. Nonetheless, purchasing renewable energy represents a challenge, given the cost premium.

A second way that religious groups can use renewable energy is by installing solar panels, a geothermal system, or a small wind turbine on their premises. Many congregations prefer this approach because, along with the power, they enjoy the attention these systems generate. However, these systems require significant up-front financing, which is usually difficult for religious groups to acquire. GreenFaith is working to secure financing for solar arrays at religious institutions nationwide during 2012 to make solar power more accessible to a range of religious sites.

Transportation. According to the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS), the most important environmental decision that the average U.S. citizen

makes is their choice of transportation, given the greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution emitted by cars (Brower and Leon 1999, 24). Religious institutions can encourage the use of mass transit, ridesharing, bicycling, and walking and can develop plans to reduce the transportation-related carbon emissions related to their own activities.

Food and water. The same UCS study referenced above reported that the second most important environmental choice for the average U.S. citizen is their choice of food. Toxic waste and pollution due to industrial agriculture create enormous environmental problems, and livestock production produces significant greenhouse gas emissions (Brower and Leon 1999, 42). Religious institutions can model a better alternative by offering vegetarian options at mealtime, and serving organic, locally grown fruits and vegetables during coffee hour, along with Fair-Trade coffee or tea that protects the environment and the rights of workers. GreenFaith offers its *Repairing Eden* resource as a tool to help faith-based groups develop environmentally sustainable food practices.

Water conservation offers another opportunity for congregations to put their beliefs to work. Installing faucet flow regulators on all sinks, using dishwashers only when full, using toilet tank flow regulators, and using landscaping practices that conserve water can reduce a congregation's water use by tens of thousands of gallons annually while serving as an important model for the congregation's members.

Green purchasing and waste reduction. Religious institutions can contribute to a healthier planet by greening their purchasing and improving their waste management. Most congregations can reduce the amount of waste they produce by more than a third by increasing recycling, reducing paper consumption, and managing food-related waste. Using Green Seal Certified cleaning and maintenance products can reduce a church's use of toxic materials, while protecting the health of children and maintenance workers.

Many people express concern that green products cost more, but this is not always the case. Many groups—such as Coop America and the U.S. CommunitiesTM Program—offer cost-effective opportunities for religious groups to buy “green” products at affordable prices. Increased costs can also be offset through conservation-minded practices that reduce operating expenses.

3. Environmental Justice. Growing out of the value of Justice, religious institutions can undertake at least four interrelated kinds of activities. They can conduct education about environmental racism and injustice, build relationships with EJ leaders, conduct advocacy on EJ issues, and take part in community organizing and litigation on EJ issues.

EJ education. Most people are not aware of the disproportionate impact of pollution on minority and poor communities—and are moved with concern when they discover this. Conducting educational programs, such as a film screening of documentaries on EJ issues, can motivate people for action. Conducting a local environmental health and justice tour, where members can see an EJ community firsthand and talk with community leaders, is another powerful way to raise awareness and motivate church members for action. Sharing research, on EJ issues while informative, is not normally as effective as the prior two forms of education.

Building relationships with EJ leaders. A growing number of citizens in EJ communities are stepping forward to offer leadership, identifying threats to their community's health, and organizing their communities in response. Connecting with these leaders is a key step in developing a strong EJ program within a religious institution, because these grassroots leaders speak with a uniquely important perspective on their community's behalf. Meeting with these leaders enables congregations to understand the issues from the community's perspective, and to organize their advocacy in a manner that supports the community's goals.

Advocacy. Advocacy is a fundamental part of seeking EJ. Whether through letter writing, meetings with elected officials or regulators, or other methods, religious institutions can make an important contribution to a healthier environment for those communities that are most vulnerable.

Community organizing and litigation. A final EJ activity available to religious institutions is community organizing, which can include litigation. In this area of activity, religious groups partner with other community groups to develop goals for improving environmental quality in their area, and advocating through various means—including community meetings, political pressure, and more—to achieve their goals. In some cases, nonprofit or public interest law firms are willing to work with community groups to undertake litigation in relation to egregious polluters who are unwilling to address community concerns adequately. While litigation can prove time intensive, it can also represent the only way that an EJ community can reduce pollution from certain sources.

METHODS FOR SUCCESS

Core values and opportunities for action are important tools to help religious institutions become active on the environment. But the third ingredient of successful religious-environmental efforts lies in the area of methodology. In this section, I will review recommendations from Dr. Douglas McKenzie Mohr, author of *Fostering Sustainable Behavior* (2011), and Dr. John Kotter, author of *Leading Change* (1996), whose

insights on the topics of individual and organizational behavior change are particularly relevant.

Fostering Sustainable Behavior. Dr. Douglas McKenzie Mohr specializes in applying behavioral psychology to the development of a range of programs aimed at changing people's environmental behaviors. His book and website, *Fostering Sustainable Behavior* and www.cbsm.com, are widely recognized as classic resources in this area. He offers trenchant observations about effective, and ineffective, strategies, and tactics for changing people's environmental behaviors.

What Does Not Work. Dr. McKenzie Mohr cites extensive research that demonstrates the limitations, or ineffectiveness, of many common methods to promote environmental behavior change. He notes, for example, that campaigns that seek to foster change largely by providing information are usually ineffective. Based on research, he voices similar reservations about initiatives designed largely around economic self-interest. Yet despite extensive research reinforcing these points, a large percentage of environmental behavior change initiatives rely heavily on these two methods. McKenzie Mohr offers an alternative, which he calls "community-based social marketing" (McKenzie Mohr 2011).

Getting It Right. McKenzie Mohr suggests a consistent approach to developing initiatives that result in real environmental behavior change. He recommends that organizers of these initiatives identify the desired behavior change clearly, identify barriers to this change within their community, develop a strategy that uses proven behavior-change tools, pilot test their strategy, and then evaluate and measure the results of their efforts. Following this method in a disciplined manner results, he asserts, in superior results to those initiatives that do not (McKenzie Mohr 2011).

He also describes a number of proven behavior-change tools. Because they rely heavily on personal contact, these can be readily applied in many faith-based sites. These methods include inviting people's public, verbal commitment to try a new behavior, and prompting them to follow through on this prior commitment (McKenzie Mohr 2011, *Good Intentions to Action*). Additional methods include establishing new institutional behavioral norms by enrolling influential individuals within the institutions to adopt and model these behaviors; utilizing specific methods to "speed the diffusion" of new behaviors (McKenzie Mohr 2011, *Social Diffusion, Speeding Adoption*); delivering behavioral prompts in close proximity to the time or location of the desired behavior (McKenzie Mohr 2011, *Prompts—Remembering to Act*); communicating in a manner that is "vivid, concrete and personal" (McKenzie Mohr 2011, *Communication—Creating Effective Messages*); utilizing incentives effectively (McKenzie

Mohr 2011, Incentives—Enhancing Motivation to Act); and making behavior changes as convenient as possible (McKenzie Mohr 2011, Incentives—Enhancing Motivation to Act).

With a strategy in place and behavior modification tools chosen, McKenzie Mohr urges planners to conduct a pilot test of their efforts prior to launching them on a wide scale, noting the cost—financially and in regards to human resources—of launching change efforts (McKenzie Mohr 2011, Piloting). He also emphasizes the importance of formal evaluation of results, and of gathering information about results through some systematic form such as surveys, as opposed to relying solely on anecdotal information (McKenzie Mohr 2011, Broad Scale Implementation).

Leading Change. A second perspective on implementing change efforts in organizations comes from John Kotter, who teaches leadership at Harvard Business School and is an expert in the field of organizational change and development. He has studied hundreds of organizational change efforts at the corporate level and has observed, along with other leading organizational change experts, that a majority of these change efforts fail to meet their goals (Kotter 1996, 3–4). This stark fact should stand as a cautionary note for religious institutions. If large corporations, with some of the world’s best management talent, are unable to meet their organizational change objectives, then it is realistic to expect that religious institutions will face similar struggles.

Based on his research, Kotter has identified an eight-step process that, if followed in a disciplined manner, dramatically increases the likelihood that organizations will succeed in their efforts to change. First, he states that establishing a sense of urgency represents an important first step in creating change and suggests that 75% of an organization’s key leaders must be convinced of the importance of change for change efforts to succeed. Second, he recommends establishing a guiding coalition for the change effort that includes influential members of the institution (Kotter 1996, 4–7). Without an influential coalition of supporters, he reasons, change efforts are doomed to failure.

Third, he emphasizes the importance of creating a vision, “a picture of the future that is relatively easy to communicate and appeals to customers, stockholders, and employees. A vision helps clarify the direction in which an organization needs to move” (Kotter 1996, 8–9). Fourth, he asserts the importance of consistent and repeated communication in support of the desired change, noting that many unsuccessful change efforts fail because their leaders undercommunicate “by a factor of ten” (Kotter 1996, 9). And fifth, he recommends allocating resources—time, organizational focus, and money—in support of the desired change (Kotter 1996, 10, 21). In my experience, it is easy for many religious institutions to claim that they lack financial resources to invest in these efforts, while overlooking the fact that

investments of volunteer and staff time, and of organizational focus, are often of equal or greater importance.

Sixth, he explicitly recommends planning to achieve several short-term “victories” in the effort to create change, noting that these early “wins” help build institutional momentum and self-confidence (Kotter 1996, 11). Seventh, he argues in favor of sustaining momentum and avoiding “declaring victory too soon,” a hallmark of failed change efforts (Kotter 1996, 12–13). Finally, he recommends institutionalizing the new approaches to conducting the organization’s work in this area, and making it “the way we do things around here” (Kotter 1996, 14–15, 21).

Beyond Belief. McKenzie Mohr and Kotter both offer methodologies that are proven, comprehensive, and actionable. They represent a vitally important component of serious religious efforts to engage environmental concerns, and deserve consideration alongside the beliefs and environmental action steps that attract the vast majority of the focus and attention of religious efforts on the environment. Simply put, their research strongly suggests that without an explicit focus on proven methodology, widespread behavior change is unlikely.

While more and more people of faith find the idea of caring for the earth appealing, most have yet to act on it, or to integrate it deeply into the patterns of their lives. The environment plays, on a descriptive level, an ornamental role in many congregations’ and congregants’ beliefs, and has not yet reached the level of behavioral impact.

This is not all bad. Drawing from McKenzie Mohr’s research, we can learn that verbal assent at the level of low commitment often precedes meaningful action (McKenzie Mohr 2011, Commitment—Good Intentions to Action). But if the goal for religious communities on environmental issues is action, then these communities need to use these methodologies to move beyond belief.¹

CONCLUSION

In recent years, it has become an increasingly accepted theological norm that caring for Creation is a religious value. The battle of ideas is being won. This is an important, and encouraging, first step.

The challenge increasingly lies with implementation—putting belief into action. The action steps and methodologies described here can help religious institutions move toward this important goal and become leaders on one of the most critical challenges facing the human family.

NOTE

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1. These core values, action steps, and methodologies form the basis of the *GreenFaith Certification Program*, the only interfaith green certification program for houses of worship in North America. Information about this program can be found at www.greenfaith.org.

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