

WCC Side Event Presentation, COP17, December 7<sup>th</sup> 2011

by Mardi Tindal, Moderator, The United Church of Canada

I have been asked to tell you about the Canadian Interfaith Call for Leadership and Action on Climate Change, and I am joined here today by several Canadian church leaders who participated in the creation of this document (acknowledged those in room), for first and foremost this is a communal effort. Another signatory to this document has been fasting in prayerful solidarity with us here at COP17, former moderator of The United Church of Canada, Bill Phipps.

At the beginning of all of our national United Church meetings we now acknowledge where we are and whose traditional land we meet on. So I begin this afternoon by giving thanks for this land of South Africa and for the traditional peoples of this land. We ground ourselves in who we are with one another on this sacred land in creation and with gratitude to our Creator.

Ursula Franklin, also Canadian, says that one of the most radical things we can do is change our language in order to reflect the moral values we choose to commit to rather than the moral or immoral values of the existing order of things. Too much of the language we hear at the COP reflects immoral values, reducing our planet and one another to things to be measured for exploitation and exchange – unrighteous economics, I would say. We see the measuring of exploitation more than work on how to prevent it. So in these few minutes I will use a different kind of language, language that I find helpful in the pursuit of right relationships with one another as moral human beings in right relationship with the Earth.

I will use language found in the teachings of the First peoples of Canada to whom I give thanks for teachings which, along with other traditional teachings of our varied Canadian faith traditions, reflect good, moral language. Almost 30 Canadian faith leaders committed themselves to a Canadian Interfaith Call for Leadership and Action on Climate Change on October 25th, and more have come on board since, now representing about 17 million Canadians, over half of the population. I was asked to tell you about our statement today, and since I can give you a copy, I won't read it to you. Allow me, though, to frame it for you.

Cree wisdom is one of the traditional threads of faith in Canada and provides a framework for my description of our Canadian Interfaith Call for Leadership and Action on Climate change:

There are four sacred directions within Cree understanding, beginning in the East where we welcome the rising sun, recognize our relationship to the Creator and confess our identity as part of Creation. In the South we seek Wisdom from Scripture and from the teachings of Elders. In the West we ask for healing from the hurts we have caused and the hurts that have been done to us. And finally, in the North we give thanks for the many blessings the Creator has provided for us in our lives.

#### So we begin by turning to the East, and confessing our identity as part of Creation

Within this statement, we bring forward our moral and spiritual resources as people of faith for the sake of God's healing and mending of creation, the healing and mending of global and local community, and for God's healing and mending of our own souls. The healing of each is depending on the healing of all: soul, community and creation.

In our statement we say that **we recognize that at its root the unprecedented human contribution to climate change is symptomatic of a spiritual deficit: excessive self-interest, destructive competition, and greed that have given rise to unsustainable patterns of production and consumption.**

As Martin Luther King Jr. said, we are tied in one single garment of destiny. We confess that we have a long way to go toward right relationship with one another and the rest of creation.

As Canadians we are well aware of our need for confession. While many would say that our call for leadership and action represents the deep desire of the majority of Canadians, we confess that the words of our call are not represented in what you've heard from our government here at COP17. We must and do encourage our government to represent the deep desire of Canadian people and the best of the religious traditions of our land. This is one of the reasons we have presented these words to our government, and will continue to do so. Willard Metzger and I will meet with Canada's Minister of the Environment here tomorrow, with this statement in hand.

We turn to the South where we seek Wisdom from Scripture and from the teachings of Elders

In our statement we say that **All religious traditions uphold the nobility of the human spirit, calling on us to seek moderation and service to the common good... and that the foundations for a sustainable economy include the values of restraint, cooperation and reciprocity. We believe we must work together in transforming cultures of self-interest and unprecedented consumption into cultures of justice for all. We also say that we need to seek coherence between our beliefs and our actions so that our lives and consumption habits reflect our relationship with the rest of humanity and Earth itself.**

This represents the imagination and wisdom of faith.

As a Christian, I think of how Jesus answered the question of the Greatest Commandment...

(speak to this)

All of our faith traditions bring the language of heart and soul, in scripture and in poetry. Wendell Berry's poem, 'The Clearing Rests in Song and Shade' is a good example: We join our work to heaven's gift... (recite lines)

This 'economy of widest worth' is God's Great Economy in which the small, human economy is a wholly owned subsidiary of the Earth and must function well within the natural systems of God's creation.

We turn to the West where we ask for healing from the hurts we have caused and the hurts that have been done to us

In this way we participate in God's healing work.

We find resources for healing in the logic of hope, the gates of hope... the place of resistance and defiance... (recite Rev. Victoria Safford's words on 'the Gates of Hope')

In our interfaith statement we say that **For high income nations such as Canada, justice demands that our governments shoulder a greater share of the economic burden of adaptation and mitigation – first and foremost, because of access to greater means, but also because of an historic role in contributing to its causes.** (And, I might add, profiting from it.) **We have a moral imperative to act.**

Finally, we turn to the North where we give thanks for the many blessings the Creator has provided for us in our lives.

In our statement we refer to the fact that **there is one human family and one Earth that is our common homeland**. We give thanks that we have been given opportunity to see our one human family manifest here in Durban.

In our statement we asked our political leaders to:

- **In the spirit of solidarity, take collective action by signing and implementing a binding international agreement that commits nations to reduce carbon emissions and set fair and clear targets to ensure that global average temperatures stay below two degrees celsius increase from pre-industrial levels;**
- **Demonstrate national responsibility by committing to national carbon emission targets and a national renewable energy policy designed to achieve sustainability, and**
- **Implement climate justice by playing a constructive role in the design of the Green Climate Fund under UN governance, and by contributing public funds to assist the poorest and most affected countries to adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change.**

Finally, I am particularly grateful for the ways in which I see our faith communities committing to walk the talk, to the kind of integrity we're asking of government, e.g. having low carbon national meetings, lowering our own carbon emissions with our travel decisions as leaders, lowering emissions of our own church buildings since 40% of Canada's GHGs come from buildings.

Many Canadians are watching and listening to our witness here, and there is much for which we are and which buoys our dedication.

Closing with words of Reinhold Niebuhr on hope, faith and love, "Nothing worth doing can be completed in a lifetime..."