

## Rationale for the Resolution on Climate Change

**Purpose:** The global threat of climate change and its diverse effects on every living creature and future generations require prophetic and strategic action by people of faith in God the Creator. By following their current business model, the actions of fossil fuel companies will lead to irreversible destruction of life as we know it on earth. On the basis of its social Statements *Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice* (1993) and *Economic Life: Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All* (1999), this resolution calls on the Minneapolis Area Synod to express its concern about these effects, and recognizing the need for humanity to shift to a sustainable energy plan, to call on Portico Benefit Services to provide means by which its participants can screen out investments in fossil fuels and invest in alternative energy strategies; and to call on its congregations to engage in education and actions that address these issues.

**Biblical Basis:** Jesus calls us to care for the "least of these" (Matthew 25:31-46). If left unchecked, climate change will lead to greater than ever hunger, drought, and displacement of people, denying them the basic human rights of food, water, and shelter. The disruption of the world's ecological systems can be expected to worsen economic and political tensions, leading to violent conflict between nations over natural resources. To profit individually or corporately from investments that contribute to such suffering contradicts the love of neighbor to which God's grace calls us.

**Background Information on Disinvestment** The leaders of 167 countries, including the United States, have agreed that any warming of the planet above a 2°C (3.6°F) rise would be unsafe,<sup>1</sup> and we have already (as of 2012) raised the temperature 0.8°C,<sup>2</sup> causing far more damage, in the forms of extreme weather events, drought, flood, and sea level rise, than most scientists had expected. Computer models show that even if we stopped increasing CO<sub>2</sub> levels now, the temperature would continue to rise another 0.8°C, bringing the planet over three-quarters of the way to the 2°C limit. Scientists estimate that humans can pour roughly 565 more gigatons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere and still have some reasonable hope of staying below 2°C.<sup>3</sup>

The proven coal, oil, and gas reserves of the fossil-fuel companies—and the countries (e.g. Venezuela or Kuwait) which act like fossil-fuel companies—equals about 2,795 gigatons of CO<sub>2</sub>, or five times the amount we can release and still maintain a 2°C limit to planetary warming. The sole objective of fossil fuel companies is to make money for their shareholders by providing energy to the nations of the world using the resources the companies currently own or have rights to tap—and if they simply continue to carry out their business plan to fulfill this objective, they will raise the temperature of the earth far beyond what scientists have estimated can safely sustain plant, animal, and human life as they have been for thousands of years.

As a result of fossil fuel use, the concentration of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere has now been measured at over 400 parts per million (ppm), 50ppm over what many scientists say is the safe upper limit, and a 43% increase in the last 250 years. Almost half (44%) of this 43% increase has occurred in the past 25 years alone, and the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> added to the atmosphere in the past decade is over three times the average addition per decade in the period 1950-80. These numbers are the most concrete evidence we have that climate change is happening at an accelerating rate.

**Background Information on Lutherans Restoring Creation (LRC).** LRC is a grassroots movement of Lutherans driven by laity, pastors, lay professionals, synodical leadership, and others who hold positions in the ELCA and its institutions. LRC seeks to empower and equip ELCA congregations, synods, seminaries, colleges and universities, outdoor ministry sites, public policy offices, social ministry organizations, and the ELCA churchwide leadership to embrace caring for creation in more substantive and meaningful ways. The goal is to incorporate care for creation into the organizational patterns, worship life, educational programs, responsibility for buildings and grounds, lifestyle of members at home and work, and public ministry of all of these institutions, so that earthkeeping and justice for all earth community becomes integral to the identity and purpose of our church.

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1 *Report of the Conference of the Parties on its fifteenth session, held in Copenhagen from 7 to 19 December 2009. Addendum* by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Accessed December 23, 2013 at <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2009/cop15/eng/11a01.pdf>.

2 *Climate Change 2013: The Physical Science Basis, Summary for Policymakers*, by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Accessed December 23, 2013 at <http://ipcc.ch/index.htm>.

3 *Unburnable Carbon 2013: Wasted capital and stranded assets*, by the Carbon Tracker Initiative. Accessed December 23, 2013 at <http://carbontracker.live.kiln.it/Unburnable-Carbon-2-Web-Version.pdf>.

