ADULT EDUCATION CURRICULUM

African Americans and Climate Change
AFRICAN AMERICANS AND CLIMATE CHANGE: ADULT EDUCATION CURRICULUM

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AN UNEQUAL BURDEN

African American churches have historically accepted the responsibility to address problems that have a negative impact on our communities. Climate change is now a very familiar word but many of us are just beginning to understand its impact.

The church can play a major role in providing information and education to increase awareness and to get people of faith involved in helping to address problems related to climate change. The Bible provides a source of instruction and inspiration as we strive to honor God by honoring by respecting and protecting the Earth that is entrusted to us.

This two-session adult education curriculum provides information and activities to help African American congregations understand more fully the impacts global climate change will have on African American communities.

SESSION ONE

OVERVIEW

In 2004, the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation released a report that details the ways in which global climate change poses a particular threat to African Americans. The report reveals some surprising facts about how African Americans are disproportionately affected by this global problem. More recent studies released in 2008 by the Environmental Justice and Climate Change Initiative and the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies confirm and elaborate on the conclusion that African Americans are disproportionately impacted by climate change.

Because many people have not thought about climate change as a problem for African American communities in particular, this session introduces participants to some of the ways that African Americans are affected by climate change, largely using information from these national reports.

BEFORE THE SESSION

Write on a sheet of flip chart paper, chalkboard, whiteboard, or other surface that everyone will be able to see the following statement: “African Americans in particular should be concerned about the issue of climate change.” Below this statement, write “Strongly Agree” on the left, draw a straight line across, and write “Strongly Disagree” on the right, as below:

African Americans in particular should be concerned about the issue of climate change.

Strongly Agree ———— Strongly Disagree

HOSTING THE SESSION

As participants enter, invite each person to indicate how much they agree or disagree with the statement about climate change and the African American community by placing an “X” on the line or indicating verbally where they would place an “X” on the line. Ask the group if
climate change is an issue for African American communities. Host a short discussion about where each person's opinion is now.

To facilitate discussion, you may want to ask the following true or false questions: True or False

• Climate change Climate change is the change in our environment caused by the release of carbon dioxide and scientists are now 90 percent sure that humans are causing these changes. (True)

• African Americans in particular should be concerned about the issue of climate change. (True)

• Climate change has a direct impact on ministry in our churches. (True)

• Climate change does not impact the cost of housing. (False)

• Asthma will increase because of global climate change and will disproportionately impact African Americans. (True)

• Unemployment and economic hardship associated with climate change will fall most heavily on the African American community. (True)

• Gasoline prices are not affected by climate change. (False)

• There is a direct correlation between social justice, economic justice, and climate justice. (True)

If needed, review climate change science with the group (see sidebar).

HEADLINE??
Climate change refers to the way that the Earth's climate is changing over time as a result of human activities. Scientists are now 90 to 95 percent certain that the changes they're seeing in the climate are the result of human activities. In general, these activities are causing the Earth's average temperature to rise, which is why the problem is often called “global warming.” But because higher temperatures will lead to a wide variety of changes in the climate, not just warmer temperatures, experts prefer to call the problem “climate change.”

Before the Industrial Revolution, the Earth’s climate had been relatively stable. As heat from the sun entered our atmosphere, it also bounced back off the planet and back into space. This way, heat never built up too much, and the temperature stayed relatively consistent. But with the Industrial Revolution and population growth, we started burning much more fossil fuels (coal, gasoline, etc.) to power factories, light homes, provide transportation, and more. Burning these fuels releases certain gases into the air, the most well known of which is carbon dioxide. Unfortunately, gases like carbon dioxide prevent heat from leaving the atmosphere, so slowly over time as the gases have built up, so has the heat. The gases act something like the glass in a greenhouse, letting the sun’s heat in but not letting it out. That’s why this problem is sometimes called the “greenhouse effect.”

Tell the group that some of the changes that are expected
or are already occurring as a result of climate change include: rising average global temperature, melting of glaciers and sea ice, rising sea level, changes in weather patterns, increasing number of heat waves, increasing severity of hurricanes, changes in ocean currents, and more. Because of warming global temperatures, experts expect that heat waves will become more frequent and intense, air pollution will increase, and certain infectious diseases will spread.

Explain that you have a short activity to help find out how the changes associated with climate change are affecting or could affect African Americans. Divide the participants into three equal sized groups.

Pass out one fact sheets to each group so that each group has a different fact sheet.

The Cold Facts on the Impacts of Global Warming
• Heat Waves Increase
• Air Pollution Increases
• Infectious Diseases Spread

Ask them to discuss their fact sheet for 5-10 minutes and then report out to the larger group the highlights of their discussion. Ask the larger group for their reactions. You might discuss that many people think of climate change as a problem that will raise temperatures a few degrees, or raise sea level a few inches. Most people don’t think of climate change as a public health threat, and not as one that particularly affects African Americans.

Note that the impacts discussed are only a few of the changes that could affect African American communities. For example, the frequency and intensity of tropical storms will probably increase, Hurricane Katrina in particular, while it can’t be directly linked to global climate change, certainly demonstrated that African Americans in particular can suffer from stronger storms. Many leaders are also concerned about how the changing economy will affect these more vulnerable communities.

THE COLD FACTS ON THE IMPACTS OF GLOBAL WARMING: HEAT WAVES INCREASE
• Scientists predict that heat waves in North America will become more intense, more frequent, and longer lasting in the second half of this century.
• The 2003 heat wave in Europe caused over 20,000 deaths.
• Over 500 people died as a result of the 1995 Chicago heat wave. Non-Hispanic blacks were 50 percent more likely to die in the heat wave than non-Hispanic whites.
• Heat waves have stronger effects on urban populations, and especially the urban poor. African Americans are nearly twice as likely as whites to live in poverty.
• One reason urban areas are more prone to heat-related deaths is the “heat island” effect. Urban areas are typically covered in surfaces such as asphalt and concrete, which retain heat. As a result, temperatures in these areas are higher, especially during heat waves. African Americans are more than twice as likely as whites to live in the inner city.

Highlight for the group that although African Americans are disproportionately affected by climate change, they also have more to gain from policies to slow global warming. According to one study, reducing emissions of greenhouse gases to 15 percent below 1990 levels would save an estimated 10,000 African American lives per year by 2020. Other studies indicate that African Americans could enjoy a variety of economic benefits from good climate change policies. So while climate change might be particularly hard on African Americans, good policies that help slow climate change will help African American communities more than they will other communities.
SCRIPTURE READING
The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it; for he has founded it on the seas, and established it on the rivers.
Psalm 24: 1-2

The Lord loves righteousness and justice; the Earth is full of his unfailing love.
Psalm 33: 4-6

A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he leads justice to victory.
Matthew 12: 19-21

Purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.
2 Corinthians 7:12

Divide the participants back into their small groups and ask them to discuss one or more of the scripture passages and how that relates to what they have just learned about climate impacts. Bring the group back together as a large group and have a representative from each small group highlight some of their discussion.

WRAP UP
End the session by asking participants if any of their opinions about the issue of climate change and African Americans have changed. Would they move the “X” they placed on the line originally?

Conclude the session with a closing prayer offered by the workshop leader or a participant.

THE COLD FACTS ON THE IMPACTS OF GLOBAL WARMING: INFECTIOUS DISEASES SPREAD

- Climate change is expected to increase the range of many diseases, as warmer conditions will allow disease-spreading insects such as ticks and mosquitoes to live in places they previously couldn’t live.
- Scientists estimate that the potential for a malaria epidemic could increase by up to 27 percent as a result of climate change. Warmer and wetter conditions in the US are likely to increase malaria rates in this country.
- African Americans are one and a half times less likely than White Americans to have medical insurance and are less likely to have regular access to medical care. As a result, increases in diseases put African Americans more at risk than other communities.

Further Reading and Resources
African Americans and Climate Change: An Unequal Burden

Joint Center National Survey Results: African Americans Respond to Global Warming

A Climate of Change: African Americans, Global Warming, and a Just Climate Policy in the U.S.
prepared for the Environmental Justice and Climate Change Initiative Available online at: http://www.ejcc.org/issues/us_policy/
GLOSSARY

**Climate Change or Global Warming? (US EPA)**

**Climate Change** (also referred to as ‘global climate change’): The term ‘climate change’ is sometimes used to refer to all forms of climatic inconsistency, but because the Earth’s climate is never static, the term is more properly used to imply a significant change from one climatic condition to another. In some cases, ‘climate change’ has been used synonymously with the term, ‘global warming’; scientists however, tend to use the term in the wider sense to also include natural changes in climate. (See: global warming.)

**Global Warming:** An increase in the near surface temperature of the Earth. Global warming has occurred in the distant past as the result of natural influences, but the term is most often used to refer to the warming predicted to occur as a result of increased emissions of greenhouse gases. Scientists generally agree that the Earth’s surface has warmed by about 1 degree Fahrenheit in the past 140 years. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) recently concluded that increased concentrations of greenhouse gases are causing an increase in the Earth’s surface temperature and that increased concentrations of sulfate aerosols have led to relative cooling in some regions, generally over and downwind of heavily industrialized areas. (See: climate change)

Climate change has become the preferred term because it helps to convey the point that there may be other changes in our weather besides rising temperatures.

**Carbon Footprint**

A carbon footprint is a measure of the impact our activities have on the environment, and in particular climate change. It relates to the amount of greenhouse gases produced in our day-to-day lives through burning fossil fuels for electricity, heating, and transportation, etc.

THE COLD FACTS ON THE IMPACTS OF GLOBAL WARMING: AIR POLLUTION INCREASES

- Over 70 percent of African Americans live in counties in violation of federal air pollution standards.
- Higher temperatures of global warming are expected to degrade air quality through increased ozone formation.
- In every major city in the US, blacks are more likely than whites to be exposed to higher air toxics concentrations.
- Climate change is expected to increase the incidence of asthma in the general population.
- African Americans are nearly three times as likely to be hospitalized or killed by asthma as whites.
OVERVIEW

Over and over, the climate change issue has a familiar refrain: those who are least responsible for climate change bear the greatest burden of its impacts. This is true within the United States, and it’s true globally.

How will climate change affect people around the world? Because experts agree that climate change will affect people in poverty, both in the developing world and in industrialized countries, more than any other group, Martin Luther King, III, has said “…global warming is a form of violence upon the most vulnerable among us…” He made this bold statement in a Congressional hearing, where he was called to talk to leaders about the need for action.

According to Rajendra Pachauri, chairman of the United Nation’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), “It’s the poorest of the poor in the world, and this includes poor people even in prosperous societies, who are going to be the worst hit.” In the United States, communities of color, the elderly, low-income communities, and children will suffer the most from the impacts of climate change.

What implications does this have for Christians? This activity simulates a hearing, in which a panel of religious leaders (the participants) hears the testimony of a variety of groups that are being particularly affected by climate change. Then the panel will have time to discuss what this means to them as Christians, and will learn about what one religious group has done in response to this global problem.

TESTIMONY

INNER CITY RESIDENTS
- Scientists predict that heat waves in North America will become more intense, more frequent, and longer lasting in the second half of this century.
- Urban areas are typically covered in surfaces such as asphalt and concrete, which retain heat. As a result, temperatures in these areas are higher, especially during heat waves.
- African Americans are more than twice as likely as whites to live in the inner city.
- Over 500 people died as a result of the 1995 Chicago heat wave. Non-Hispanic blacks were 50 percent more likely to die in the heat wave than non-Hispanic whites.
- Higher temperatures of global warming are expected to degrade air quality through increased ozone formation.
- In every major city in the US, blacks are more likely than whites to be exposed to higher air toxics concentrations.
- Climate change is expected to increase the incidence of asthma in the general population. African Americans are nearly three times as likely to be hospitalized or killed by asthma as whites.
BEFORE THE SESSION
Make one copy of each of the profiles of vulnerable communities or regions provided at the end of this activity.

HOSTING THE SESSION
• Divide the participants into four groups,
  • Victims of Katrina
  • Inner City Residents
  • Union of African Nations
  • Pacific Islanders

Explain that each group will receive information about a different group of people who are especially affected by climate change. Each group will review a sheet of facts that explain some of the ways that they are or will be affected.

After reading the facts, the small group should develop a two-minute statement that they’d like to share with Church leaders to help the leaders understand how critical this issue is for that particular population.

Give each small group 15 minutes to review the facts, discuss, and write their statement. Ask each small group to select a spokesperson that can deliver their statement. Once the groups are ready, have each small group present their statement to the larger group.

After each small group has presented its testimony to the rest of the participants, allow the participants to discuss what they’ve heard. Do they notice any common threads? Were they surprised at all to learn that it’s not just people in developing areas of the world that are threatened with the problems of climate change?

SCRIPTURE READING
“In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.”
Matthew 7:12

“Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and

PACIFIC ISLANDERS
• As sea levels rise, many low-lying islands are facing new problems of flooding with unusually high tides. According to Amjad Abdulla, a representative of the Republic of the Maldives, “In recent months we in the Maldives experienced tidal surges on an unprecedented scale. Never in our documented history has so many islands been flooded over simultaneously and to such an extent.”
• Rising ocean temperatures threaten the health of coral reefs. These reefs are the mainstay of tourism and fisheries industries, which are at the heart of many small island nations’ economies.
• Some nations are making plans to move vulnerable coastal communities to safer locations, and the government of New Zealand is making plans to handle climate refugees from people leaving Pacific islands.
• Although many islands’ highest point is only a few feet above sea level, mountainous islands such as Fiji do not necessarily offer residents more places to move. Fiji’s center is mountainous, with steep, rocky slopes—difficult terrain for people to inhabit. People who live on much larger land masses, like North America, have much more room to move around.
• “It is very, very serious because if we don’t do something now, we are gone. That’s for sure. There’s no two ways about it and we are scared.” –Young Vivian, Premiere of the small island nation of Niue, at a meeting of island nations to discuss the threat of climate change
• As sea levels rise, fresh water supplies are being contaminated with salt water. Many nations are considering new ways of getting fresh water, like converting seawater into drinking water, but for many the costs are too high.
• Climate change may affect the El Nino weather events, which in turn affect rainfall patterns on the islands. During a recent event, Pacific island nations suffered acute water shortages.
• The intensity of tropical storms is predicted to increase. Stronger storms pose a particularly big risk to small island nations.
you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me. Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did to one of the least of these who are member of my family, you did it to me.’” Matthew 25: 34-40

Divide the participants back into their small groups and ask them to discuss the scripture passages. Does being a Christian make us any more or less obligated to care about the issue of climate change? What are some specific ways our churches can become involved in addressing the issue of climate change? Bring the small groups back together in a larger group and have each small group share a highlight of their discussion on the scripture passages.

WRAP UP
Conclude the session with a closing prayer offered by the workshop leader or a participant.

Further Reading and Resources
Climate and Church: How Core Church Ministries will be impacted by Climate Change produced by the National Council of Churches Eco-Justice Program office and available online at: www.nccecojustice.org

UNION OF AFRICAN NATIONS
• Although Africa is the continent least responsible for global climate change, it is the continent that is most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.
• Climate change threatens Africa’s water supplies. Scientists think there will be less moisture in the soil in many regions, and less water running off into reservoirs where water is stored for human use. Lakes and dams in Africa are now at critically low levels, and experts think climate change will make these kinds of shortages more frequent.
• Climate change is likely to make disease epidemics worse. Increasing temperatures will extend the range of mosquitoes that transmit malaria, for example. Droughts and floods will also increase disease where sanitary conditions are poor.
• Climate change will lead to further losses of already declining forests and rangelands. These areas not only offer habitat to wildlife and wild plants, but also supply food to people.
• In most areas of Africa, farmers depend entirely on rain that falls on crops during the rainy season, and not on irrigation. For this reason, Africa is particularly vulnerable to climate change.
• Coastal nations of west and central Africa have low-lying coasts that are especially threatened by sea level rise. Many of these countries have major cities on the coast, but few have the economic resources to erect sea walls, relocate residents, or use other measures to adapt to rising sea levels.
• Climate change will affect political stability in Africa. Experts have linked the current genocides in Somalia and Sudan to global warming because shifting rainfall patterns have made water more scarce. A former US Army Chief of Staff has called global warming a “threat multiplier” because of its ability to intensify already existing problems. Water shortages and declining viable farmland are likely to trigger more armed conflicts.
African Americans and Climate Change

**VICTIMS OF HURRICANE KATRINA**

Scientists don’t think any one storm is caused by global climate change, but they do believe that storms are becoming, and will continue to become, larger and more intense as climate change makes the world’s oceans warmer. Storms like Katrina could become more common.

In the North Atlantic Ocean, the number and intensity of tropical storms and hurricanes appears to be increasing. From 1850-1990, there were about 10 tropical storms, including five hurricanes, per year. Since 1995, the average has increased to about 14 storms, including 8 hurricanes.

Hurricane Katrina struck the US Gulf Coast on August 29, 2005. The storm left more than one million people homeless and killed hundreds of people in three states. The city of New Orleans suffered the greatest impact from the storm.

Key facts about residents of the city of New Orleans at the time of the storm:
- Nearly one quarter were elderly or disabled
- More than 28 percent of New Orleans residents lived in poverty (double the national average poverty rate)
- Eighty-four percent of those living in poverty were African American
- Thirty five percent of African American households did not have a car (compared to 15 percent of white households).

Before Katrina, African Americans in Louisiana were 50 percent more likely than whites to be living without health insurance.

In general, higher-income residents lived in safer areas less prone to flooding. The poorest residents of New Orleans lived in the most hazardous parts of the city. The Lower Ninth Ward, where many low-income residents lived, quickly flooded when the canals and levees failed. Louisiana State University Geographer Craig E. Colten said, “Out West, there is a saying that water flows to money. But in New Orleans, water flows away from money.”

Many think of hurricanes and other natural disasters as tragedies that can strike everyone in society equally. But according to New York Times columnist David Brooks, storms such as Hurricane Katrina “wash away the surface of society, the settled way things have been done. They expose the underlying power structures, the injustices, the patterns of corruption and the unacknowledged inequalities.”