

Leaders of Today

Empowering youth for climate change activism by Monica Moore



THE GOAL OF THIS one-hour workshop is to encourage youth to take action in reducing climate change in their homes, schools, churches, and world. Youth will be encouraged to be the leaders of today, not the leaders of tomorrow.

PREPARATION

Set up four tables in the room, each covered with a large sheet of paper (a paper tablecloth would be great). At each table have a box of recycling (cans, paper tubes, plastic tubs, paper, egg cartons, etc.), some markers, glue, string, and other assorted craft supplies. Label the four tables with one of the following: Home, School, Church, World.

Have a laptop and projector to show the video, and a bell, buzzer, or music to mark the time.

OPENING (10 minutes)

Introduce the topic with a video from The David Suzuki Foundation's Blue Dot campaign. It can be found at bluedot.ca, and the video is the first thing you see on the website. This is a seven-minute video that is very inspiring and empowering and covers the broad strokes of climate change issues.

As workshop leader, you may want to look further on the website to get ideas to share with your group. There are also other helpful websites listed at the end of this article that may be a source of ideas and information. All of these resources help to move us from individual choices and actions through wider activism in community and on to a worldwide approach to addressing the issue of climate change. This is the heart of the approach of this workshop. It may be helpful to have a list of these resources that participants can take away from the workshop to follow up on their own.

Read Genesis 1:27–2:4 to put the video in the context of our faith. As part of God's good creation, we are asked to care for and protect this Earth and all who dwell in it. It can be an act of faith to work for climate change.

Explain that there are going to be four stations that groups are going to rotate through: home, school, church, and world. Divide the participants into four groups of three or four people or a single group of up to five people, depending on how small

your group is. This will allow groups that are big enough to have to work collaboratively, yet small enough that everyone can play a role. Explain that the group(s) will be rotating through the four stations. This exercise mimics what we actually have to do in the real world around climate change issues: we work with what we have been left by previous people; we work with others and listen to their different views and approaches; we work under the pressure of time.

It is important that there be very few rules in order to encourage people to think creatively. Participants should also be encouraged to literally “bring to the table” any organizations or school clubs or social media resources that they participate in or are aware of. You may want to allow people to use their phones to search websites or resources that they want to add to their discussions, but be careful that this does not impede the creative process. (You will know your group best.) When they move on to the next station, the groups may choose to build on what the group before them did, to start completely new, or a combination of the two approaches.

ACTIVITY (40 minutes, maximum)

Each group will go to one of the tables (the order they do the stations in does not matter) and are told that they have exactly seven minutes to create a plan to deal with climate change reduction in their given situation (home, school, etc.), and to somehow represent that plan with the materials at their station. The only suggestion you might give is to first take about one or two minutes to brainstorm ideas, but then get right down to building their plan.

As workshop leader, your job is to keep the time. At the end of seven minutes, ring a bell or use a buzzer or music to indicate that it is time to move on to the next station.

It should take about 30 to 35 minutes to go through all the stations. When the last station is done, take five minutes to have each group explain what the station in front of them has to offer in way of climate change leadership and ideas.

DEBRIEFING

This is the real meat of the workshop, as this is where people can think about the challenges and opportunities of being a

climate change activist and where they might like to put their energies in the future. It is best to sit in a circle for this part.

Some key questions to get the conversation going:

- What did it feel like to know the bell was going to ring so soon? Are there connections you can make to dealing with climate change issues in the real world?
- What was it like to inherit the work that was left from past groups? Did your group build on the previous work or start from scratch? Again, are there connections to the real world?
- What were the challenges of working in groups? Did you always agree? What were the positive aspects of working as a group?
- Has this exercise inspired you to do something about climate change in any of the four areas we looked at? Are there issues that cross over into other areas (e.g., what we do at home as opposed to what we do in our church/world/school)?
- Any other thoughts or learnings?
- Is there something that people would like to commit to doing as a group (e.g., setting up a recycling or composting program at the church, advocating for an “idle-free zone” in their school’s drop-off/pick-up area, talking with their family about an eco-friendly vacation choice, attending a political rally to let their voices be heard in the political arena, or signing on to the Blue Dot campaign)?

CLOSING

Close with a prayer (printed on sheets or projected on a screen).

One: In the beginning, God said, “Let there be light,” and there was a first day.

All: And it was so good!

One: On the second day, God created the sky over the waters.

All: And it was so good!

One: On the third day, God separated the earth from the seas and covered that earth with an amazing array of trees, crops, and flowers.

All: And it was so good!

One: On the fourth day, God put the stars, the sun, and the moon in the sky to track the seasons and time.

All: And it was so good!

One: On the fifth day, God created the fish of the sea and the birds that filled the skies. God said, “Be fruitful and multiply.”

All: And it was so good !

One: On the sixth day, God created all the animals that walk, crawl, slither, and hop over the earth.

All: And it was so good!

One: And on the sixth day, God created humans. They were made in God’s image, with a spark of the Divine echoing through their souls. God said, “It will be your job to care for everything that I have made and use your God-given wisdom to interact with all of creation.”

All: And it was so good!

One: And finally, God looked on all of the created order and said, “Wow! That is so good!” And then God rested. God, in turn, invites all of creation to rest on a regular basis, so the whole Earth will remember what a blessing this earth, this planet, our home, is.

All: Thanks be to God! May we be a blessing to this creation.

Amen.

The Rev. Monica Moore lives in Bracebridge, Ontario, and is now studying to become a midwife at Ryerson University in Toronto.

ONLINE RESOURCES

Canadian Youth Climate Coalition at ourclimate.ca. This resource is based on specific areas of action that people are encouraged to promote in their own communities and on a Canada-wide scale. It is a thoughtful response to the United Nations Climate Change talks that happened in Paris in December 2015.

A UNICEF publication that encourages local action as well as worldwide connections around youth and climate change is well thought out. It begins with stories from around the world of youth making positive changes in their own situations. It then goes on to lay out ways in which youth can join together to fight climate change on a global scale. The link is unicef.org/education/files/Publication_Youth_in_Action_on_Climate_Change_Inspirations_from_Around_the_World_English.pdf

A YouTube video from The Daily Conversation called “Climate Change Explained.” This is a six-minute video that covers the broad strokes of climate change issues. The content is American, but applies to the whole world.

Are there local initiatives or more resources from a local high school or college? It would be great to connect with things that are already going on around your church and community. For example, our Kids Church in Orillia, Ontario, became a member of Kids for Turtles, a local group that was involved in habitat conservation and protection of at-risk reptiles and amphibians. Reptiles are the “canaries in the coal mine” of climate change because of the permeability of their skins, and so protecting them is closely related to climate change action.