



Pitt Street Community



Conversation on Climate Change

Report from 25 October 2015

Welcome and introduction

Warren Talbot welcomed people to the Conversation, particularly welcoming Thea Ormerod, President, Australian Religious Response to Climate Change (ARRCC). Warren outlined the program for the one hour conversation. Those in attendance are listed at the end of this report.

Australian Religious Response to Climate Change (ARRCC)

Thea outlined the work of ARRCC with the following points:

- A number of churches and religious bodies have made statements on climate change.
- Uniting Church statements go back to union in 1977, and later statements in 1991 and 2006.
- Statement from international Islamic leaders.
- Pope Francis's encyclical, *Laudato Si'* has helped change the discussion: embracing personal and spiritual dimensions, challenging business practices, sense of urgency, a crisis, churches working alongside environmental movements.
- A statement from over 400 Rabbis, highlighting the need for Sabbath rest after 200 years of industrial development.
- The ARRCC is not party political.
- ARRCC supports a moratorium on new coal mines and coal seam gas.
- Challenges in India and China.
- ARRCC does not see nuclear energy as a solution, partly because of the lead time to build a power plant, and continuing safety concerns.
- NLCS data provides a picture of church attitudes. Though 80% see the environment as an issue of concern for Christians, these are not well-supported by actions such as use of solar energy, recycling, environmental themes.
- The Uniting Church and some Anglican dioceses have led in the campaign for divestment from fossil fuels.
- The importance of people of faith engaging in ecology issues *as* people of faith.

Small group discussion

Participants met in five small groups and discussed the following questions. The responses are in no particular order and have not been edited.

1. *Are you concerned about climate change? If so what is your main concern?*

- Reconceptualising climate change as per Naomi Klein as a movement of movements, seeing it as an integral part of the structure of society and reading other issues in this context (refugees, feminism etc).
- Importance of pollution and degradation of air, soil and water.
- Our concern for poor people - rich people always have options.
- Tokenism we affluent Westerners engage in (why did we have to turn the air conditioner on for those remaining 20 minutes???) + the 'loss of biodiversity' focus being lost in the wider climate change debate.
- Concerns are water, weather patterns, ice melting, rising sea levels, inaction, politicians in denial.
- Increasing catastrophic events.
- Loss of species.
- Lack of moral ethics in the political scene.

2. *Climate change action might mean us making changes as individuals and as communities. How might that be hard? What could be the upsides?*

- The seductive nature of our culture of acquisition.
- Persistence is hard - constantly overcoming inherent laziness.
- In developing countries material comfort is a mark of success - the self image of people is different: (some) Westerners feel guilty when engaging in environmentally unfriendly activities - Chinese people are proud of it.
- Difficulty to make short to medium term changes.
- Economic costs of change, such as job losses.
- Give up things such as travel.
- Need for government incentives for solar panels.

3. *Is there value in people of faith advocating for environmental causes as people of faith? If so, what is important about it?*

- We considered it more appropriate to bring the energy from environmental organisations into religious organisations (as per Q1 point1) rather than vice versa.
- Important for issues to not be seen and/or dismissed as extreme.
- We have to admit that our response to scripture has been wrong.
- We are stewards of the earth (Genesis).
- Rf John Cleary ABS Local Program, 25/10 on church responses to climate change, including the Revd Elenie Poulos.

Actions of the Uniting Earthweb group at Pitt Street

Warren briefly mentioned:

- Sustainability audit of Pitt Street's building and the stewardship of our resources.
- Increased information and education for the congregation, including an information table, ecology corner, use of eNews, etc.
- Connections with wider environmental groups and activities, most notably for now the People's Climate March on 29 November.

Resources

There are, of course, thousands. A small number of key ones for Pitt Street use might include:

www.laudatosi.com [English translation of full text]

www.unitingjustice.org.au [a range of UCA policies and resources]

www.bze.org.au/media/radio [a weekly radio program and podcast, co-produced and presented by Vivien Langford, includes an interview with Thea]

www.arrcc.org.au [full range of ARRCC resources, many practical ideas, and a Climate Action kit tailored for various religions]

www.unitingearthweb.org.au [various resources, including but not limited to Uniting Church activities]

www.peoplesclimate.org.au [read more about the March and related activities]

www.350.org.au [campaign for divestment from fossil fuels]

Thanks; and Prayer from *Laudato Si'*

After thanking Thea for her attendance, the conversation concluded with people sharing a responsive version of a prayer from *Laudato Si'* for people of all faiths.

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All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe
and in the smallest of your creatures.

You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.

**Pour out upon us the power of your love,
that we may protect life and beauty.**

Fill us with peace, that we may live
as brothers and sisters, harming no one.

**O God of the poor,
help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth,
so precious in your eyes.**

Bring healing to our lives,

that we may protect the world and not prey on it,
that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction.

**Touch the hearts
of those who look only for gain
at the expense of the poor and the earth.**

Teach us to discover the worth of each thing,
to be filled with awe and contemplation,
to recognize that we are profoundly united
with every creature

as we journey towards your infinite light.

We thank you for being with us each day.

**Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle
for justice, love and peace." Amen.**

[Responsive version of prayer by W Talbot, text unchanged.]

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Attendance

Cathy Ashcroft, Isobel Bishop, Ron Brown, Syd Cole, Lyn Eggins, John Floyd, Sue E, Sue Gehrig, Gillian Hunt, Meredith Knight, Stephen Langford, Vivien Langford, Margaret (Balmain), Margaret Mayman, Andrew Muller, Liz Nash, Susan Nicholson, Ben Skerman, Sophie, Warren Talbot, Warwick Tate, Horst Thiele, John Thorpe, Trish Thorpe, Vera Tibbertsma, and Liz Watson. Apologies were received from Bruce Irvine, Liz Irvine and Elizabeth Maddox.