

# Communicating climate change science and solutions among communities of faith

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## Abstract

In recent years, many researchers and advocates have noted the potential of religious groups and institutions to leverage their significant influence in favor of addressing environmental challenges. However, in the United States, many scientists struggle to communicate the implications of their work on climate change with faith communities who may be skeptical of both climate science and scientists. Recent polls from the Pew Research Center show that white evangelical Protestants are the least likely to believe climate change is caused by human activity and the most likely to assert that there is no solid scientific support for a changing climate. However, the full picture is more nuanced than can be captured in a news headline or polling survey, and evangelical Christianity is a diverse movement that is also found at the forefront of environmental and climate science and action. Drawing on more than six years of experience working on climate science communication and climate action solutions among fellow evangelicals in the United States, this presentation highlights best practices for communicating climate science to faith communities. Showcasing examples of work advanced through the Evangelical Environmental Network, Young Evangelicals for Climate Action, and PBS Global Weirding series with Dr. Katharine Hayhoe, I present a hopeful view of efforts to communicate climate change in a way that intentionally and genuinely connects with people's values, and ultimately motivates action. Additionally, this presentation discusses the challenges of and opportunities for engaging communities of faith as scientists with a different or no faith affiliation.

# Communicating climate change science and solutions among communities of faith



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**Senior Advisor, Young Evangelicals for Climate Action**



**PRESENTED AT:**



# WHY THE PERSONAL STORY MATTERS...

Climate "testimonies" are powerful tools. While this term might seem odd or outdated, the concept of "testimony" has a rich tradition within Christianity. **Young Evangelicals for Climate Action (Y.E.C.A.)** uses these climate testimony videos to share stories of transformation. **Good news?** As powerful as it is to hear young evangelicals sharing their own "coming to climate change" moments because of their faith (not in spite of it), those with a different or no religious denomination can use this technique to tell others how and why they came to care. Building relationships with genuine care starts by helping others know "why" you study what you do.

[VIDEO] <https://www.youtube.com/embed/DxfRbUb4i-8?feature=oembed&fs=1&modestbranding=1&rel=0&showinfo=0>

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[VIDEO] [https://www.youtube.com/embed/EwOYGPGHI\\_4?feature=oembed&fs=1&modestbranding=1&rel=0&showinfo=0](https://www.youtube.com/embed/EwOYGPGHI_4?feature=oembed&fs=1&modestbranding=1&rel=0&showinfo=0)

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# CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

In 2014, the American Academy of Religion (AAR) and Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI), surveyed more than 3,000 Americans over 18 years of age, including individuals from all fifty states, through bilingual phone interviews (Spanish and English), to produce one of the largest surveys on religion and climate change ever conducted in the United States. One of the **key findings**? White evangelical Protestants and white Catholics consistently demonstrate lower levels of agreement among all other religious subgroups across all statements of climate change concern and perceived harm. And, as we know, climate skepticism can influence other aspects of societal engagement, including policies and politics. Given these findings, what is being done to change it?

**We have so many reasons to be hopeful.** Since Young Evangelicals for Climate Action (Y.E.C.A.) was founded more than 7 years ago, we have seen tens of thousands of young evangelicals become engaged. They're studying climate change, they're advocating for better policies, and they're finding practical ways to live as climate stewards on their campuses and in their churches. They are engaging faith leaders, helping other connect their faith with the causes and implications of climate change, and are influencing the vote. And, they are doing all of this *because* they are Christians.



More at: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/yecaction/> (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/yecaction/>)

# TAKEAWAYS FOR ANY SCIENTIST

1. **We already have all the values we need to care (and to share with others!).** This one is critical to remember. No matter if we have a faith affiliation or not, our shared humanity, and daily lives as colleagues, neighbors, and citizens allows us to connect to others about the things we care most about. We care about our children's health, our job security, and having enough food to eat. Do not try to change someone's worldview outright - learn about them and learn what it takes to meet them where they are at.
2. **Respect for framing (and the person) matters.** Are there certain parts about climate science and their solutions that are particularly motivating to you? That's great. Just be aware that sometimes you may need to use the framing and key words that connect climate to the issues that matter most to your audience (even if not the most important to you). Also, if you act like the person you are talking to is beneath you or assume they won't get it, they can tell. No one appreciates condescension.
3. **The messenger matters.** Sometimes individuals can't "hear you" so, find the person within the community who already has their trust and respect. If you are creative, you can find unlikely allies and with patience, you can change hearts and minds. Just like with other multi-stakeholder projects, you want to find collaborators who understand the goal and can bring their skills, experiences, and perspectives to the table.
4. **Scientists can also be persons of faith (so, if they are willing, use them as a resource).** This one should be a no-brainer but many times I have heard fellow scientists say that given a fundamental conflict between science and religion, they assume there could not be a single evangelical Christian among their colleagues. Not only do they exist, but if you ask, they might just be willing to tell you why they can be both scientists and persons of faith. Our identities and stories are an asset and help us connect better with some audiences better than others may be able to.

**Looking for partners?** Many of these organizations have members who are scientists themselves.



Young Evangelicals for Climate Action (<http://www.yecaction.org>)



Evangelical Environmental Network (<http://www.creationcare.org>)



Climate Caretakers (<http://climatecaretakers.org>)

FRIENDS COMMITTEE ON



NATIONAL LEGISLATION

Friends Committee on National Legislation (<http://www.fcnl.org>)



Catholic Climate Covenant (<http://catholicclimatecovenant.org>)

You can find even more organizations here (<http://www.nrpe.org>) via the National Religious Partnership for the Environment.

Or check out the AAAS Dialogue on Science, Ethics and Religion to find more information (<http://www.aaas.org/programs/dialogue-science-ethics-and-religion>) and resources.

# APPEALING TO WHAT THE SCIENCE CAN'T

**Dr. Katharine Hayhoe**, Atmospheric Scientist at Texas Tech University, uses this *PBS Global Weirding* series to answer questions and clear up common misconceptions about climate change science and solutions. Two of her episodes (featured below) focus on religion, the Bible, and why connecting to "moral responsibility" can motivate action. **Good news?** You don't have to belong to a religious denomination to share a sense of moral responsibility. In fact, scientists can often best help the public (including persons of faith) understand the impacts of climate change by connecting to shared values., and clearing up their own misconceptions about religious publics.

[VIDEO] <https://www.youtube.com/embed/W53uRqITk2I?feature=oembed&fs=1&modestbranding=1&rel=0&showinfo=0>

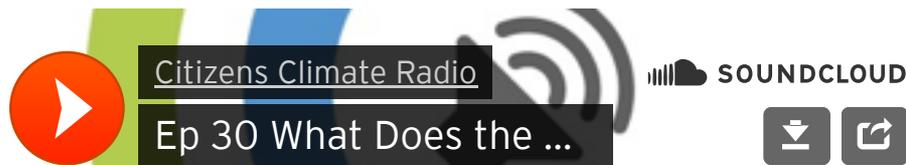
[VIDEO] <https://www.youtube.com/embed/W53uRqITk2I?feature=oembed&fs=1&modestbranding=1&rel=0&showinfo=0>

[VIDEO] [https://www.youtube.com/embed/SpjL\\_otLq6Y?feature=oembed&fs=1&modestbranding=1&rel=0&showinfo=0](https://www.youtube.com/embed/SpjL_otLq6Y?feature=oembed&fs=1&modestbranding=1&rel=0&showinfo=0)

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# WHAT DOES FAITH HAVE TO DO WITH IT?

We know people are complex and that their identities are influenced by many factors - so why focus on someone's faith identity? For many people around the world, connecting social and environmental issues to their faith-informed values is one of the most powerful motivators for action and change. A number of civil society organizations, such as **Citizen's Climate Radio**, have been featuring stories about persons of faith to showcase the power of living out a faith-informed identity.



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In this episode (30), three American Evangelicals consider faith, theology, and global warming. Kyle Meyaard Schaap, National Organizer and spokesperson for Young Evangelicals for Climate Action (YECA) and Corina Newsome, Y.E.C.A. steering committee member on the diversity and civic engagement subcommittees, along with Rev. Josh Gibson, pastor of Emmanuel Bible Fellowship Church in Sunbury, PA, chat with host, Peterson Toscano about the Bible, stewardship, loving our neighbor, heaven, and earth.



[Cookie policy](#)

In this episode (3), Citizens' Climate Radio host, Peterson Toscano, introduces you to two people of faith who are active climate advocates. Rachel Lamb, an American, is the national organizer and spokesperson with Young Evangelicals for Climate Action. David Michael Terungwa, a Catholic from Nigeria, is a leader in the African GREEN Movement and Africa Regional Coordinator for Citizens' Climate Lobby.

# AUTHOR INFORMATION

Rachel is currently a PhD Candidate in Geographical Sciences and Flagship Fellow at the University of Maryland, College Park. Through her research, Rachel is exploring how climate change governance can better reflect the complex, non-linear and dynamic nature of social-ecological systems. In particular, her work focuses on the socio-economic applications of NASA carbon monitoring products to advance climate policy in the land-use sector.

As part of her professional development, Rachel has worked for numerous agencies and organizations, including the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, A Rocha Peru, National Socio-Ecological Synthesis Research Center (SESYNC), Society for Conservation Biology, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. During the summers, she teaches Environmental Law and Policy and Land Resources Policy at the Au Sable Institute of Environmental Studies in Michigan as an Assistant Professor. Prior to beginning this program, Rachel served as Y.E.C.A.'s National Organizer and Spokesperson and was a founding member of the Steering Committee, serving two years as Chair. She currently holds the position of Senior Advisor to the organization.

In 2015, Rachel was named a White House Champion of Change for her efforts in protecting our environment and communities from the effects of climate change. In 2018, Rachel was named a Harvey Fellow by the Mustard Seed Foundation.

Follow her on Twitter [@Rachel\\_L\\_Lamb](https://twitter.com/Rachel_L_Lamb)

# ABSTRACT

In recent years, many researchers and advocates have noted the potential of religious groups and institutions to leverage their significant influence in favor of addressing environmental challenges. However, in the United States, many scientists struggle to communicate the implications of their work on climate change with faith communities who may be skeptical of both climate science and scientists. Recent polls from the Pew Research Center show that white evangelical Protestants are the least likely to believe climate change is caused by human activity and the most likely to assert that there is no solid scientific support for a changing climate. However, the full picture is more nuanced than can be captured in a news headline or polling survey, and evangelical Christianity is a diverse movement that is also found at the forefront of environmental and climate science and action. Drawing on more than six years of experience working on climate science communication and climate action solutions among fellow evangelicals in the United States, this presentation highlights best practices for communicating climate science to faith communities. Showcasing examples of work advanced through the Evangelical Environmental Network, Young Evangelicals for Climate Action, and PBS Global Weirding series with Dr. Katharine Hayhoe, I present a hopeful view of efforts to communicate climate change in a way that intentionally and genuinely connects with people's values, and ultimately motivates action. Additionally, this presentation discusses the challenges of and opportunities for engaging communities of faith as scientists with a different or no faith affiliation.

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