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Tired feet and proud souls cross the Commonwealth

by Marlene Gasdia-Cochrane, Editor

June/July 2007

On March 16, 2007, a small group of people braved the nor'easter snowstorm, facing both the biting wind and the bitter facts of global warming, and began walking. It was the start of a 100-mile trek from Northampton to Boston to bring notice of the hurting climate and to demand from its inhabitants an 80% reduction in global warming pollution by 2050. By the time the last step was taken, over a thousand people rallied together while tens of thousands were made aware of the crisis via newspaper and television news reports.

The goal of the Interfaith Walk for Climate Rescue, held a few weeks before Earth Day (April 22), was to bring attention to how climate change threatens children, the economy, national security, biodiversity, and the poorest and most vulnerable of the earth's people. "Reason, conscience, and love of creation demand we act now," read one of their flyers (see www.climatewalk.org). "It's time to stop feeling overwhelmed by global warming and start demanding government action to reduce global warming pollution."

During an Interfaith Service at the Northampton Unitarian Universalist Church held for the walk's commissioning, Massachusetts Conference UCC Minister and President Rev. Dr. Jim Antal told the small group: "You can bend the arc of global warming. For thousands of years, our climate has only minor fluctuation, and the graph ambles along, flat as a pancake. And then about 50 years ago it begins to curve upwards, and in the last 10 years, it's shooting skyward. But you are all part of a different J-curve – powered not by coal but by love, lit not by oil but by hope, fueled not by wood but by imagination."

The walk started in Northampton and followed east for 100 miles; the group swelled as more supporters joined along the way at stops at Amherst, Belchertown, Ware, Spencer, Worcester, Grafton, Wellesley, Newton, Cambridge and then Boston. Ironically, the weather played a perfect part in depicting the perils of ignoring the earth. The unusually wintery late-March melted into a warm, almost too hot, spring walk in just a few short days.

Participants were both young and old; some even pushed strollers as they walked. They stayed in church buildings overnight; a van carried their sleeping gear and changes of clothing. There was one injury, a stress fracture, and many were sunburned – another irony since most wore hats and mittens at the event's start. By the time they reached their destination nine days later, they were sore and tired, but exultant when they realized that 900 people packed Old South Church in Boston UCC for interfaith worship and 1500 rallied by their side in Copley Square.

When asked why she was walking, Rev. Dr. Andrea Ayvazian of the [Haydenville Congregational Church UCC](#), replied "We walk for the earth, for generations unborn, for the animals, plants, for the Eden we have inherited. Together we have a hope that we are not alone. That we tap a power more powerful than politics and more powerful than science."

Ayvazian, a co-chair of the event, thanked the Conference and her congregation for supporting the event. "I am very proud to be a UCC pastor," she said. "The whole UCC, the Conference, the churches, the pastors, the members, they have all shown support for the event."

The Rev. Ms. Kathryn Stevens of the [First Congregational Church, UCC of Ashfield](#), another UCC pastor, also said she was proud to be a member of the UCC. "The UCC has been a



A flag holder hurries to catch up with his group at the front of the line during the Interfaith Walk for Climate Rescue.

Photo by Marlene Gasdia-Cochrane

religious vanguard. They have been a voice when others are afraid to talk." While she walked, she kept images of polar bears in her head, and how those bears could be lost because of the melting of polar ice due to climate change.

The climate walk was not the only pre-Earth Day event focused on global warming. On April 14, many Americans participated in "Step-it-Up"—a grassroots campaign started by Environmentalist Bill McKibben, author of the 1989 book on global warming. McKibben has roots in the UCC, having grown up at Hancock United Church of Christ in Lexington, where his mother is still a member.

The campaign focused on asking Americans to call on their leaders to act immediately to stop global warming. In all 50 states, at more than 1400 iconic places across the nation, there was a united common call to action: "Step It Up Congress: Cut Carbon 80% by 2050."

In Williamstown, Rev. Carrie Bail, pastor of [First Congregational Church UCC](#), reported that her church held an event where interfaith, political, scientific and business representatives came together to speak to the community about global warming.

"We had two local politicians, an educator, various environmental activists, a ski businessman who is installing a wind turbine, a transit authority representative who talked about new hybrid buses that were on order, two pastors and one rabbi," said Bail. In addition, positioned around the edges of the gathering were many tables offering energy-saving light bulbs, kids' activities, refreshments with local food, registration for a month-long class on Global Warming, and letters to congressmen ready for signature.

"We also wanted to leave the community with a memorable graphic," Bail said. "If you saw Al Gore's Inconvenient Truth movie, you watched him ride up a cherry picker following the trajectory of the graph depicting increased carbon emissions over the last 1000 years. We decided to recreate that precipitous rise up the front of the church steeple with the help of a long red ribbon, a large banner, and a tall ladder."

"The struggle to reverse global warming is no less a spiritual concern than were Gandhi's and King's struggles for freedom," said Antal. "Scientists have their place in this discussion. But they do not command the force that will lead us from this mire. Politicians have their place in this discussion. But the art of politics lacks the heart that's needed if the world of our grandchildren is to resemble our own."

"This is one of those moments for which the church was born. The changes we must now make will be difficult. But people of faith recognize that God did not put us on this earth to wreck it."

Antal finished, "We are the first generation to foresee and the final generation with an opportunity to forestall the most catastrophic events of global warming."

For more information about the event, or how you can get more involved, contact the event's sponsor, Religious Witness for the Earth (RWE) – a national interfaith network dedicated to public witness in defense of Creation. – www.religiouswitness.org/ or the Step It Up organization at www.stepitup2007.org.

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Main Office: 1 Badger Road, Framingham, MA 01702 • 508-875-5233 • fax: 508-875-5485
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