

Oregon Faith Communities & Climate Resilience Report 2023

Prepared by

Cherice Bock
Sarah Loose

Research & Art by

Nina Casey
Christopher Johnston
Julia Rankin
Julia Weinand



CONTENTS

Introduction

Why faith communities and climate resilience?

What is climate resilience?

Who conducted the project?

Methods

What we did

Project leaders

Project format

Participants

Confidentiality

Survey Results

Overview

Mapping Project

Green Teams

Social Action Teams

Disaster Preparedness Teams

Examples

Looking Ahead



WHY FAITH COMMUNITIES & CLIMATE RESILIENCE?

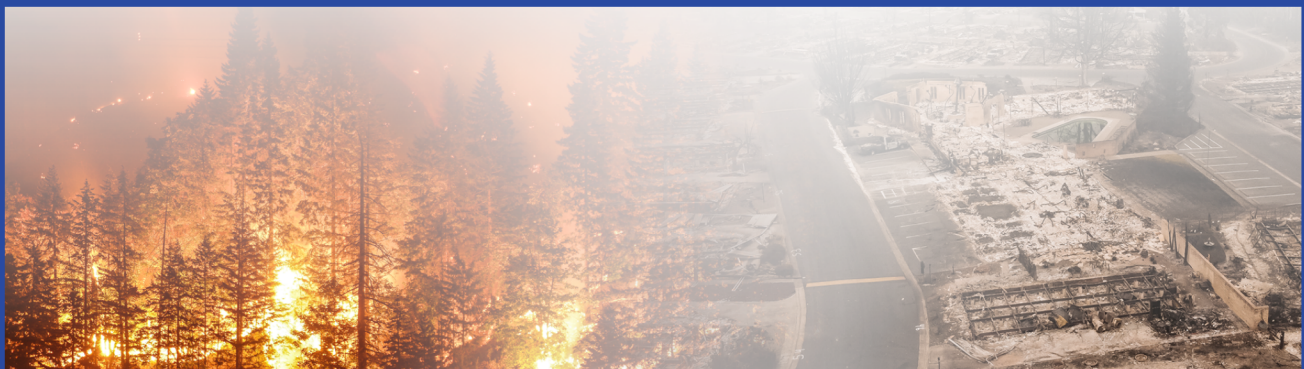
It's no longer a question of if, but a question of when. The impacts of climate change are painfully present in our lives and landscapes here in Oregon. Indeed, a quick survey of headlines in summer 2023 offers a window into the stark realities we're facing:

- *Evacuations ordered near Oregon-California border after wildfire races through Klamath National Forest*
- *Oregon heat wave lingers east of the Cascades*
- *This week's heat wave was intense, but they could get worse*
- *Multnomah County reports third possible heat-related death*
- *Cooler temperatures and rain needed to wash away Willamette River algae bloom*
- *Biologists research why high number of common murre die along Oregon's coast*
- *Central Oregon overcome with wildfire smoke, unhealthy air conditions*
- *This small town in Oregon embraces green energy after fossil fuel disaster*

We know that confronting climate breakdown, mitigating its impacts, and accompanying communities responding to and recovering from increasingly destructive climate disasters isn't the work of any one institution, organization, or even government agency. It's going to take many of us, in many constellations, each doing our part, working together.

As faith-rooted organizers, committed to caring for our planet and her people, we find ourselves asking: **what might be the role of faith communities in this work of building climate resilience?**

The question is a complicated one, especially given the long and troubled history of many (particularly Christian) faith communities' objectification of the Earth and her people.



But at their best, faith communities can serve as trusted places where neighbors come together to find connection, make meaning, accompany one another in celebrating life's joys and sorrows, and care for one another, ensuring that everyone's needs — physical and material, as well as social and spiritual — are met, everyone's gifts received.

In the face of climate disasters and crisis, we've witnessed faith communities in Oregon nurture life and love their neighbors in the midst of some of life's most difficult moments. In the wake of wildfires, faith communities have served as points of relief and encounter, as feeding stations and resource distribution sites. Many congregations are opening up their buildings to provide shelter from the heat, cold, and smoke. Others are planting community gardens, using only their share through becoming more energy efficient, installing solar panels with batteries to reduce use of fossil fuels and be available during emergencies. Yet others are showing up alongside immigrant and BIPOC leaders to advocate for climate-friendly policies and divestment from fossil fuels.

We also know that more can — and must — be done. It'll take all the heart, imagination, and creativity we can muster to confront and adapt in the face of climate change.

In the summer of 2023, we brought together a group of four young adults, each passionate about climate justice, to help survey and map faith communities in Oregon who are working on or interested in sustainability, environment, disaster preparedness, and other climate resilience projects.

We aimed to paint a broader picture of faith communities' efforts statewide:

- How are faith communities already engaging in the work of building more resilient communities in the face of climate change?
- Where are they getting stuck or encountering challenges?
- Where are there gaps and opportunities for future engagement and capacity building?
- How might faith communities, community-based organizations and government agencies collaborate more effectively to address these challenges?

This report offers a general overview of what we heard and learned together, as well as some initial recommendations for future research and opportunities for deeper collaboration.

Ultimately, we hope this research and report can set the stage for future organizing that will deepen faith communities' investment and engagement in the work of building community-wide disaster and climate resilience.

One final note: as parents, we feel an extra layer of poignancy and concern about the state of the Earth, our common home, and the climate crisis we're all facing. This means we also feel a strong resolve to do all we can to leave a flourishing and resilient planet for our children and for everyone's children. We hope, pray, advocate, and organize among our faith communities and in our regions to co-create the world we want them to be able to inhabit. It is our dream that faith communities can contribute to the necessary healing and participate in the renewing of creation in the twenty-first century.

— Cherice Bock & Sarah K. Loose

WHAT IS CLIMATE RESILIENCE?

Building resilience in the face of the challenges of climate change is among the most pressing realities confronting communities today. Climate resilience has multiple dimensions: physical-material, social-relational, and emotional-spiritual; it's about more than just “bouncing back” from hardship. We especially appreciate this definition from “Pathways to Resilience”: Resilience is “*bouncing forward to eradicate the inequities and unsustainable resource use at the heart of the climate crisis*” (<https://kresge.org/sites/default/files/Pathways-to-resilience-2015.pdf>).

Faith communities and faith-based organizations are uniquely situated to help our neighborhoods and regions become more resilient in the face of climate change. Why?

- Faith communities often have buildings and land.
- Faith communities have networks of relationships internally and in the broader community, as well as around the world.
- Faith communities are often already involved in many of the types of actions that need to occur in order for communities to become more resilient, such as disaster response, food access, housing projects, and sharing resources.



Faith communities could participate in resilience hubs and networks:

“community-serving facilities augmented to support residents, coordinate communication, distribute resources, and reduce carbon pollution while enhancing quality of life.”

—*Urban Sustainability Directors' Network*

WHO CONDUCTED THE PROJECT?

This project, Oregon Faith Communities & Climate Resilience, was conducted by Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon's (EMO) creation justice program, Oregon Interfaith Power & Light (OIPL), and the Oregon Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). Cherice Bock (creation justice advocate at EMO/OIPL) and Sarah Loose (disaster and climate resilience director, Oregon Synod ELCA) led the project, organizing a summer internship cohort to help gather information. The project was partially funded by a Public Health Equity Grant from the Oregon Health Authority.

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon



**ECUMENICAL
MINISTRIES**
— OF OREGON —

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO) is a statewide association of faith partners working together to improve the lives of Oregonians. With 15 member denominations and many other individual faith community and faith-based organizational members, EMO engages in a ministry of peace, reconciliation, justice and the healing of God's creation. In finding common ground among diverse religious traditions, EMO acts to create a future filled with hope for every Oregonian. EMO consists of direct service programs, policy advocacy for bills and laws that care for neighbors, and education and connection among people of faith in Oregon.

EMO's Creation Justice Program, Oregon Interfaith Power & Light (OIPL)

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO) is a statewide association of faith partners working together to improve the lives of Oregonians. With 15 member denominations and many other individual faith community and faith-based organizational members, EMO engages in a ministry of peace, reconciliation, justice and the healing of God's creation. In finding common ground among diverse religious traditions, EMO acts to create a future filled with hope for every Oregonian. EMO consists of direct service programs, policy advocacy for bills and laws that care for neighbors, and education and connection among people of faith in Oregon.





Cherice Bock, creation justice advocate

I led EMO's creation justice program from 2020–2023, organizing Oregon Interfaith Power & Light events, programs, and advocacy opportunities. With an MDiv from Princeton Theological Seminary and an MS in environmental studies, and while working to complete my PhD in environmental studies from Antioch University New England, I was able to lead Oregon's faith communities with a mixture of pastoral and theological background as well as solid knowledge of the environment and climate change. I have taught in a

variety of higher education institutions at the intersection of religion and environment. As a Quaker, social justice has been an important part of my understanding of what it means to be a follower of Jesus, to love my neighbor and my enemy, and to a transformed creation in which each person belongs. As I recognized the reality of the climate crisis, my focus of ministry broadened to recognize that social justice includes environmental and climate justice, and that the new creation includes not just people, but also the community of all life. My pertinent publications include the articles, "Faith Communities as Hubs for Climate Resilience" (2022) and "Watershed Discipleship: communicating climate change within a Christian framework, a case study analysis" (2018).

Oregon Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Disaster and Climate Resilience

The Oregon Synod's Disaster & Climate Resilience Team accompanies people of faith and courageous love in the work of



Oregon Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's Work. Our Hands

building more resilient communities, so that all might thrive before, during, and after disasters & climate emergencies. We provide direct support and accompaniment to communities recovering from disasters, we equip leaders and communities of faith to participate alongside their neighbors in building climate resilience, and we work in partnership with people on the frontlines of the climate crisis to advance climate justice.



Sarah K. Loose, Director, Disaster & Climate Resilience

Originally from small-town Minnesota, I've lived in Oregon since 2004 and had the privilege to organize for justice alongside immigrants, rural and small-town Oregonians, and faith communities across the state. I've worked with groups such as the Highlander-inspired Jefferson Center for Education & Research, the Rural Organizing Project, Northwest Workers' Justice Project, the Interfaith Movement for Immigrant Justice, and the Leaven Land & Housing Coalition.

Currently I direct the Oregon Synod's Disaster & Climate Resilience team and serve as lead organizer for the Climate Resilience Room of the "Sacred Organizing House," which brings together, under one (metaphorical) roof, teams of people of faith & courageous love committed to building a multifaith, multiracial, multigenerational movement for justice in Oregon. I have an MA in Oral History from Columbia University and a BA in History from Yale University.

INTERNSHIP COHORT



Nina Casey

I attend Southern Oregon University, seeking a degree in sociology and anthropology and a minor in social justice. Growing up in the Pacific Northwest, I am a very outdoors-oriented person, and witnessing the impacts of climate change on the landscape and communities I know and love has driven my passion for climate resilience projects like this one. My strong interest in religious sociology and background in community engagement makes me excited by the opportunity to bring my interests, experience, and eagerness to this project, blending both religiosity and a commitment to climate justice.

Christopher Johnston

My name is Christopher Johnston, and I am a third year environmental policy student at Linfield University. I am passionate about environmental restoration, conservation, policy, activism, climate action, and other environmental issues affecting the world today. I am also minoring in critical ethnic studies and have a deep passion for environmental justice and health. Some hobbies I enjoy are rock climbing, reading, and film!



Julia Rankin

I just graduated from Oregon State University as an honors student, majoring in environmental sciences with a specialization in conservation, resources, and sustainability, minoring in social justice while earning a GIS certificate. Originally I grew up in Seattle, Washington where I played in a 120-acre local forest, wandered low tides looking for life and attended Trinity Lutheran Church. You can typically find me gardening (I am the proud parent of a 30 year old Bird of Paradise), baking with my friends, hiking or scuba diving!

Julia Weinand

In my time at Jesuit Volunteer Corps Northwest, I have been serving as EMO's climate and environmental justice policy advocate. I also got to join this cohort and learn more about what faith communities are doing across Oregon to respond to natural disasters and the climate crisis as a whole. Growing up in Seattle and graduating from the University of Portland (2022), I am familiar with the local impacts of climate change in the Pacific Northwest. I am excited to be part of this movement to help communities better prepare for disasters and become more resilient.



METHODS: WHAT WE DID

During June–August 2023, we gathered information and stories from faith communities and faith-based organizations in Oregon regarding their activities related to climate resilience. This project was a partnership between Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon’s (EMO) creation justice program, Oregon Interfaith Power & Light (OIPL), and the Oregon Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), and the project was partially funded by a grant from the Oregon Health Authority.

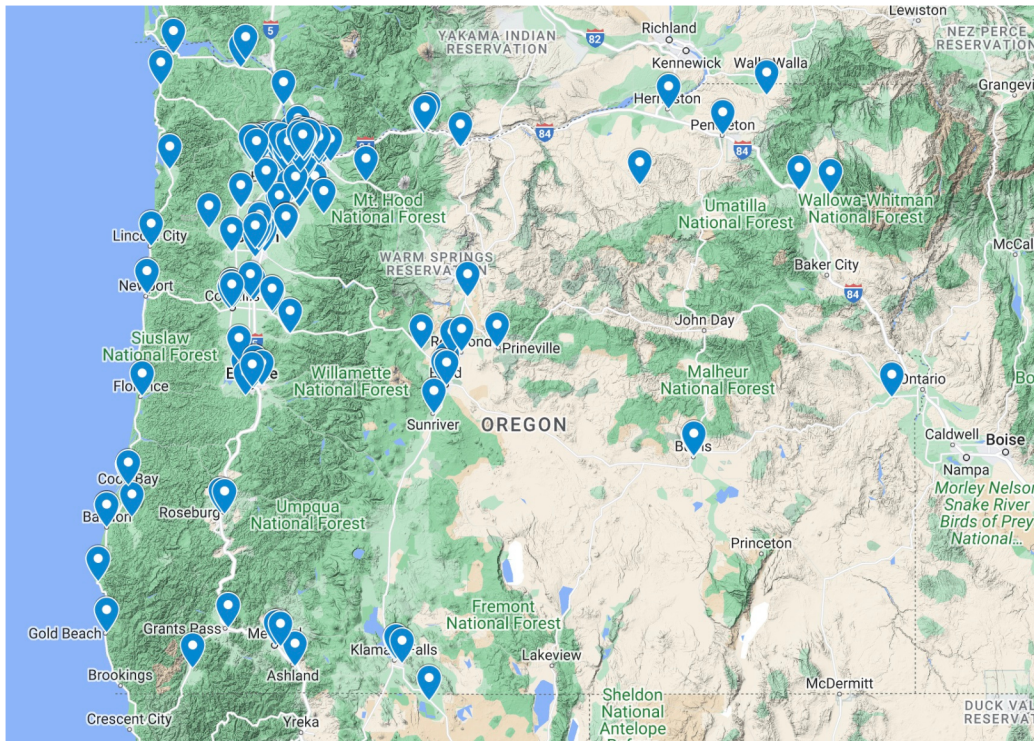
Project Leaders & Process

Cherice Bock (creation justice advocate, EMO/OIPL) and Sarah Loose (director, disaster and climate resilience, Oregon Synod ELCA) led this project, organizing an internship cohort consisting of four interns, whose bios appear on the previous page. The internship consisted of:

- An introductory retreat in which interns learned about faith communities and climate resilience, experienced an example of a faith community working on a range of climate resilience efforts (Salt & Light Lutheran/Leaven Community, photo at right), and built connections with one another.
- 8 weeks of conducting the project, consisting of 7 hours each week on Tuesdays, co-working in person or virtually when possible, or working on their own as needed.



- A final retreat, discussing findings, collaborating on artwork for the final report, generating the map, learning about another example of a faith community working on climate resilience (Ainsworth United Church of Christ), and spending time kayaking on the Tualatin River (left) and reflecting together on internship experiences and learning.
- Interns spent approximately 70 hours each on the project.



Left: Map of faith communities and organizations who participated in the study

PROJECT FORMAT

In order to gather information about the ways faith communities and faith-based organizations in Oregon are working toward climate resilience, we made phone calls and sent emails to congregations and individuals, with the purpose of having them fill out an initial survey regarding their activities, teams, and leaders. This initial information was then used to contact specific individuals in each faith community or organization who are working on teams or projects related to climate resilience. These individuals were encouraged to complete a survey relating to the type of project they are engaged in: a “green team” or creation care project, a social action team, or a disaster preparedness group. The initial and “specific surveys could be filled out over the phone, or a link could be sent so someone could fill out the survey themselves online. Faith communities and faith-based organizations were generally contacted first by phone, and then by email if necessary.

After receiving initial survey information, we reached out to green team, social action team, or disaster preparedness leaders using the contact information given in the survey response (email or phone). Again, individuals could answer survey questions over the phone or fill out the survey online.

We also offered the opportunity to hold more informal conversations with individuals and groups who would like to tell us about their work. This provided the opportunity to hear more about the work of green teams, social action teams, and disaster preparedness groups beyond the questions we asked in the surveys, to hear stories, and to build relationships.

The initial survey and specific survey links were also sent by email to individuals who had participated in OIPL events since 2020.

PARTICIPANTS

We contacted faith communities and faith-based organizations who were:

- Members of Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon,
- Members of the Oregon Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America,
- Or had individuals who had participated in an event organized by Oregon Interfaith Power & Light since 2020.
- Respondents are indicated on the map on page 10.

EMO consists of member denominations as well as individual congregations and faith-based organizations. While each of the congregations that make up the member denominations are members of EMO, we did not contact every congregation that was part of each of the member denominations, as we only had a limited amount of time to conduct this project. Each faith community and faith-based organization we contacted had consciously chosen to become a member of EMO, is a member of the Oregon Synod ELCA, or they have people who have intentionally chosen to participate in OIPL programming. A further project could gather information from congregations that are connected to member denominations, but that was beyond the scope of this project.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Data generated in this project is available to EMO, OIPL, the Oregon Synod, and Sarah Loose and Cherice Bock for research and relational organizing purposes. Those who participated in the survey read and agreed to the following statement:

Your names and contact information, as well as the contact information you provide for others, will not be shared with outside parties. You will not be added to mailing lists unless you expressly request to be added. This survey does ask you to share contact information for other individuals in your congregation/organization, and we will use that information to follow up with them and request more information about your faith community from them, but other than that we will not use or share their information.

By continuing with this survey, you indicate your consent for participating in this project.

Participating faith communities and organizations who appear on the online map of faith communities and climate resilience we generated were given the opportunity to opt out and not appear on the map. They can also opt out at any time and be removed from the map.

Stories in this report and any other ways we share about the information generated in this project will be shared in ways that do not reveal the identities of the people or congregations being discussed, unless we have gained prior permission from those who shared the information with us. Stories shared in this report are either told in ways that keep the person or group's identity vague, or we asked and received permission to share their story.

SURVEY RESULTS



For this project, Oregon Faith Communities & Climate Resilience, we contacted by phone and/or email 90 denominations, faith communities, and faith-based organizations that are members of EMO, 118 congregations that are members of the Oregon Synod ELCA, and 71 faith communities whose members participated in EMO/OIPL events from 2020–2023. This makes a total of 279 organizations contacted. We also contacted 284 individuals who participated in EMO/OIPL programs in 2023.

We had five survey options:

- Full survey: included general information and all the questions about green teams, social action teams, and disaster preparedness teams.
- Initial survey: included general information and requested contact information for those in charge of each type of team.
- Green team survey: leaders of green teams were asked to fill this out.
- Social action survey: leaders of social action teams were asked to fill this out.
- Disaster preparedness survey: leaders of disaster preparedness teams were asked to fill this out.

We received the completed surveys listed in the table at right, totaling 150.

Since some faith communities and organizations had more than one person fill out a survey or filled out more than one of the specific categories, 110 faith communities or organizations filled out a survey. The denominations or faith traditions listed on the chart on pages 13–14 filled out surveys.

Completed Surveys	
Initial Survey	113
Full Survey	9
Green Team Survey	9
Social Action Team Survey	16
Disaster Team Survey	3
TOTAL	150

Tradition	Number of surveys from tradition	Number of communities from tradition
American Baptist	4	4
Assemblies of God	1	1
Buddhist	1	1
Catholic congregation	2	1
Catholic organization	2	1
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)	5	4
Community of Christ	1	1
Episcopal	2	2
Interdenominational congregation	1	1
Interdenominational organization	4	4
Interfaith organization	4	4
Jewish	3	2

INITIAL & FULL SURVEYS

The initial survey asked for basic information about each faith community or organization contacted, including whether they had a social action team, green team, or disaster preparedness group, and who the contact people were for these groups. The purpose of this survey was to gather as much information as possible about many faith communities who are part of EMO and the Oregon Synod. The contact information on file for these faith communities was often office administrators, who did not always know much about what different teams and committees were working on, but they could often connect us with those who would know more. We were then able to follow up with the contact people they suggested in order to learn more about the specific teams we were interested in.

Tradition (continued)	Number of surveys from tradition	Number of communities from tradition
Latter Day Saints (Mormon)	1	1
Lutheran	63	46
Non- denominational	1	1
Presbyterian	9	7
Quaker (Friends)	2	2
United Church of Christ	21	13
United Methodist	9	6
Unity	1	1
Unitarian Universalist	13	7
TOTAL	150	

The full version of the survey included all the questions about all of the areas being researched in this study, including information about green teams, social action teams, and disaster preparedness teams. We began with some initial practice of this survey on the phone and found that it was too long, and one person in a faith community does not usually have all this information. Nine faith communities filled out the full survey and all of them were Lutheran (ELCA).

For the purposes of this report, information about whether faith communities and organizations have the kind of teams we were asking about is grouped together: 113 initial surveys and 9 full surveys, for a total of 122 responses.

Faith communities and organizations

reporting whether or not they have a social action team are listed in the Social Action Team table on page 15. (Note that this question was not included in the full survey.)

Over half of the respondents did have a social action team of some kind. Most of the people who responded “other” described projects or social concerns and services that the faith community or organization was working on, though they did not have a specific group dedicated to working on social action.

Social Action Team	
Yes	64
No	23
Unsure	2
Other	23
Didn't answer	1
TOTAL	113

Green Team	
Yes	49
No	51
Unsure	4
Other	18
Didn't answer	0
TOTAL	122

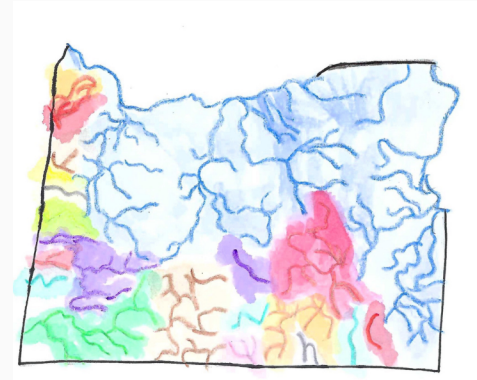
Regarding whether their faith community or organization has a green team, the responses are above at right. About half the groups do have a green team or something similar. Some of those who said “other” are working on starting a group, had a group prior to the pandemic, or described various projects and activities they are doing that relate to care for the Earth though they do not have a dedicated green team. Some are also working with other faith-based or nonprofit organizations on environment and climate concerns with people from their faith community, though they do not have a team in their faith community.

About half of these faith communities and organizations do not have a group working on disaster preparedness and response, and only about a fifth of the faith communities and organizations have a solid team. Those who responded “other” reported specific projects they had done in years past, plans that need updating, or teams that functioned prior to the pandemic. Several mentioned they have been hearing about resilience hubs and are interested in getting involved.

Disaster Preparedness Team	
Yes	25
No	61
Unsure	9
Other	23
Didn't answer	4
TOTAL	122

MAPPING PROJECT

We compiled information about each faith community that participated in the survey to create a simple, interactive digital map to serve as a tool for organizers and leaders in our various organizations. The map shows where each faith community is located and lists basic information about the community's faith tradition and teams or projects related to disaster preparedness, Earth care, and climate resilience. Additional layers enable users to locate communities within their watersheds and in relationship to areas vulnerable to particular disasters. We look forward to further developing and updating this map as we learn more about the activity and capacities of faith communities across the state. If kept up to date, such a map could be useful to government agencies looking for partners in resilience projects, individuals looking for services during climate emergencies, and other faith communities and community-based organizations looking for ideas and collaborators.



QUICK NUMBERS

57%

SOCIAL ACTION

47%

GREEN TEAM

20%

DISASTER TEAM

122

INITIAL & FULL SURVEYS COMPLETED

19

TRADITIONS



GREEN TEAM SURVEY

While there is a range of terms used by faith communities for their environment-oriented teams or groups, we used the shorthand title of “green teams survey,” and asked them if they have a team, group, or project relating to care for the earth and what they call it. The green teams survey included questions about what the faith community is already doing relating to care for creation, environmental justice, and sustainability. Check boxes were available as well as the option to select “other” and write in other actions. Categories included waste and recycling, energy, food, grounds, and education. We also asked about advocacy, intersecting justice issues, and social actions, which will be discussed in the next section. There were also open-ended questions about what they are noticing related to climate and the environment, what they’re excited about, and who they are collaborating with.

Nine groups filled out the green team survey and 9 groups filled out the full survey (which included the green team questions). They came from the following traditions: Buddhist (1), United Church of Christ (4), Unitarian Universalist (1), Lutheran (10), and United Methodist (2); all 18 were from different faith communities.

“
More people,
especially in faith
groups and among
the youth, are
aware and taking
[climate] action.”

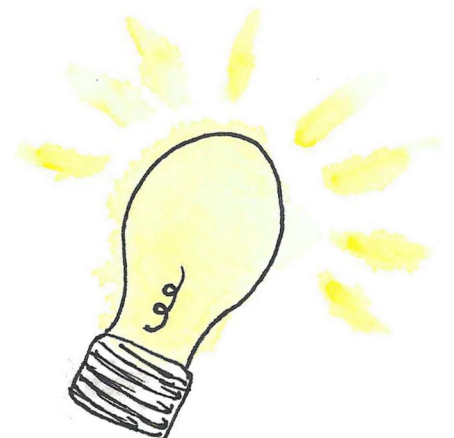
The responses show a range of actions in the various categories we asked about. Faith communities and organizations are taking action related to Earth care, reporting the following actions: reducing waste (86), providing education (63), projects related to food (47), climate related advocacy (45), more sustainable ways of taking care of the faith community’s grounds (43), and energy efficiency projects from efficient light bulbs to solar panels (35). Each green team survey reported an average of 15 actions being taken by their faith community or organization.

We can notice and celebrate that faith communities are engaging in actions in each of the “green team” categories we asked about. The most common actions being taken were:



- recycling paper (17),
- using high efficiency light bulbs (16),
- recycling bottles and cans (15),
- using washable dishes and mugs (14),
- using washable containers for communion or other sacred rituals (11),
- offering prayers, music, or messages during a weekly gathering related to Earth care (11),
- recycling more challenging things such as Styrofoam and batteries (10),
- and planting native plants (10).

Category	Number of actions reported	Average number per survey
Reduce	86	4.8
Energy	35	1.9
Food	47	2.6
Grounds	43	2.4
Education	63	3.5
TOTAL	274	15.2

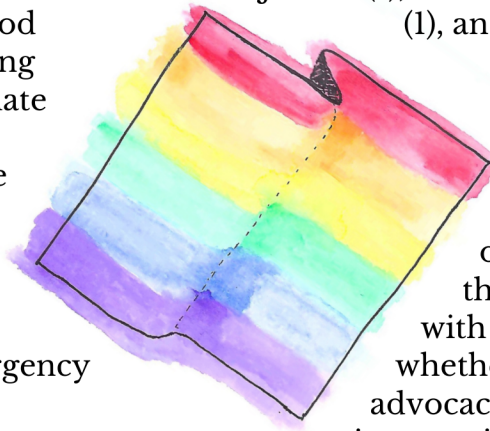


SOCIAL ACTION TEAM SURVEY

For some faith communities, care for the environment and disaster preparedness are carried out by an overarching social action team. These have a variety of names and focuses. Some of them relate directly to community resilience even if they are not directly related to climate and environmental concerns or disasters. For example, creating local food networks may not be something congregations think of as climate and environment related, but helps the community be more resilient and sustainable. Additionally, projects related to social services can build networks of relationships that are extremely helpful in emergency situations.

Sixteen social action surveys were filled out, and the social action team questions were asked in the full (9), green team (9), and disaster preparedness surveys for a total of 37 responses. Some faith communities had people fill out more

than one of the surveys, so a total of 28 faith communities and organizations participated from the following traditions: Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) (1), Lutheran (17), United Church of Christ (6), Presbyterian (2), Catholic (1 organization, 1 congregation), Unitarian Universalist (4), Jewish (1), United Methodist (2), Buddhist (1), and American Baptist (1).



Questions in this section asked about social service programs that faith communities and organizations are running themselves or in partnership with other local organizations, whether and what types of advocacy they are doing, and what intersecting justice issues they are working to address.

Our Earth Care Team has determined that significant change will likely require legislative efforts to really make an impact.

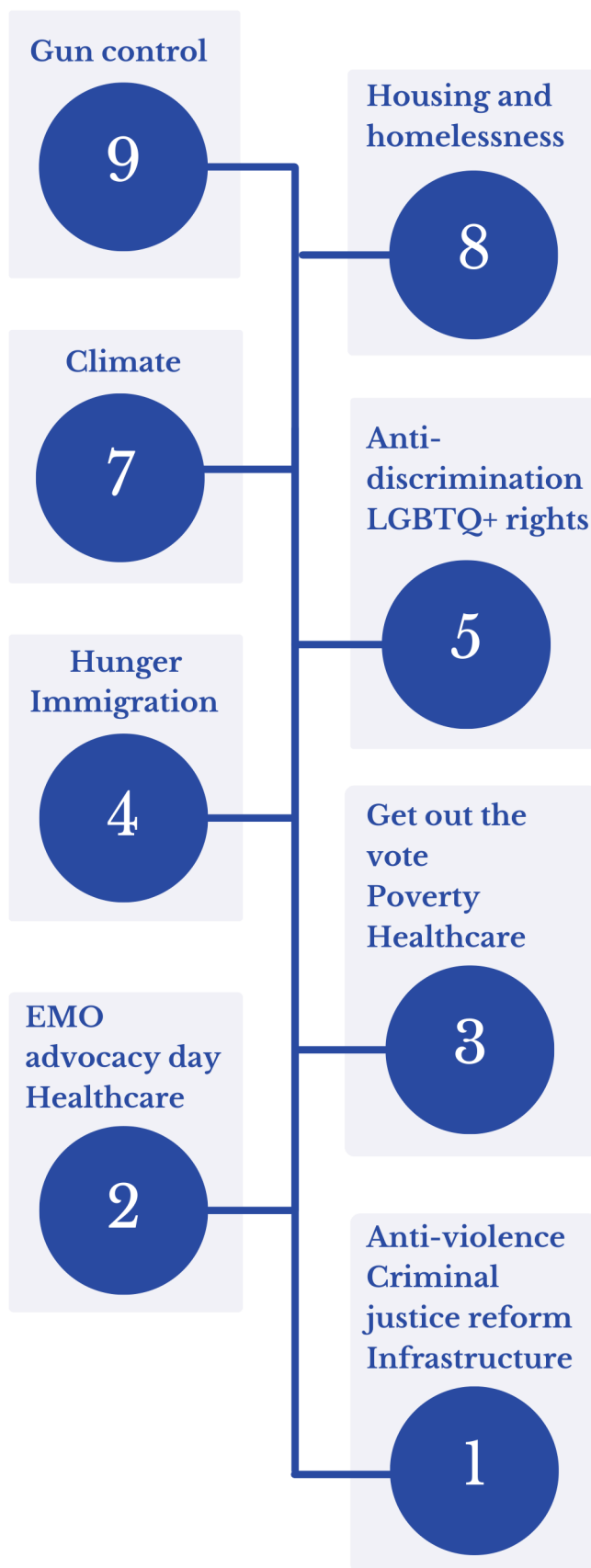
Advocacy Level	
Local	22
State	20
National	11
International	7
With partner orgs	15
With denomination or faith tradition	14

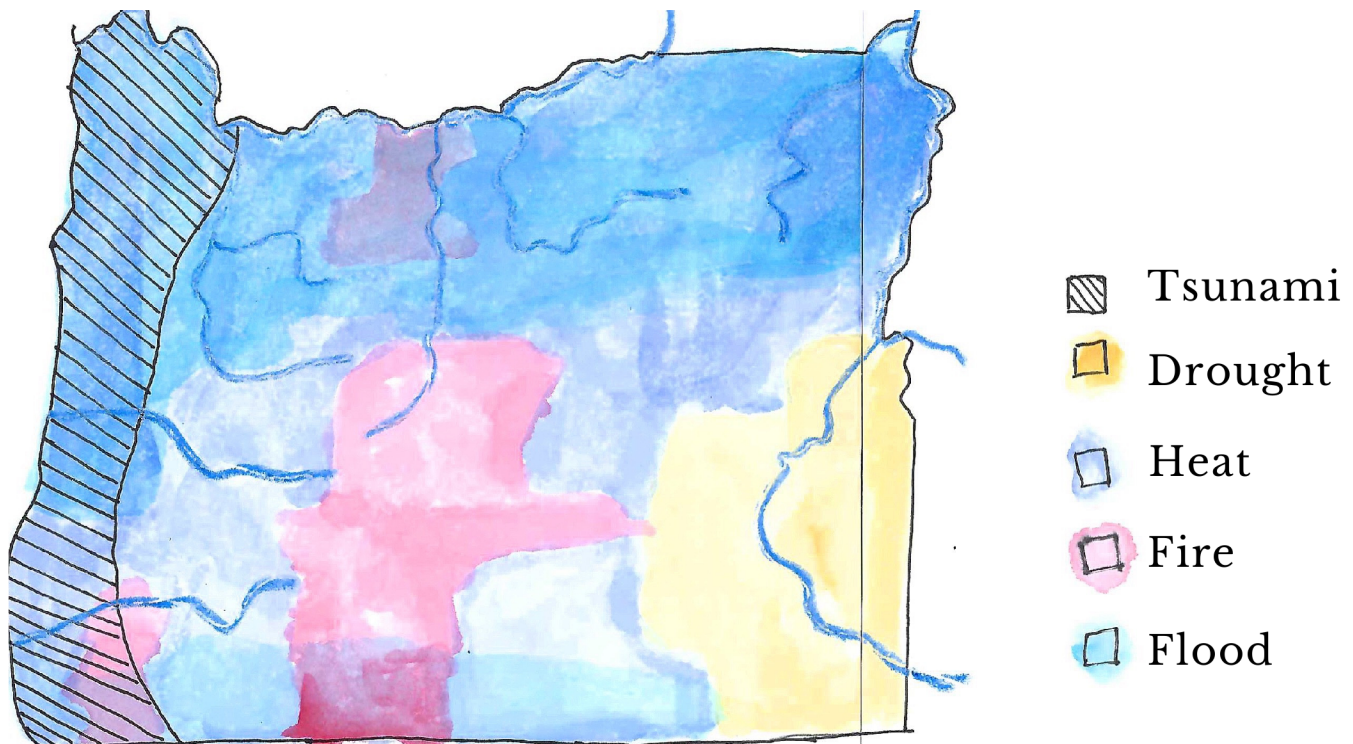
The most common responses for social services included: sharing indoor and/or outdoor space with the public or community groups (28), providing emergency funds for things such as food and gas (24), and projects relating to sharing clothing (19). Groups are working on the following intersecting justice issues:

- Intentional anti-racism and diversity, equity, and inclusion trainings (21)
- Refugee resettlement (19)
- Addressing homelessness (18)
- Immigrant justice (10)
- Building affordable or transitional housing (8)

While two of the groups stated they are not participating in advocacy, the other groups mentioned involvement in advocacy at the following levels: local (24), state (22), national (13), international (8), with partner organizations (17), and with their denomination or faith tradition (16). Respondents listed advocacy efforts in the areas at right.

ADVOCACY





DISASTER PREPAREDNESS SURVEY

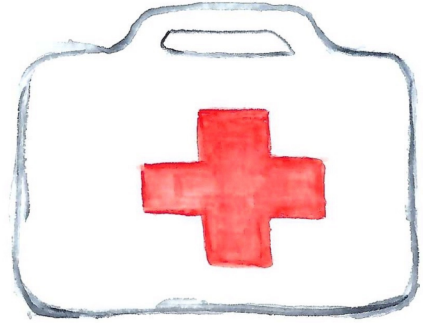
Three faith communities filled out the disaster preparedness survey along with 9 who filled out the full survey (which included disaster preparedness team questions). Respondents came from the denominations: American Baptist (1), Lutheran (10), and United Church of Christ (1), with one response from each participating community, for a total of 12 responses.

Of the 7 groups who shared about their disaster preparedness team's focus, one of the groups is just forming, one is mostly focused on environmental concerns such as energy efficiency, community gardens, and education. A third group had a robust disaster preparedness project prior to the pandemic, helping neighborhood households prepare for disasters and checked in with them

"Citizens want more information about what is happening now and what their role could be with disaster preparedness, community resilience, and climate action. Our denomination is active at local, state, national and international levels."

regularly, but has had difficulty getting going again. One group participates in disaster preparedness trainings at the denominational level, and another hosts trainings for their community. Two others focus on different types of emergencies: active shooter response, and helping people move or have access to food. One respondent explained that most of their congregational actions are disaster responses in one way or another.

The most common disaster preparedness actions reported were: sharing about emergency preparedness (8), financially supporting teams responding to disasters elsewhere (7), participating in disaster preparedness trainings hosted by their denominations or faith traditions (5), and hosting emergency kit workshops (4). One group has hosted people during an emergency, 3 have gathered supplies to prepare to help, and 3 have served as warming or cooling shelters.



CONNECTING THE DOTS: CLIMATE RESILIENCE

Many of the actions faith communities and organizations are taking overlap between social action, response to climate change and environmental injustice, and disaster preparation. Some of the teams are shifting toward an integrated approach, recognizing that climate emergencies will be more frequent until and unless we reverse climate change, and intentionally focusing on justice and equity as they advocate for policy change and collaborate with their neighbors. Leaders of the teams surveyed noted that more people are becoming aware of current climate impacts through first-hand experience.

“We now cannot use our sanctuary in the summers because it is entirely too hot too much of the time. I think this is a result of climate change. The building was built for a different climate.”

”
The heat and flood disasters of summer 2023 are dispelling the illusion that anyone is “safe” or immune.

WHAT FAITH COMMUNITIES ARE NOTICING AND DOING

Green Teams

- Neighbors are interested in climate/environment
- People are changing how they think and behave
- Serving as warming/cooling shelter during extreme weather
- Restoration of grassland prairie, oak savannah, wetlands
- Unpredictable weather, more drought, fire, ecosystem change, impact on trees
- New solar panels and hot water system
- Helping fund heat pumps for low-income people
- Revitalizing green team
- Increased anxiety about climate and disaster
- Collaborating with other faith communities
- Environment-related camp for children

Social Action Teams

- Working with people without homes, but noticing no one is making good plans in their area for hosting people during extreme weather
- “Right to sleep” advocacy
- Hosting a daycare
- Clothing closet for children
- Helping with shelter for domestic violence victims
- Helped build affordable housing on their land

Disaster Preparedness Teams

- Helping prepare individual homes and families
- Preparing for active shooters, fires, medical emergencies, earthquakes, natural gas explosions
- Noticing interest from local and state government and other nonprofits to coordinate around preparedness
- Trainings by denominations helpful
- Community groups are becoming more organized and prepared due to recent disasters

EXAMPLES

Faith communities working toward climate resilience

A Hub for Community Resilience: Leaven Community

At the heart of Leaven Community's efforts to build climate resilience is a story of weaving and re-weaving relationship with people and place.

Starting in 2010, after experiencing so much harm in the neighborhood and the changing attitudes of people about religion and its place in the community, members of Salt & Light Lutheran Church in NE Portland (formerly Redeemer Lutheran) initiated a process of deep listening with their neighbors. Due to the effects of racialized harm and its resulting violence, substance abuse, and other impacts, the congregation focused on relational organizing in the broader community to address root causes of inequity and oppression. That process led to the birth in 2013 of Leaven Community — a community sourced project and nonprofit that “ignites the power of our relationships in our shared stories and spiritual wisdoms by acting collectively with our neighbors for more equitable, diverse, thriving neighborhoods.”

Today, Leaven is a hub of initiatives and projects under the Leaven Community nonprofit umbrella, including Salt & Light Church and a multitude of “Common House Partners,” each deeply engaged in supporting racial, economic, and climate justice. The Leaven Land & Housing Coalition grew out of those early listening sessions and now brings together teams of leaders from over 50 different faith and community groups to build affordable housing on faith stewarded land, and to organize for racial and housing equity.

Other partners housed at Leaven include nonprofits dedicated to environmental justice and deepening people's relationships with the natural world, such as Cascadia Wild and the Center for Diversity and the Environment. Freedom To Thrive “works to create a world where safety means investment in people & planet and to end the punishment-based criminal and immigration systems.” The NE Portland Tool Library supports thriving communities by providing “residents of all income levels access to tools,” while The Portland Fruit Tree Project (PFTP) “increases access to healthy food and strengthens communities by empowering neighbors to share in the harvest and care of city grown produce.”



Leaven Community (continued)

When the interior of the building fell eerily quiet during the pandemic, Leaven leaders leaned into their care for and connection with the land outside the building as a site of resilience and relationship.

At the Leaven, neighbors of all ages come together in intergenerational gatherings to deepen their connection with the land as a space for healing and to practice regenerative agriculture in the Leaven Community Garden. The “Root Buddies” was a regenerative food growing and climate justice program in Summers 2021 and 2022 for middle and high school students. Through a collaboration with PFTP, the Native Wellness Institute and NE Emergency Food Program helped distribute fresh organically grown produce. Food has been distributed to garden participants, neighbors, and Dandelion House. Young people tended to a giant compost bin and learned about the importance of healthy soil in mitigating the worst impacts of the climate crisis.

Today, spaces both out and inside the building are once again bustling with activity. In listening to the community, there was a longing to hold space for collective creativity. Practicing relational organizing, “The Collab at Leaven” was created in June 2023, as an all-ages maker space for community creativity. The Collab continues to support the re-weaving of community, coming out of the toughest moments of the pandemic and racial justice uprisings. There is intention to reconnect with Leaven values and to take action together.

Meanwhile, leaders at Leaven continue to reimagine what building community and climate resilience can look like into the future. A new round of deep listening in the Summer–Fall of 2023 affirmed the vision of further developing Leaven Community as a “Community Resilience Hub” that follows the leadership of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color communities organizing for climate justice. For Leaven, the community resilience hub combines “many of the longings people have named for climate action, mutual aid, and community building in one overarching project that the community could organize around and engage our neighbors in.” A new core team of leaders from Leaven will be stewarding this work over the coming months as part of the statewide Climate Resilience Cohort.



Toward Repair, Conciliation, and Reimagining Stewardship: The Episcopal Diocese of Eastern Oregon

For the Episcopal Diocese of Eastern Oregon, the journey toward climate resilience is inextricably linked with work of racial justice — specifically, the repair and restoration of healthy relationships with the land and her original Indigenous caretakers.

Given the church's history of colonization, genocide, forced displacement, and assimilation of Indigenous peoples, that road to repair is long, and one that the Diocese doesn't take lightly. Rev. Roy Green explains:

"We really have to clean up our own house before we can go present ourselves and say we want to build new relationships. The Native peoples have seen lots of good ideas and good intentions from the white people that have turned out to be frauds. So if we're going to build healthy relationships we first have to understand our past and what we've done. And then make some serious intentional efforts to make things right. And only after we've done the first two, can we gather with our Indigenous neighbors and apologize for what we've done. Many of the cultures, many of the movements start with the apology. Well, an apology doesn't mean anything if you're not changing your behaviors."

And so, over the past five years, the Diocese has invested in a process of learning, unlearning, relationship building, and concrete acts of repair. An important first step was reimagining what it meant to faithfully steward the lands that were colonized by white settlers and deeded to the church in the late 1800s:

"Our Episcopal church in Eastern Oregon was given about a hundred acres in northeast Oregon for our church camp and Bishop's office. In 2019 we designated 80 of those 100 acres to return the land to the management of the local Native people. [We had been] leasing 80 acres out to a farmer. Well, when the lease came due, we didn't renew it."

Instead, those 80 acres are now being stewarded by Naknuwila Tiičámna — Caretakers of the Land, an organization created and led by Native partners, with financial and administrative support from the Diocese, which is restoring natural habitat and prioritizing First Foods.

Episcopal Diocese of Eastern Oregon (continued)

“The land is now being converted to the way it was 200 years ago, 300 years ago. Adding some of the native foods. The water courses had been irrigated for the farmer in square lines, right turns ... Well, what we’ve done is to do some research and see where the original water courses were for this land. And now to let the water that comes down off the mountains, let it flow in its normal [course], let it find its own way. So we now have 80 acres for the first foods, the basic foods that the Native people have been living on.”

Right: Monitoring a prescribed burn from horseback on a restoration project. The burn done using Indigenous knowledge, guidance, and practice.



From there, the Diocese has continued to build relationships with their Indigenous neighbors and to reckon with the Church’s ongoing history of colonization — a process that’s radically transforming how they understand their relationships with all of Creation:

“[At our 2022 Convention] we formally repudiated this Doctrine of Discovery, to recognize that this land belonged to the Native peoples before it belonged to us. And the Native peoples are saying, ‘Wait a minute. The land belongs to the earth. Nobody owns it.’ So the Anglos are coming kind of late to the party to understand that it’s all sacred, that all people, all beings, these little toads in my yard, the trees, the mountains, they all deserve respect as our Mother Earth. So in that sense, yes, we’re dealing with climate resilience.”

To learn more about these efforts, Naknuwílama Tiičámna, and the Diocese’s “Truth and Conciliation Commission,” established at the 2022 Diocesan Convention to continue this work, see:

- <https://www.facebook.com/naknuwithlamatiichamna/>
- <https://edeo.org/truth-and-conciliation-commission/>
- <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/racialreconciliation/becoming-beloved-community-in-the-episcopal-diocese-of-eastern-oregon/>
- <https://www.opb.org/article/2022/12/13/episcopal-diocese-plants-path-forward-with-indigenous-neighbors-on-80-acres-in-union-county/>

Caring for the Earth is Who We Are: St. Andrew Lutheran in Beaverton

For over a decade, the Earth Care Team at St. Andrew Lutheran in Beaverton, Oregon has been working in partnership with the ten acres of woodlands, wetlands, and buildings they steward in support of climate resilience.

Team member, LuAnn Staul, shares how the process of discerning whether and how to renovate the church building solidified care for the Earth as a core value and defining feature of the congregation's identity:

"As we explored the options for a building renovation, we found that although we had a large property most of it was designated as a wetland and therefore, we would not be able to use it for building. The congregation began considering options, including possibly moving to another location, and after much prayer and discernment the congregation decided to stay in our current location. With the help of an architect we found other ways to build a space that would meet our needs and we began to embrace the wetland/forest. We now consider it one of our greatest assets. It is truly kind of who we are."



*View of rain garden
and worship area,
St. Andrew Lutheran
Church, Beaverton, OR*

With support from Washington County, the Tualatin Soil and Water Conservation District, and community groups such as Eco-Faith Recovery, St. Andrew has installed rain gardens, planted native plants (and kept invasive species at bay), and achieved Platinum Backyard Habitat Certification for their grounds, which sit adjacent to Johnson Creek. In 2018, the congregation installed solar panels on the church roof. A community garden on site supports food security with over 30 plots available to parishioners and neighbors. An annual Earth Care Fair introduces congregants and neighbors to a variety of strategies to combat climate change, and an Earth Camp encourages children to develop a deeper relationship with the natural world. And in the summer the congregation worships in their beautiful, upland forest Sanctuary of the Firs.

This year, the Earth Care Team is turning their attention outward. They're asking,

"How can the energy we have about Earth Care spread to the larger community? How can we do more to fight climate change and prepare for climate disasters?"

A team of leaders from St. Andrew has joined the 2023-24 Climate Resilience Cohort, eager to collaborate and build deeper relationships with their neighbors, especially those on the margins, towards greater community-wide climate resilience.



LOOKING AHEAD

Who is this report useful for?

We hope this research is interesting and useful to our organizations: EMO, OIPL, and the Oregon Synod, as well as sparking creativity for faith communities and organizations who are considering climate resilience projects. We also hope this can be a first step in helping identify faith communities and organizations working on climate resilience in order to create better relational and communication networks, which will serve the region well during climate emergencies and other disasters. During the 2023 legislative session, a community resilience hubs bill passed, and as those hubs begin to be organized, it will be useful to know which faith communities and organizations are likely to want to be involved in local resilience hubs and networks. During the intense wildfires of September 2020, EMO shared information about faith communities willing to host people displaced by smoke and fire, but this list was created in the moment: it would be even better to have a list of places and contact information ready to go before the next climate emergency.

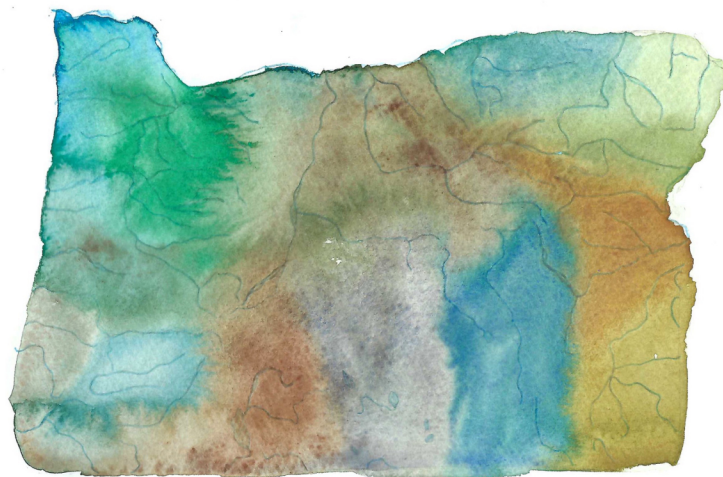
Uses for advocacy and relationship building

Although this report does not list who expressed interest in EMO/OIPL's programs and resources, that data was collected and can be used by EMO staff and the creation justice committee to learn more and connect with those working on climate resilience-related projects around the state. Many wanted more information: they are just beginning their journeys into more awareness of faith-based care for the Earth, our common home, or their paradigm is shifting from responding to disasters elsewhere to preparing for and responding to more frequent disasters nearby.

Uses in preparation for and during climate emergencies

This project was partially funded by the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) with the goal of gathering initial information about how faith communities are engaging in climate resilience and what other support they need. It is hoped that EMO/OIPL and OHA can continue to collaborate toward building a more just and sustainable region.

A digital map with layers relating to faith communities offering various skills and services was generated through this project. It could serve as a valuable resource if people are looking for places to go during a climate emergency, or where to find services and resources that contribute to a flourishing everyday community. Although this kind of a map is difficult to keep updated, it has long been a dream of the creation justice committee to have such a map, so this is a starting point. The map could be used by government officials wondering which faith communities to contact in a given region when the need arises. It could be used by faith communities wanting to learn what other congregations and organizations are doing to address the climate crisis and prepare for disasters.



And finally, the information gathered in this study helps EMO/OIPL and the Oregon Synod build relationships and bring people together for events and activities such as the Oregon Interfaith Earth Summit, a cohort for climate resilience, and advocacy. EMO/OIPL staff, creation justice committee members, and Oregon Synod staff can follow up with contacts who were referred, get to know them, and find out more about what they are working on and what support they need. The data in these surveys is a treasure trove of connections to people and groups statewide who are passionate about many of the topics EMO advocates about and organizes around. Through getting to know these new connections, EMO/OIPL can learn more about concerns at the grassroots level, and individuals and groups around the state can join with EMO's advocacy and education opportunities.

Climate Resilience Hubs and Cohort

In the fall of 2023, the Disaster & Climate Resilience Team at the Oregon Synod has convened a new, 9-month, multi-faith Climate Resilience Cohort. The Cohort is bringing together teams of leaders (lay and clergy) from faith communities across Oregon to build leadership capacity and explore how we can be active co-participants, alongside our neighbors, in building community-wide resilience and advancing climate justice. Engaging the practices of community-based, relational organizing, we are working together to:

- **Build climate resilience in our own contexts** — stewarding our faith communities' land, buildings, energy, and resources towards community-wide resilience, working at the level of our local watersheds, and in partnership with neighbors;
- **Enact systems-level change** — advocating for policies in our governments and institutions (including our own faith institutions) that advance climate justice and amplify the efforts and priorities of frontline communities; and
- **Support culture shifts in ourselves and our faith communities** — nurturing ways of being that support repair and collective resilience and well-being, for all people and our planet.

A core commitment of the Cohort is tending to racial and economic equity: Who is most impacted by disasters and climate change in our communities? How can we work together toward a community in which all can thrive?

With teams of leaders from a third of Oregon's 36 counties, spanning multiple watersheds and generations, and coming from nearly a dozen different faith traditions, we are eager to see what might become possible as we learn, unlearn and discern our way forward, moving out of despair and isolation, and into courage in community and collective action.

The information gathered in this study shows that many faith communities are doing creative and exciting work in their communities to educate about faith and Earth care, enact more sustainable practices, and advocate for environmental and climate justice, as well as working alongside their communities to address other needs to make their communities more resilient. Some are preparing for disasters in new ways because they have experienced more frequent climate emergencies in their regions. This study can help EMO/OIPL and the Oregon Synod to strengthen this work, building a network of faith communities around the state who are living out care for our common home.

