

The Genesis Covenant

50% in 10 years ... How Do We Get There?

*WE WILL REDUCE THE GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS FROM EVERY FACILITY THAT WE MAINTAIN
BY 50% IN 10 YEARS. – The Genesis Covenant*

The Genesis Covenant is an interfaith pledge being joined by communities of faith; a pledge to take action to slow global warming. Its signors endorse it as their witness to the holiness of creation and their commitment to protect the Earth as a sacred trust.

Your community can join too ... learn how at www.GenesisCovenant.org

After the signing, and after all the congratulatory applause has quieted down, it's time to get down to work. It's time to walk the talk, and start to make the very real lifestyle changes which will make the big difference.

The physical reality of halving our carbon emissions within the space of a mere decade is potentially a daunting task. We live in a more, more, more society, but the goal at hand will demand that we strike out on a very different course.

In any journey, one of the first things we do is reach for a map (or, in these technology-intense days, many reach for the GPS). What is our map toward 50% CO₂ reduction?

1) Understand the full scope. The Genesis Covenant website says it aims to “stop the threat of irreversible climate change.” But climate change is only one aspect of the problem we face. In the decade ahead, humanity will grapple with twin crises: climate change and peak oil.

Peak oil is the understanding that our planetary supply of fossil fuels is limited, and that – particularly with respect to oil – we are at about the halfway point of using up that planetary supply. We have already consumed the cheap, easy-to-get-to oil. Now comes the more expensive, more precious portion of the supply. That means that in the coming decade, even as we are adjusting to the threats of climate change, we will experience an energy crisis, the likes of which we have never seen. We will experience extreme price volatility, supply interruptions, shortages, potential conflicts over remaining supplies, severe economic repercussions, the inevitable human emotions that come with massive-scale change, and – if we dive into it unprepared -- a looming threat of civil unrest.

One thing that means is that many of the “green solutions” currently in the media will never come to fruition. Biofuels, which require more energy to create them than they yield once produced. Hydrogen, which scientists haven't ever been able to bring to widespread functionality during a time of economic plenty – how can they solve it during times of economic hardship? Nuclear, which requires enormous amounts of fossil energy to secure and maintain.

Our renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, wave, thermal, and small-scale hydro will provide a small amount of energy for our future, but they will never be able to supply the massive excess to which we have become accustomed during this brief age of oil. To the combination of peak oil and climate change, the only answer is **power down – decreasing the amount of energy we consume, overall.**

2) Energy Audit. Once we understand the full scope, we can begin to address the mechanics. The first thing to do is to understand our starting point. This is an opportunity to learn about your community and learn about your facility.

- Pull out your old utility bills: electricity, gas, water. What is your monthly power consumption in winter? In summer? Learn how electricity is generated in your municipality. Is it generated by filthy, carbon-belching coal? Can you elect some form of “green power” through your utility company? What about water? Where does it come from? Is it pumped using electricity?
- Poll your congregation. How far do they drive to access your campus? What form of transportation do they use to get there? Are there carpool opportunities? How far does the priest commute to get to the campus?
- How much travel is done on behalf of your church/temple site and on behalf of your diocese or region, with all the various gatherings, meetings, and activities? Is it air travel or car travel?
- Consider other carbon-producing aspects of our modern life. The food that you serve at your events – where does it come from? How far does it travel to reach your site? The paper in the office copier – is it recycled?

Environmental Change-Makers

What We Can Do

www.EnviroChangeMakers.org

- For more questions to ask, see the “Energy Audit” prepared by the Environmental Change-Makers at <http://EnviroChangeMakers.org/documents/EnviroAudit.pdf>

3) Take the first Baby Steps. When well-known actor and environmentalist Ed Begley, Jr. came to visit us, he encouraged us to “pick the low hanging fruit first.” Do the easy ones – often they add up to a very big impact, and they’ve cost you very little effort.

- Make sure all your light bulbs are compact fluorescent bulbs. As you check the bulbs, also determine whether all of those lights are truly necessary – which ones could you possibly do without?
- Take a look at that local, regional, and national travel – which trips can be eliminated? Explore the possibilities for tools like electronic conferencing and telecommuting.
- Offer bike racks outside your facilities and praise the early-adopter people who use them.
- Switch to recycled paper (requires 70-90% less energy to manufacture it). Change the toilet paper in the restrooms to recycled, too.
- Go vegetarian at parish events. Almost a fifth of global warming emissions come from livestock, plus, we can better feed the needy: the amount of land that it takes to feed one meat-eater could sustain 20 vegetarians.
- Eliminate disposable goods – all of them. Switch to reuseables – durable goods you will use and use for years into the future.
- See “Environmental Suggestions for Large Events” for more “low hanging fruit” ideas <http://EnviroChangeMakers.org/documents/EnviroSuggLgEvents.pdf>

4) Grow Your Community. Sweeping changes in our urban lifestyles won’t happen in isolation. As the familiar phrase goes, “it takes a village.” The journey ahead will involve far more than simply the membership in your parish roster. We must, by necessity, integrate campus neighbors, local community groups, other faith communities, local area government, and more. We cannot achieve success alone.

- Who else in your neighborhood is on board the Genesis Covenant? Can you forge a partnership with another faith community, even if their belief system is different than your own?
- What resources do you have in your local community? What environmental groups, farmers markets, etc. They can provide local answers to your immediate “how to” questions.
- What resources can you invite onto your campus? Are there environmental groups in need of meeting space, who could bring richness to your community?
- Educate your community about what you are doing. See www.EnviroChangeMakers.org for examples. See our book, *Environmental Change-Making* for guidance.

5) Tap into Transition. Transition groups are part of an international network of grassroots activists who are working within their local communities to create solutions to these same problems – reducing carbon emissions and adapting to the changes coming with peak oil. Transition groups are springing up in many areas of the United States. Perhaps there is one in your neighborhood, where you could participate. Or perhaps you could start one.

Transition groups recognize that the road ahead demands far more than a few baby steps. Reducing humanity’s carbon emissions and adapting to peak oil will require a complete overhaul of the lifestyle we currently tell ourselves is “normal.”

Transition groups work to raise awareness of climate change and peak oil. They offer reskilling classes to help relearn the skills necessary for everyday living, skills we have forgotten in this brief time of energy plenty. In doing so, they work to grow a new sense of community, like those of us alive today have never experienced. Additionally, Transition groups network with other organizations, and set up working groups to analyze and plan power down efforts for local activities such as food, power, water, etc. The eventual goal is creating an Energy Descent Action Plan, a roadmap for your community to navigate a successful and graceful path into the future.

- Learn about the Transition concept at <http://transitiontowns.org/TransitionNetwork/TransitionPrimer>
- Check <http://transitiontowns.org/TransitionNetwork/TransitionCommunities> to see if your community is listed.

The Environmental Change-Makers are a community group in the Los Angeles area. They focus on environmental solutions -- “What We Can Do” about our environmental issues, in particular global warming and peak oil. Most recently, the Environmental Change-Makers pioneered Transition ideas within the greater Los Angeles area. The Environmental Change-Makers provide a listing of environmental resources for faith communities at <http://EnviroChangeMakers.org/FaithCommunities.htm>

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