

# A Eucharist for the Environment: Environmental activism in Rupert's Land

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Photo: [Xianyu Hao](#)

We are hurtling towards climate disaster. With the rampant rise of heat waves, forest fires, tropical storms and more, we are already in the thick of it and things will continue to get worse. However, there is still hope for change and climate activists are working tirelessly around the world to save our ecosystem from further degeneration. In Canada, the climate movement is spearheaded by youth and Indigenous people. In the past few years, Canadians have watched the [Wet'suwet'en](#) standoff, the blockade at [Fairy Creek](#) and the [Global Climate March](#) in 2019. In Winnipeg, Bishop Geoff Woodcroft asked clergy to attend an ecumenical meeting at the Legislature prior to the march.

"I was invited by a 15-year-old disciple to seriously consider publicly declaring my support for Climate Action," Woodcroft says. "It was important to me that clergy/leadership be encouraged to walk in the spring rally as they represent the Church that understands its

role as stewards within God's creation. We owe it to the world around us to live our vows and promises with integrity."

But does the church really have a role to play in environmental activism? Is it necessary for us to shrink back and let others take the lead? Or does faith offer some basis for participating in political action against climate change and the powers and principalities that continue to defile the Earth?

[Dr. Jane Barter](#) and [Rev. Gwen McAllister](#), and their ecumenical partners in Treaty One Christians for Socialism believe faith offers some basis for participating in action against climate change.

On [August 22, 2021](#), an ecumenical coalition known as [Treaty One Christians for Socialism](#), including Barter and McAllister gathered in front of the TD bank on Notre Dame Avenue in Winnipeg to protest TD's financing of the [Enbridge](#) pipeline. The group had planned a series of events to draw attention to the

problems of investing in fossil fuels and climate change, in solidarity with Indigenous groups.

This action was in response to calls from Indigenous people for support from the Christian communion in environmental activism.

“The Church must stand with Indigenous Peoples and advocate and promote respect for their culture, their Land, and their way of life. In this, there must be a commitment to create a space for them in the World Council of Churches and in the family of nations and peoples around the earth.”

This was the message put forth at the pre-assembly gathering of [Indigenous Peoples](#) at the World Council of Churches, during their 10th assembly.

Rev. McAllister, rector at St. Matthew’s Anglican Church and member of Treaty One Christians for Socialism, sees listening as a primary function of being Anglican.

“One of the gifts of being part of the Anglican Communion is being family with people all over the world, people who have different understandings of God and different understandings of what our faith can look like played out in the land we’re in, and especially in Canada, and in the Diocese of Rupert’s land. If we want to be people with honest faith, we must hear from Indigenous Christians.”

Dr. Barter and Rev. McAllister participated in this Enbridge Action by presiding over a eucharist liturgy, as their Anglican contribution. Dr. Barter, professor at the University of Winnipeg, sees a special connection between the Eucharist and climate justice.

“Eucharist speaks to a kind of abundance and sacrifice. It’s not based on a zero-sum game where we are continually depleting, exploiting the Earth, but rather it’s an economy of abundance in which there’s enough for all,” Barter says. “I found it rather meaningful to be standing outside of a bank and to be talking about an economy where everybody has enough, including the Earth, in which the Earth was not being destroyed because of the kinds of pressures humans were putting on it. The eucharist speaks to that and to the natural gifts



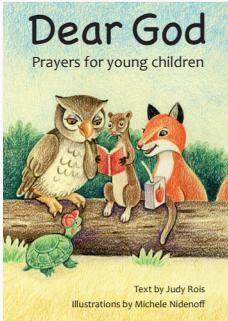
Photo: [Logan Weaver](#)

that God has given—the bread and the wine, the grapes, the grain—and to there being an abundant harvest whereby everybody can partake without an economy of violence.”

In our day-to-day contexts, we can look to youth and Indigenous people to guide our responses to climate change. In the summer of 2021, St. Margaret’s member Iona Taylor, who is also a member of [Manitoba Youth for Climate Action](#), organized a panel on environmental theology. St. Margaret’s rector Bonnie Dowling sees the support of members and activists as part of the parish’s response to climate justice.

[A Rocha Canada](#), a faith-based environmental stewardship organization, is also using St. Margaret’s as a place to develop their new green audit program for churches.

“We’ve been continuing to work with and look for young leaders who are passionate about this issue and trying to fill them up with good books and a lot of time and attention so that they know that the church is behind them and with them, and believes in their capacity to meet, and that we will gladly follow,” Dowling says.



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As we move forward into a precarious, unknown future, it can be difficult not to be overcome by climate anxiety or fear but participating in environmental activism and practicing material simplicity can provide some solace.

**“Christians know very well that there is hope, but the Christian faith doesn’t need optimism. It doesn’t need a fatalistic view that everything will work out. It’s deeper than things just being okay. The church has something to teach people about contentment and being content with less or being content with whatever it is that we do have. That is a message that’s going to be more and more important as the world changes.” says Dowling.**

This contentment requires a different kind of thinking, an anti-capitalist, anti-colonial kind of faith, like the first generations of colonized Christians had under the Roman empire.

“I hope that the Church will provide a vision and an imagination that comes out of our scriptures and of our tradition [which is not supportive of] capitalist consumption, but that is based in a giving and sharing in having enough rather than the drive to accumulate wealth, land, resources, and to extract a source; a vision of living within our means and in relationship with this land,” McAllister says. “In covenant people with the land, the language of our scriptures, that’s what I hope the church has to give to share that vision. And that requires shedding a lot of identification with institutionalism and with having power and privilege. Having force in society requires, instead, a prophetic voice.”



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