ELECTRIFICATION RESOLUTION

Title: Protecting God’s Earth and Its People with Electrification

Date Submitted: March 3, 2022

Submitted by: Creation Justice Team of the Minnesota Conference United Church of Christ and Mayflower United Church of Christ, Minneapolis

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Summary of Intent: This resolution declares that the 2022 Annual Meeting of the Minnesota Conference United Church of Christ encourages member congregations to actively plan for and promote electrifying appliances and machines when old ones fail or become outdated as one of the ways to protect God’s earth and its people from climate change emissions, and to become role models for just and equitable electrification for individual members and the broader community.

Background and Supporting Statement:

WHEREAS a major 2018 report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change told us that we must reduce carbon emissions 50% by 2030 in order to avoid the most catastrophic effects of climate change; and

WHEREAS scientists are talking about effects on God’s earth, that God’s creation could be catastrophically impacted by the climate change we are causing; and

WHEREAS protecting God’s creation also protects all God’s people by reducing air pollutants and sickness; and

WHEREAS, because air pollutants from burning fossil fuels are especially harmful for children, the elderly, rural and under-resourced communities, and people of color, protection measures must be just and equitably available; and

WHEREAS God’s word as set out in Leviticus leaves no doubt about what is required of a steward, to care for God’s land while in our temporary tenancy; and

WHEREAS about 40% of the United States’ emissions causing climate change come from the places we live and the vehicles we drive and those emissions are increasing; and

WHEREAS our electricity is getting cleaner with the addition of very inexpensive
wind- and solar-generated electricity and electricity will continue to get even cleaner as expensive coal-fired electric generation is quickly retired; and

WHEREAS switching to new efficient appliances powered by electricity will go a long way toward lowering our emissions, and reducing the impact of climate change and poor air quality.

RESOLUTION:

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Minnesota Conference United Church of Christ encourage member congregations to actively plan for and promote electrifying appliances and machines when old ones fail or become outdated as one of the ways to protect God’s earth and its people from climate change emissions; and to become role models for electrification for individual members and the broader community; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED each member congregation of the Minnesota Conference of the United Church of Christ create a plan to convert its natural gas appliances and other fossil fuel appliances, including machines like lawn mowers, to electric ones when it is time to replace those outdated or failing appliances; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that member congregations actively promote electrification as one of the ways to protect God’s earth and its people and, with environmental justice in mind, help our members and neighbors electrify; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Conference gather and distribute information and guidance for member congregations and individual members to implement electrification, thereby becoming role models for the broader community.

FUNDING: Funding for the implementation of the resolution will be made in accordance with the overall mandates of the affected entities and the funds available. The Creation Justice Team anticipates only minimal costs to the Team or other entities of the Conference.

IMPLEMENTATION: The Conference Minister, in consultation with appropriate ministries or other entities within the Minnesota Conference UCC, will determine the implementing body.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

In a major 2018 report the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change concluded that we must reduce carbon emissions 50% by 2030 in order to avoid the most catastrophic effects of climate change. This is a widely accepted benchmark. And it is a huge lift.
When we fully ground ourselves in God’s word, we understand that this is God’s earth that scientists are talking about—God’s earth that could be catastrophically impacted by the climate change we are causing.

Genesis tells the origin story and we know the story well: God separating light from dark within the formless void through calling forth all manner of vegetation, fish and birds and onto the creation of humankind. At each step God stepped back, reviewed what God had created and assessed it as good.

Some have said that the creation of humanity in God’s image with a commission to rule over the animal kingdom carries a license for ecological irresponsibility. But the Bible portrays humanity not as the owner of nature but as its steward, strictly accountable to its true owner. Leviticus 25: 23-24 makes the point clearly. In God’s words, the land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants. Throughout the land that you hold, you shall provide for the redemption of the land.”

Some have said that redemption referred only to a claim from prior owners. But in its discussion of sabbatical years and the every-fifty-year jubilee year, Leviticus makes it clear that the jubilee year is the year in which the land is redeemable by God, the true owner. The phrase, “you are but aliens and tenants” emphasizes the transitory nature of human land ownership. We humans occupy the earth only for our lifetime. God remains. God’s word as set out in Leviticus leaves no doubt about what is required of a steward, to care for God’s land while in our temporary tenancy.

Around 40% of the United States’ emissions causing climate change come from residences and the vehicles we drive. Greenhouse gas emissions from residential buildings in Minnesota have increased 32% since 2005. Emissions from commercial buildings increased by 15% and these emissions continue to grow each year.

Structural change is now creating a path forward. Electricity is now getting cleaner with the addition of very inexpensive wind- and solar-generated electricity. And electricity will continue to get even cleaner as expensive coal-fired electric generation is retired.

But that structural change is not enough. We must use the cleaner electricity. Our individual actions matter. Switching everything in our lives to be powered by electricity will go a long way toward lowering our emissions and reducing the impact of climate change.

Electrifying everything for individuals means replacing any appliances/machines in
our homes and garages that currently burn fossil fuels. And it might also mean installing new electric machines, like solar panels and home storage batteries. This doesn't have to be done all at once. Congregations and individuals can make plans to replace fossil fuel appliances and machines when they become outdated or fail.

Modern appliances and machines are so much more efficient they'll immediately have lower total carbon emissions than burning fossil fuel directly. Plus, as the electric grid switches to renewable sources, emissions will continue to drop.

Protecting God's earth also protects God's people. Natural gas, a fossil fuel, burned inside a church or residence has more pollutants than just carbon dioxide. Burning natural gas also emits nitric oxide (NOx), sulfur oxides (SOx), particulate matter (PM), and formaldehyde (CH₂O).

Multiple peer-reviewed studies tell us that when natural gas is burned without proper ventilation, gas cooking can generate levels of carbon monoxide and nitrogen dioxide inside homes that exceed federal and state standards for air quality.

EPA recently concluded that long-term exposure to Nitrogen dioxide is linked to the onset of asthma in children. Asthma is a leading cause of children missing school. There is also a growing body of evidence which suggests that indoor air pollution from burning natural gas negatively impacts cognitive development of children. Range hoods may remove the pollutants from burning natural gas. But children in older and poorer homes may not live in homes with range hoods, a clear environmental justice issue.

Unburned natural gas is mostly methane. Methane is the second-largest contributor to climate change among greenhouse gases and is more than 80 times more powerful at trapping heat in earth’s atmosphere than carbon dioxide in the first 20 years after it is released into the atmosphere.

In a recent peer-reviewed study, Stanford University scientists found that stoves release far more of the potent planet-warming gas methane than the Environmental Protection Agency estimates and that more than three-quarters of the methane emissions occurred when the gas stoves were turned off, suggesting that leaks persist even when the appliances are not being used.

Fresh Energy highlights the environmental justice issue imbedded in our reliance on natural gas: “(w)hile the burning of fossil gas is detrimental to the health of all Minnesotans, it is especially harmful for children, the elderly, rural and under-resourced communities, and people of color in Minnesota.”
The American Gas Association reports that natural gas meets more than thirty percent of the United States' energy needs.17

God calls on each of us and all of us together in community to act prophetically, to be role models, to be the Moses of our time. Our church communities must lead the way to protect God’s earth and its people—leading by electrifying and helping our members and neighbors electrify.

May it be so.

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5 Fresh Energy. “Our accomplishments of 2021 and what we are looking forward to in 2022: Further changes to coal plant operations secured & Otter Tail Power begins to exit coal and increase renewables.” January 24, 2022.
11 Children’s Minnesota, “Managing asthma for students.”
15 Washington Post, January 27, 2022. “Gas stoves in kitchens pose a risk to public health and the planet, research finds.”