

From Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray

1. What do you see as the root causes of the climate crisis?

Climate Justice works at the intersections of environmental degradation and the racial, social, and economic inequities it perpetuates. Ultimately, the goal of climate justice is to dismantle the paradigm of dominance that has led to the violence perpetuated on people with black and brown bodies, displacement of indigenous peoples, the denial of health care for women, the disempowerment of immigrant communities and the use of Earth as supply source and sewer.

Climate change is often characterized as a crisis of modern culture, generated by a broken economic system, unfixable by a fractured political system that will ultimately be solved through scientific magic and human ingenuity. But, because the crisis is rooted in systems of dominance, the real hope rests in our faith and commitment to our shared Principles.

2. What foreseeable impacts of global climate disruption are you most concerned about? Why?

We have found ourselves in a moment of great urgency. Communities of color, indigenous communities and communities in the southern hemisphere are already bearing tremendous costs with limited access to basic needs like food, water, clean air and land. We need action on multiple fronts and partnership is critical to our effectiveness.

Global migration and displacement continues to be an issue of critical importance to me personally. My work on immigration justice led me to see that the reality of human migration is a global and generational issue because of climate disruption (rising waters, droughts, floods, famine) and political instability that results. We see this in Syria where a civil war erupted after five years of serious drought resulting in the present humanitarian, refugee and migrant crisis.

3. How do you relate global climate disruption to the other great moral, spiritual and religious issues of our time?

Building on my answer to question #1, we need an intersectional understanding and approach to climate justice. Global climate disruption is a direct result of the paradigm of dominance that also perpetuates racial, social and economic inequities as well as systemic violence against women, indigenous communities, people of color and the poor.

In this time, when our world has literally never been more connected through media, internet and social media, the rise of nationalism is an indication of the way that both domination and fear continue to undermine our capacity as humanity to embrace compassion, reverence and generosity.

Given the opportunity that our interconnection can provide to collectively address responsive action to the global climate crisis, the fact that individuals and nations are responding through a lens of scarcity, fear and the building of walls is a reflection of the moral bankruptcy at the heart of the ethic of domination and competition.

As a religious faith, we must respond by combatting ideologies and pedagogies that reinforce domination while nurturing theologies and practices that encourage collaboration and compassion.

4. What moral imperatives should guide Unitarian Universalist climate action?

As Unitarian Universalists our moral imperative is to respond to life, to creation, and to one another with reverence, gratitude and humility.

Additionally, collaboration is critical in this work. We cannot do this work alone. Our effectiveness depends on an intersectional

approach that centers the voices and strategies of front-line communities.

5. How do you respond to global climate disruption in your current life and ministries?

My ministry in Arizona has fundamentally reshaped and deepened my commitment to global climate justice. The realities of drought and fire across the Southwest have made climate disruption personal and real. My relationships with indigenous leaders within and beyond the congregation have shown me the beauty of always beginning with gratitude - gratitude for life, for the earth.

This has changed my prayer life. I begin my daily spiritual practice in mindful attention to the earth. I bring this wisdom into my public prayers, always beginning in gratitude, always mindful of the relationship to the earth and the fundamental interdependence of all life. I have always thought this intellectually, but my time in the desert southwest has helped me know this deep in my spirit.

This has made me bold in preaching regularly to the realities of global climate change and the spiritual and moral shifts we need to make to change our own personal orientation to one of reverence for all life.

6. As UUA President, what specific actions and policies would you implement to address the climate crisis? How would you increase institutional support from the UUA for its congregations and their members to work towards climate justice, environmental justice, and a sustainable way of life?

We need action on multiple fronts and partnership is critical to our effectiveness. If elected President of the UUA, there are three things I'd like to help the UUA do more effectively.

First is to support Unitarian Universalists in our intersectional approaches to climate change, racial justice, immigrant and refugee justice, ending mass detention/incarceration, and economic inequality. These issues are not separate. Intersectional approaches will be critical in achieving lasting change.

Second is to amplify the efforts of frontline communities in their campaigns to resist the continued pollution and degradation of their homelands and natural resources. By supporting congregations and UU organizers in this work, we can enter long term relationships with those most immediately effected by climate and environmental injustice and have those partnerships shape and inform our effort. As UUA President, I am committed to putting more resources to organizing. This is an urgent time where we are called to be bolder, braver and better organized and we need resources to meet this moment.

7. As UUA President, how would you expand and support the UUA's work with other faiths and non-governmental organizations to take collective actions towards shifting to a low carbon future, advancing the human rights of impacted populations, and growing the climate justice movement?

We must build power through strong organizing strategies and partnership to compel change at the highest levels of the economy and government. The larger environmental analysis is done, but corporate, capital and moneyed interests are working against our need for climate and environmental justice. Strong partnerships within Unitarian Universalism, across faith communities and with front-line communities must be the foundation of our efforts to build a powerful, compelling moral voice to push urgent and effective climate justice action.

Our internal collaborative efforts (as demonstrated by the nine

UU organizations partnering on Commit2Respond) and our outside partnerships are key to our future success.

8. How should the UUA and its congregations offer ministerial support for people struggling with despair, confusion, or denial related to the global climate crisis?

As Unitarian Universalists, we need to make room to name and honor the sorrow and collective despair we feel.

Personally, as a religious leader, I believe we must develop a greater capacity to welcome grief rather than an avoidance or shorthand acknowledgement of it. In my own spiritual life, welcoming grief, making room to honor and name our experiences and emotions allows us to more fully embrace the reality and our capacity for agency and self-determination. Developing the spiritual capacity to welcome pain and joy, allows us to see new opportunities and to be informed by an honest assessment of our present.

In the end, hope, resiliency and courage come not from ignoring the challenges, grief or crises we face, but acknowledging it, honoring it and then remembering that we have our own gifts and ways that we can change and respond.

9. How should the UUA and its congregations offer ministerial support for members of front-line impacted communities of the global climate crisis? What steps should the UUA take to be in greater solidarity with the front-line impacted communities of the global climate crisis?

As Unitarian Universalists and the UUA, we must create more resources for training and supporting organizing efforts in local communities to support front-line impacted communities.

We also need to support rapid response efforts that amplify local

work and develop partnerships for the long haul. We modeled this in Arizona, with the UUA bringing national support to the local work in response to SB1070. This is replicable, even as there have been other times when our response has not been as immediate or sustained.

Social media can be more successfully used to bring national attention and support to communities that are already leaders in these efforts. We also need to show up publicly, consistently, spiritually and in a sustained way with partners, building power and impact over time.

This is an urgent time. The devastations of climate change are real and the context just got a lot more difficult. Now more than ever, we are being called to show up powerfully, boldly, lovingly and effectively for justice. If elected UUA President, I will be focused on articulating the clear and compelling calling of our faith for this time and developing the resources, financial and otherwise, to meet this moment.