

Climate Ribbon Ritual at Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough
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Introduction

Thank you for welcoming me and my husband Scott here today. I know that you prioritize being a welcoming community and, as a newcomer, I would like to say that I definitely feel that!

Today, I am going to lead you through a modified version of the Climate Ribbon Ritual. This ritual was developed by artists and faith leaders for the People's Climate March in New York 2014 where over 300,000 people came. At the time, it was the largest march for climate. Those numbers have been exceeded by the youth climate marches of this past year. The ritual has been used throughout the States and Canada as a way of facilitating conversations about the climate crisis. I have modified the climate ribbon ritual to fit your format for this service but it can be changed and used in different ways.

You can learn more about the original ritual if you go online. And you will see that the beautiful tree that my husband made for this ritual is a small replica of a gorgeously crafted wooden tree made for the original event.

I learned about the ritual in the fall of 2018 when I attended the Parliament of World Religions which is an international conference that was held in Toronto. This conference happened a month after the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's report which said that drastic change needs to happen in the next 12 years in order to reduce the worst impacts of climate change and keep warming below 1.5 °C. One of the main themes of the conference was climate justice and many speakers addressed the many ways we can respond.

The Climate Ribbon Ritual can be used to open up conversations and this - having conversations - is one of the actions that climate scientists like Katherine Hayhoe recommend as an important way to respond to the crisis. And I know your community is already talking about this because I looked at your web page and saw that Julie has spoken about it, and that some of you are involved in the Kitchen Table conversations project.

So as I came away from the conference, and thought about my upcoming retirement, I wondered how I could be active in promoting climate justice and I thought that the Climate Ribbon Ritual might be a good way to do that. Since then, I have visited several other religious communities in Peterborough and done presentations and facilitated conversations about climate justice and environmental action.

A bit about my background and how it led me to this. I have always had a strong connection to nature and a deep concern for environmental issues. I worked in outdoor education in parks across Canada, and then taught science at high school. Partway

through my career, I decided I wanted to spend more time having conversations with students about what matters most, and how to put that into practice – conversations that I hear you folks having every time I come here. I got qualified to teach the social sciences and then studied for my Masters of Ministry and Spirituality with a Diploma in Spiritual Direction at U of Toronto. A spiritual director, or spiritual companion, as I prefer to call it, creates space to help people think deeply about their values and priorities. I moved from teaching science and used the skills from I learned as a Spiritual Companion with my students in the classes that I went on to teach in World Religions and ethics.

Climate chaos challenges us to re-evaluate our values and priorities, to think about what matters most to us, and to figure out how live our lives so that we can limit warming to 1.5°C. It bring up difficult conflicts as we realize that we can't do things the way we have always done things. We have to re-evaluate so many everyday actions and choices that we made before our awareness of the climate crisis and climate justice.

Part One of the Climate Ribbon Ritual

The Climate Ribbon Ritual is based on one question....*“What do you love and hope to never lose to climate chaos?”* Please take a moment to think about your response to this question.

You will be given a coloured ribbon which is being re-used from a ritual that was done previously with some teenagers. You can see their response to this question. Please write your answer on the coloured ribbon and then share your answer with one or two people beside you. We will collect your ribbons and place them on the tree.

Can you call out a word or two that describes your emotional reaction to climate change?

Many of us experience a deep sadness and grief and anxiety and fear as we see the changes happening around us. A couple of names have appeared recently for these feelings.... eco-grief and eco-anxiety. This sadness, grief, despair, hopelessness and fear can be paralyzing. There is a meme on Facebook that says, “I can read the news or I can look after my mental health.” That really resonates with me. But absolute denial might not keep warming to below 1.5°C. Although some days, we need a bit of what is called, “functional denial,” which allows us to get out of bed and get on with our day.

What I want to do with the rest of the time is share some ideas that may help you to cope with the reality of the climate crisis.

1. Acknowledge your grief and sadness and fear

Take some time to acknowledge these feelings, and recognize where they are coming from, and what the crisis means for you. Talk to other people. Don't be in this alone.

But be mindful of how much space these feelings take up - I remember the character, Morrie, in Tuesdays with Morrie – a story about a man who had ALS. He coped by allowing himself ten minutes a day to fully feel his grief and sadness and anger and fear. And then he made a conscious choice to turn his attention to things that were life-giving.

Use these feelings to understand what matters most to you in this crisis and how want to respond. Where you want to put your time and energy and your skills? How much can you do? What do you feel called to do? There are many different ways of responding.

And don't be ashamed that you can't be a "climate saint". We live within a system which needs to be changed, and that is changing, but we can't be perfect nor can we do everything. You probably want to take a hot shower tomorrow, and go home to a warm house. You are likely going to use some fossil fuels for that. Keep in mind that historically, it has taken 70 years to shift from one source of energy to another – from wood to coal, from coal to oil. The system is changing and it takes time. None of us can do it all.

Can you use these feelings to push you out of your comfort zone to do some of the hard things – either personally or politically? Can they help you to reduce your own carbon footprint by

- eating less meat, driving less, flying less, buying less?
- buying carbon offsets? (BTW, the NHL players association decided to buy carbon offsets for all their travel),
- getting more politically involved? writing letters or visiting politicians?
- having more conversations with people that we might not usually talk to about this?

From big to small actions, it all matters. There are different levers of change that we can push on to bring about change. And it is important to be aware that individual action will not be enough. The system needs to change and the lever that will help bring that change about involves the government changing policies.

If you feel yourself getting overwhelmed by the bad news. Try to remember that we do not know, for sure, what the future holds. Rebecca Solnit, in her book, *Hope in the Darkness*, wrote, "We inhabit a future that was unimaginably dark a few decades ago, when people found the end of the world easier to envision than the impending changes in everyday roles, thoughts, practices that not even the wildest science fiction anticipated." I never could have imagined the momentum that has built around this issue in the last year and I can't be certain that I know where things will be in another year, or in another decade.

2. Self care

Practices such as meditation and mindfulness and gratitude and spending time in nature can help to calm the fear centres of our brains. All of these practices are linked

with better physical and mental health outcomes. We need to take the time for the self-care as we live through this crisis.

3. Connect and talk about the climate crisis

Talk to friends, family, neighbors. Build community of people who care and share your feelings. Build resiliency. Be part of the momentum that is building and get ideas about what you can do to reduce your impact and pressure the government so we can limit warming to 1.5°C. Be comforted in the knowledge that many others care very much and are actively trying to figure out what can be done.

But I feel like I am preaching to the choir here. I have been watching your community this fall and I see how much you do to create opportunities for conversation, connection, community and resiliency.

4. Look for the good news. There is a lot of it and we don't hear enough of it. This was probably my biggest take-away from the Parliament of World Religions. I am surrounded by so many people who really care and who are re-evaluating their values and priorities in light of this situation.

Paul Hawken has curated a list of at least over 130,000 small, grassroots decentralized organizations that are found all around the world in every country, every city, and include every race, tribe and ethnic group. They are all working on climate change and social justice issues as these are intricately connected. He calls it the human immune response to heal the earth. I am providing a hand out with some resources and his 5 minute video is called *Blessed Unrest*. You won't walk away from watching this feeling like you are the only one who cares.

And it's probably helpful to remember Margaret Mead's famous saying: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

The handout that I have provided includes lots of good news including some of the following:

- The Union of Concerned Scientists presented a 5 step plan for keeping the warming under 1.5°C
- Paul Hawken has written a book, *Drawdown*, on the 100 solutions to address climate change.

And keep in mind the progress and good news of the last year alone. I remember canoeing on a very hot day in the summer of 2018 and feeling so much despair. It felt like nothing was being done, and no one cared. And in the 15 months since then, the kids have started going out onto the streets in climate marches around the world and millions of people have attended. I attended a march in Peterborough during the spring of 2019 where there were 40 people and 5 months later, I attended another one where there were over 700 people gathered in Millenium Park. The momentum is building. We are seeing governments declare climate emergencies, businesses ignore the inaction

of governments and commit to reduce their carbon pollution, banks are divesting from fossil fuels, massive re-forestation efforts are happening all around the world, and “regular folks’ are lying down on the pavement in downtown cores around the world as part of Extinction Rebellion demonstrations. Just the other day, I learned that the band, Cold Play, won’t do any more concerts until they can figure out how to make them carbon neutral. So I would recommend that you find ways to hear the good news. We are surrounded by many people all around the world who are making this a priority. I have included a few recommendations of blogs, Tedtalks and podcasts, etc on a resource handout.

Part Two of the Climate Ritual Take a minute and think about how are you coping with the reality of climate change? Perhaps your answer connects to something I have shared today, or something different.

Please answer the questions by writing a word or a phrase on the white ribbon.

Question

1. What helps you to cope with climate chaos?

In conclusion, I would like to share a poem. Poetry, especially that by Mary Oliver in her new book *Devotions*, and by Wendell Berry helps me deal with emotional reaction that I have to the climate crisis.

The Peace of Wild Things

When despair for the world grows in me and I wake in the night at the least sound in fear of what my life and my children’s lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things who do not tax their lives with forethought of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

Wendell Berry

View a list of resources here: <http://peterboroughunitarian.ca/files/2019/11/Some-Resources-on-Climate-Change-fall-2019.pdf>