

Torah, Pope Francis, & Crisis Inspire 300+ Rabbis to Call for Climate Action

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The Shalom Report

PHILADELPHIA – More than 300 rabbis — inspired by the climate crisis, the Torah’s call for a Sabbatical Year of releasing the Earth from overwork, and the impending Papal Encyclical on the climate crisis — have joined their voices in the *Rabbinic Letter on the Climate Crisis* — a call to action to prevent further climate-fuelled disasters and work toward eco-social justice.

The Rabbinic Letter was initiated by seven leading rabbis from a broad swathe of American Jewish life: *Rabbi Elliot Dorff*, rector of the American Jewish University; *Rabbi Arthur Green*, rector of the (Boston) Hebrew College rabbinical school; *Rabbi Peter Knobel*, former president, Central Conference of American Rabbis; *Rabbi Mordechai Liebling*, director of the Social Justice Organizing Program at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College.; *Rabbi Susan Talve*, renowned spiritual leader of Central Reform Congregation, St. Louis; *Rabbi Arthur Waskow*, director of The Shalom Center; and *Rabbi Deborah Waxman*, president of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College and Movement. They were joined by *Rabbi Irving (Yitz) Greenberg*, a leader of the Orthodox community.

More than 300 rabbis from across the denominational spectrum signed in support of the call in less than two weeks, and their numbers continue to grow.

The seven initiators wrote their colleagues explaining:

“Our decision to do this now arose out of our learning that Pope Francis will be issuing an encyclical to the Church and the World that will address the climate crisis in the context of worsening concentrations of wealth and power and worsening degradations of poverty.

“We believe it is important for the spiritual leadership of the Jewish people to speak to the Jewish people as a whole and to the world on this deep crisis in the history of the human species and of many other life-forms on our planet.”

Although the immediate inspiration for the Rabbinic Letter was news that Pope Francis would be sending out an encyclical on the climate crisis, many of the initiators, other rabbis, and many others in the Jewish community have been working on issues of climate change for at least a decade; and the Rabbinic Letter speaks in the language of Torah and draws on the deepest teachings of Jewish text and tradition.

Pope Francis’ encyclical on the climate crisis will be published to the world on June 18. He has entitled it “*Laudato Sii*” [“May the Creator Be Praised”], a phrase from St. Francis of Assisi’s famous prayer celebrating Brother Sun, Sister Moon, and all the other aspects of God’s Creation.

The 333 rabbis speak out especially against certain extremely destructive ways of extracting fossil fuels, including fracking, off-shore drilling in the Arctic, oil trains, and the disproportionate impacts of these practices upon low-income communities and communities of color.

The call also notes America’s impact upon other more vulnerable nations, stating, “America is one of the most intense contributors to the climate crisis, and must therefore take special responsibility to act. Though we in America are already vulnerable to climate chaos, other countries are even more so — and Jewish caring must take that truth seriously.”

The rabbis point out that among these especially vulnerable countries is the State of Israel, which faces the climate crisis impact of massive desertification and rising seas there.

The call suggests that Jewish households, congregations, and institutions move their money away from purchasing their electric power from coal, and purchase wind power instead; and that they shift investments away from fossil fuel producers, which it calls “Carbon Pharaohs” that endanger human beings and bring plagues upon the Earth. It calls on households, congregations, and denominations to move their money instead into life-giving enterprises, including sources of renewable energy.

And it urges that an ancient Torah teaching that the Jewish people assemble every seventh year during the harvest festival of Sukkot be carried out this fall with public assemblies to explore Jewish and multireligious responses to the climate crisis, pointing toward demanding strong governmental action at the international conference on climate due to take place in Paris this coming December.

See the full text and list of signers of the Rabbinic Letter [HERE](#).