



What deeper reflection are we called to in our time? Why?

“If not now, then when?”

By Mary Minette, ELCA director for environmental education and advocacy

“Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep.”

--Romans 13:11

In early January 2013, the National Climatic Data Center announced that [2012 was the hottest year](#) ever recorded in the United States. A week or so later, a group of federal agencies ranging from the Department of Defense to the Environmental Protection Agency released a draft assessment, requested by Congress, of the impacts of climate change on our country. The executive summary of the draft [National Climate Assessment](#) notes:

Climate change is already affecting the American people. Certain types of weather events have become more frequent and/or intense, including heat waves, heavy downpours, and, in some regions, floods and droughts. Sea level is rising, oceans are becoming more acidic, and glaciers and arctic sea ice are melting. These changes are part of the pattern of global climate change, which is primarily driven by human activity.

Both of these announcements followed a year that contained a remarkable number of extreme weather events throughout the U.S., ranging from wildfires in western states, to a significant summer drought that devastated crops throughout the Midwest, and culminating with Hurricane Sandy. Sandy was a relatively weak but slow-moving storm that hit the most populated section of the

East Coast and destroyed dozens of coastal communities because [rising sea levels](#), attributable to climate change, made tidal flooding even more destructive.

Last month, I was in Doha, Qatar, for the latest round of United Nations climate change negotiations as part of a delegation from the ACT Alliance, an international network of Christian humanitarian assistance and development organizations, including the ELCA. While the climate negotiations were underway, [Typhoon Bopha](#) killed more than 1,000 people in the Philippines, a tragedy that moved that nation's lead negotiator to make an [impassioned plea](#) for global action to the national representatives assembled in Doha:

*I'm making an urgent appeal, not as a negotiator, not as a leader of my delegation, but as a Filipino. I appeal to the whole world. I appeal to the leaders from all over the world to open our eyes to the stark reality that we face. I appeal to ministers. The outcome of our work is not about what our political masters want. It is about what is demanded of earth's seven billion people. I appeal to all: Please, no more delays, no more excuses. Please, let Doha be remembered as the place where we found the political will to turn things around, and let 2012 be remembered as the year the world found the courage to do so, to find the courage to take responsibility for the future we want. I ask all of us here, **if not us, then who? If not now, then when? If not here, then where?***

But in spite of the escalating evidence that climate change is our new reality, in spite of the suffering of people around the world and calls for action from the small island nations and least-developed countries that are already feeling climate impacts, [the Doha talks bore little fruit](#). At a time when the evidence is mounting, and when it is becoming clear that even the wealthiest nations will not escape the impacts of rising sea levels, rising temperatures, and more extreme weather, global leaders did little to move forward.

Negotiators in Doha did take steps toward a single, streamlined negotiating process that is intended to result in a new global climate treaty by the end of 2015, which will take effect in 2020. But what countries do in the next three years, and the positions they take as the treaty begins to take shape, will have a significant impact on the world that we leave our children. Major economies, including the U.S. and the European Union (EU), failed to make significant

new financial pledges in Doha to help less industrialized countries adopt cleaner energy technologies and help the poorest and most vulnerable countries adapt to the impacts of climate change. Major emitters of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, including the U.S., the EU and China, also failed to make any new pledges to reduce their emissions in the years leading up to a new global agreement in 2020.

In light of this failure of political will, it would be easy to lose hope, to say “what can I do on my own?” when leaders fail to act. In truth, each of us can do something to help prepare ourselves and our communities to withstand what is already happening. If you and your congregation engage in anti-hunger or anti-poverty work, you are already helping to build more resilience to climate disasters in your own community. If you donate to [ELCA World Hunger](#) to support international or domestic anti-hunger programs or give your support to [Lutheran Disaster Response](#), you are also helping your neighbors, particularly those with few resources, to recover from weather disasters and build communities that are better able to withstand extreme weather events. Acting in your home, congregation and community to conserve energy, to push for more renewable energy sources, to better care for God’s earth through recycling or carpooling or other collective actions, is also part of what is needed to address climate change and prevent more extreme weather in the future.

But we also need action on a global scale, and for that we need to work together to build a movement, urging our leaders to come together and do what is necessary to prevent the worst impacts of a warming world from becoming reality.

As I noted in my [piece this past November](#), the road to prevention and resilience is difficult, but we have the means to navigate it. Christians believe we are called to care for our neighbors and care for God’s creation. Many of us understand that we have a moral obligation to leave behind a world that will sustain future generations. As Paul notes, we know what time it is — it is time for all of us to wake from sleep, to see what must be done, and to act and urge others to act for a more just and sustainable future for all.



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