



## TASK FORCE ON CARBON NEUTRALITY

# Seeking carbon reduction with honesty, prayer and empathy

*By Andrea Wilhelm*

I live in Alberta, ground zero of the fossil fuel industry in Canada. Here the calls for carbon reduction are most difficult to make and may sound most disingenuous, hypocritical, or out of touch, since many people's livelihoods are built on the industry, and indeed many have gotten wealthy from it. Blue and white collar participants in the industry have viewed their jobs as a blessing from God. Many of them sit in church pews on Sundays, including Lutheran pews.

So how to speak about and work on carbon neutrality in Alberta, and to speak with a voice of faith to people of faith?

I believe the first step is honesty. Honesty about the benefits people have reaped from the industry. That includes everyone, whether our jobs are in it or not. Most of us heat our homes with fossil fuels and use fossil fuels for transportation. Even our food and other products use fossil fuels to be produced and shipped. Honesty means admitting we are all participants and benefactors, we are all complicit. In a way, we are all trapped.

That means I cannot speak about carbon reduction from a high horse. I have to be honest about all of the above. I am reminded of Luther's insight that each of us is saint and sinner simultaneously.

That does not mean saying or doing nothing, however. If I listen to people with empathy, I will learn that high-carbon life has also demanded sacrifices. For example, working away from home in remote camps, a breathless pace of life, feeling alienated from creation or one's own conscience, the anger or despair of one's children or grandchildren, being evacuated or even losing one's home, suffering from smoke, and so on.

So what is the way out? Is there any hope, any good news (gospel)? I propose two things:

First, even in Alberta practical and affordable low-carbon options are becoming more available. I know of two ABT churches which have put solar panels on their roofs, thus dramatically reducing their utility bills. There is at least one [organization](#) in Alberta which will help with the upfront cost. I know people, including a retired bishop, who have done solar or/and a heat pump in their homes. Yes, there are heat pumps that work in Alberta winters! Plus, heat pumps can cool homes too; no extra AC needed.

Second, there is good news for people who are trapped. We are all trapped in sin (the sinner side of us), but Jesus Christ overcame sin for us. United with him, we have access to his power. The power to love, to be compassionate, to be righteous, including in our carbon struggles.

Perhaps we need to pray about this more earnestly in our churches. In John 14, towards the end of his life, Jesus promised his fearful disciples that those who believe (trust) in him “will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father” (v. 6). That is immediately followed by “I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it” (vv. 13-14).

Let us encourage one another. Let us share useful information. And let us ask God in Jesus’ name for strength and wisdom to reduce our carbon emissions for real, for the benefit of all humanity and creation, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. Right here in Alberta.

## LOVING OIL & GAS

I love oil and gas too.  
They have kept me warm, and moving, and fed.  
Thank you, energy workers, for making oil and gas available to so many.  
But I also love  
air and land  
water and animals and plants  
people  
and Creator of it all.  
And they tell me it’s time to change.  
And it seems to me that oil and gas too,  
have not been happy being burnt.  
They have made smoke and a stink.  
Being burnt - perhaps that’s not their purpose.  
Perhaps we love oil and gas better  
by leaving them in the ground, for the most part.  
And save them for rare uses, like diamonds.  
Sorry oil and gas, for corrupting you.  
Sorry air and land  
water and animals and plants  
people  
Creator  
for all the waste and stink and smoke.  
Much of it is avoidable.  
I want to change.  
Friends, will you change with me?

*(I wrote this about 2019 in response to “I love oil & gas” signs in Alberta.)*

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*Note: This is the first in a series of reflections by the ELCIC Task Force on Carbon Neutrality. The reflections are available at <https://elcic.ca/climate-justice/task-force-on-carbon-neutrality/>, along with other resources – including the Green House Gas (GHG) Inventory Calculator for Congregations.*