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An Open Letter On Renewing Hope, for the Future: Divest From the Nuclear Power Industry

by David Ratcliffe

To:

- [Rev. Jim Antal](#), Minister & President, [Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ](#)
- [Rev. Margaret Bullitt-Jonas](#), [Grace Episcopal Church](#), Amherst, MA
- Sister Patricia A. Daly, Dominican nun
- Rev. Fletcher Harper, [Episcopal priest](#), [executive director of GreenFaith](#), a New Jersey interreligious environmental organization
- [Rev. Fred Small](#), senior minister, [First Parish Cambridge – Unitarian Universalist](#)
- [Rabbi Arthur Waskow](#), Director, [Shalom Center, Philadelphia](#)

and:

- [Rabbi Michael Lerner](#), Author, Rabbi, [congregation Beyt Tikkun](#), editor of [Tikkun magazine](#)
- [Sister Janet Mock, CSJ](#), Executive Director, [Leadership Conference of Women Religious](#)
- [Terri Johns](#), Global Ministries Program Manager, [Friends \(Quakers\) United Meeting](#)
- [Bishop William E. Swing](#), President and Founder of the [United Religious Initiative](#)
- [Dr. Susan Goekler](#), Chair, [Commission on Social Witness](#), [Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations](#)
- [Rev. John I. Jenkins, C.S.C.](#), President, [University of Notre Dame](#)
- [Mary Elizabeth Moore, Ph.D.](#), Dean, [Boston University School of Theology](#)
- [Greg Sterling](#), Dean, [Yale Divinity School](#)
- [Richard B. Hays](#), Dean, [Duke University Divinity school](#)
- [Margaret M. Mitchell](#), Dean, [University of Chicago Divinity School](#)
- [David N. Hempton](#), Dean, [Harvard Divinity School](#)
- [Mark S. Massa, S.J.](#), Dean, [Boston College School of Theology and Ministry](#)
- [Rev. Dr. Serene Jones](#), President, [Union Theological Seminary](#)

SUMMARY:

This is an open letter to leaders and groups in the religious community in the United States inviting your participation to expand a campaign currently being mounted to divest from fossil fuel companies to also include the nuclear power industry as well. There are good reasons for this expanded action. In addition to the astronomical releases of radioactive isotopes from such calamities as Chernobyl and Fukushima, there are also the medical and public health consequences of all aspects of the [nuclear fuel cycle](#). Long-lived radionuclides being generated in nuclear reactors did not exist on Earth, in any appreciable quantities, during the entire evolution of complex life. [There is no safe dose or exposure to radiation](#). It is [not humanly possible to achieve 100% containment of these man-made radioactive particles](#) that burn at the atomic level. An expanding campaign directed by elements of the religious community to divest from the nuclear power industry – which necessarily includes nuclear weapons since their production derives from radioactive materials generated in nuclear reactors – embodies a moral, life-affirming imperative of the highest order. It is an action for both peace and greater equity: safer energy sources and more efficient products and lifestyles will bring multiple advantages, for us now and for the planet and its climate we leave for future generations.

THE LETTER:

Dear Rev. Antal, Rev. Bullitt-Jones, Sister Daly, Rev. Harper, Rev. Small, Rabbi Waskow, and a wider community of religious leaders and groups,

I read with great interest the June 30th article in the *Boston Globe*, "[More churches calling for divestment from fossil fuel](#)," that leads off with:

“A growing number of mainline Protestant churches in New England are calling upon their denominations to divest from fossil fuel companies in an effort to cast unlimited coal, oil, and gas production as immoral as well as environmentally unsustainable.”

I felt a deep sense of fresh hope learning of your collective efforts to engage people in an expanding conversation involving living in harmony with all of creation on Earth.

“The realities of climate change require prophetic and strategic action by people of faith seeking to be faithful to the everlasting covenant God has made with us, with every living creature and with all future generations ...”

The choices our species continues to make—based on the belief that we can produce and use unlimited energy from non-renewable resources—express a profound disconnect, [as Joseph Chilton Pearce articulates](#), between human intellect, that asks only “Is it possible” and human intelligence, which asks “It is appropriate?” As you clearly understand, the result of daily choices we make about our energy usage demand our collective attention and wits to change course, sooner or later, away from the dead-end toxic and depleted future we are currently pursuing. And, as many do understand, “later” is coming up ever more rapidly on “sooner.”

“Just as I wouldn’t want to be making money off tobacco or military operations, I don’t want to be making money off fossil fuel,” said the Rev. Margaret Bullitt-Jonas of Grace Episcopal Church in Amherst, a veteran climate activist. “It is one of the only businesses I can think of that, if successful in carrying out their business plan, they are going to essentially be killing life as it has evolved on this planet.”

I urge you all to include another non-renewable energy industry in this conversation that is even more toxic to all life on Earth. The nuclear power industry exacts staggering costs on the integrity of the planetary gene pool, both through standard operation of the 400-plus reactors globally as well as radioactive contamination from the ongoing catastrophes at [Chernobyl](#) and now [Fukushima](#).

In addition to the astronomical releases of radioactive isotopes from such calamities there are also the medical and public health consequences of the entire [nuclear fuel cycle](#): from the [mining](#) and [enrichment](#) of uranium, its transport, operations in nuclear reactors and routine standard operating procedures [that release radioactive isotopes in both gaseous and liquid forms](#), as well as reprocessing of so-called spent fuel, disposal of radioactive trash, and the proliferation of fissile materials employed to produce nuclear weapons.

Please examine the accompanying [Supporting Documentation](#) concerning the bottom-line consequences our species must confront and deal with if we are to not condemn the future of all life on Earth to the compounding pernicious health impacts of concentrations of man-made long-lived radionuclides almost below human recognition and comprehension.

Perhaps in your divestment campaign you have heard recent pronouncements about how nuclear power is a viable, safe alternative and the “best fit,” scalable energy source to replace fossil fuels. This claim ignores two primary elements that cannot be evaded or dismissed: toxicity and containment. As explained [in the attached documentation](#), the results of the nuclear fuel cycle produce long-lived radionuclides that cannot be extinguished or suffocated because they burn at the atomic level. Damage to the biosphere and its gene pool is toxic down to the level of one nuclear track through the nucleus of one living cell. There is no safe dose or exposure to radiation. Furthermore, guaranteeing one hundred percent containment of the mass of radioactive isotopes created and generated within this industry—some of which will last for hundreds of thousands of years—is not humanly possible. As the history of leaks and spills makes clear.

Is it our own hubris that seeks to justify maintaining the level of energy use our country has grown accustomed to in only the last 100-plus years, while obdurately choosing to ignore the consequences of what late historian and social critic Richard Grossman termed, “[the promises and strategies of M-O-R-E](#)”? Our species appears to be in its adolescent phase: exhibiting wild, sometimes dangerous and erratic behavior without sufficient understanding to accurately gauge the consequences of choices we are making. To survive will require re-discovering how to honor and serve Life’s needs without becoming trapped in patterns of thought and the pursuit of profit that exclude seeing the interrelatedness and interdependence of all things.

Just as there is no ‘off’ switch with nuclear power, there is absolutely no justification for saddling thousands of generations yet unborn with what we have been forced to accept in this epoch. The entire nuclear fuel cycle and industry in toto creates astronomical quantities of long-lived radionuclides that did not exist on Earth prior to three human generations ago. Consider how the consequences of what we are doing in this epoch will last, for all intents and purposes, into eternity.



Photo: Søren Solkær Starbird
Into Eternity © Magic Hour Films

“Once upon a time, man learned to master fire. Something no other living creature had done before him. Man conquered the entire world. One day he found a new fire. A fire so powerful that it could never be extinguished. Man reveled in the thought that he now possessed the powers of the universe. Then in horror, he realized that his new fire could not only create but also destroy. Not only could it burn on land but inside all living creatures; inside his children, the animals, all crops. Man looked around for help, but found none. And so he built a burial chamber deep in the bowels of the earth, a hiding place for the fire to burn, into eternity.”

—Michael Madsen: Writer, Director, Narrator, [Into Eternity](#)

Thank you for your time and consideration of the consequences of the continued generation of more man-made long-lived radionuclides. An expanding campaign directed by elements of the religious community to divest from the nuclear power industry – which necessarily includes nuclear weapons since their production derives from radioactive materials generated in nuclear reactors – embodies a moral, life-affirming imperative of the highest order.

For the Earth, the children, and all that follow us here.

Sincerely,
David Ratcliffe
editor and publisher
[rat haus reality press](#)
45 Bexley Road
Roslindale, Massachusetts

Endorsed By:

- **Janette D. Sherman, M.D.** – [Author](#), Contributing Editor, [Chernobyl - Consequences of the Catastrophe for People and the Environment](#), Senior author: Alexey Yablokov, [pub. by N.Y. Acad. Sciences, 2009](#)
- **Helen Caldicott, M.D.** – Founding President, Physicians for Social Responsibility; President, [The Helen Caldicott Foundation for a Nuclear Free Planet](#)
- **Roger Herried** – Archivist, Abalone Alliance Clearinghouse, [The Energy Net](#)
- **Lynn Howard Ehrle** – Chair, International Science Oversight Board
- **Elisabet Sahtouris, Ph.D.** – Evolution Biologist & Futurist, [sahtouris.com](#)
- **Maria Gilardin** – Broadcast Journalist, Producer [TUCradio.org](#)
- **Thomas H. Greco, Jr.** – community economist, educator, author of *The End of Money and the Future of Civilization*. Beyond Money: [beyondmoney.net](#)
- **Sr. Megan Rice SHCJ** – presently in pre-sentencing detention for being convicted for direct action calling for transformation *now* of the Oak Ridge Y-12 Uranium Processing Facility aimed at modernizing and enhancing the destructive capability of existing thermo-nuclear and other warheads stockpiled in the U.S. and around the world, with capability of producing up to 80 plutonium “pits” annually in contravention of the [NNPT](#), and other International Treaties and Laws. (The [Transform Now Plowshares](#) Movement to call for alternative projects which can create life-enhancing economic, environmental and sustaining, societal structures for the Planet).
- **Joanna Macy, Ph.D.** – Author, Teacher, Activist, Co-Founder, [Nuclear Guardianship Project](#)
- **Egan O’Connor** – Archivist, [Committee for Nuclear Responsibility](#)
- **Bishop Thomas Gumbleton** – [Archdiocese of Detroit](#)