

READING – JAN. 10, 2015 – UU GREEN LEADERS, RRUUC, BETHESDA, MD

COMMIT2RESPOND is a coalition of UUs and other people of faith and conscience working for climate justice. It is grounded in environmental *justice* rather than environmental *ism*.

- *Justice* means recognizing that the peoples who contribute the least to climate change are the ones suffering the most because of it.
- *Justice* means understanding that oppressions are inextricably linked and that the values that have resulted in the degradation of human groups through slavery, colonization, genocide, and mass incarceration are the same values that are leading to the destruction of Earth.
- *Justice* means grounding our work in the needs and leadership of marginalized peoples who are impacted by and fighting climate change.
- *Justice* means working in relationship and partnership, always seeking out community-based solutions that challenge the status quo rather than individual actions that only uphold the power structures and values that are destroying our world.

Now, the words of Frances Beinecke, President of the Natural Resources Defense Council, from her 2014 book *The Word We Create: A Message of Hope for a Planet in Peril*:

“We in the environmental movement, the social justice movement, the movement for a more sustainable world, the movement to treat our natural systems as the most important physical asset we share and to care for those systems as if our lives depended upon them, we are embarked, all of us, on the mission of our lifetime. We hold, each of us, in the palm of our hand, more influence than any other people at any other time in any other place in the history of the world. The positions we press, the decisions we make, and the actions we take will determine the fate, not only of our future, but also of the future of the generations to come. Will we consign them to a world of mounting destruction and waste, a place that grows more devoid of life and more desolate of spirit with each measure of dirty fuel we consume, or will we grant them as our crowning legacy the promise of a brighter tomorrow, a world where the natural

systems we depend upon are honored, protected, and cherished, as if we were counting on them for our last breath of air?

I believe we'll affirm our destiny, I believe we will summon our strength. I believe we'll rise to this challenge, as we have before, stand up, speak out, and be heard. Even when we count our gains in inches, I believe we will stay the course, focus on solutions until by degrees we succeed, certain that there's no turning back to a world that pits power of the corporate balance sheet against the well being of the planet, its people, and all it supports.

I believe in that vision. I've lived it. I've seen it at work. I know how far it has brought us, and I know there is a new generation of environmental champions pushing for even more progress with all the restless urgency, optimism, and faith of a determined people united for change. It won't happen overnight, or in a straight line, or in some grand bargain that can expunge from our future the mistakes of our past. But it must happen over time, and now is the time for us to begin. We have it within us to rally around this great goal and to bend the resources and summon the will to achieve it. That is what we have always done in this country, whenever challenge and opportunity have knocked, not only for ourselves, but for those who will one day inherit and be called on to watch over the world we create.