

## **Center for Climate Justice and Faith: Linking Ecological Healing to Racial and Economic Justice\***

The Center empowers leaders to cultivate moral, spiritual, and practical power for the work of climate justice in communities of faith and in collaboration with others.

### **The Center's Programmatic Branches**

- Certification as a Green-Justice seminary – certification earned in five areas of seminary life:
  - Curriculum
  - Liturgy, Ritual and Worship
  - Buildings and Grounds
  - Community Life
  - Public Leadership
- Concentration in Climate Justice and Faith (for M.Div. and MA. students)<sup>1</sup>
- Curricular innovations
  - Teaching and learning at the nexus of race, class, gender, and Earth
  - Equipping leaders for faith-based social transformation
- Certificate in Climate Justice and Faith (serving the global Lutheran communion; for non-degree participants) in collaboration with:
  - Lutheran World Federation
  - ELCA World Hunger
  - Lutherans Restoring Creation
- Course/training: Community Organizing for Climate Justice as Love in Action (for non-degree participants) in collaboration with:
  - ELCA Organizing for Mission Network
- Public programming in collaboration with local, national, and global networks
- Possible next branch: Cloud of Witnesses (Circle of Voices from Front-line Communities)
- Possible next branch: Annual Climate Justice Activist-Scholar or Activist-Artist in Residence
- Possible next branch: Circle of Affiliated Activist-Scholars and Activist-Artists

### **The Center's Roots**

- God's liberating healing love at work in the world.
- The Spirit-led, Gospel-grounded, truth-telling, courageous impulse of re-formation at the heart of Lutheranism.

### **The Center's Fruits**

- Seminary graduates and certificate graduates will be prepared to cultivate moral, spiritual, and practical power for the work of climate justice in communities of faith and in collaboration with others.
- Congregations and synods in the U.S. will be better equipped to fulfill their baptismal vocation to "seek justice and peace in all the Earth" in the age of climate crisis linked to racial and economic violence.
- Communities around the globe who are served by seminary and certificate graduates will be better equipped to heed Jesus' call to love neighbor by working toward climate justice.
- Students will be attracted to PLTS.
- CLU will advance its commitments to:

- Work toward racial justice and prepare students for doing so
- educate leaders for a global society who are strong in character and judgment, confident in their identity and vocation, and committed to service and justice.
- PLTS will play a leadership role in the growing efforts of the ELCA and the broader church to be a force for environmental justice and creation care.
- Local secular efforts to address climate justice may benefit from engaging with gifts that grow from spiritual traditions.<sup>2</sup>
- PLTS/CLU will witness to the world that the church is relevant, justice-seeking, Creation-caring, and empowering.

**The Center's Sustenance:** A tree cannot exist and bear fruit without, water, sunshine, soil, and love.

- Donors whose values, hopes, and intentions align with this Center, and who enable it to thrive, and bear rich fruit
- Partner Congregations and Synods
- Granting organizations

**\* Crucial Clarification:** *"Climate justice" holds that the climate crisis is inherently a crisis of racial, gender, and economic inequity. The humans suffering first and foremost the ravages of climate change are disproportionately the world's people of color and economically poor people. Thus, climate justice weds efforts to address climate change with efforts toward racial and economic justice.*

## Stages

Stage One (already accomplished or underway)

- Certification as a Green-Justice seminary
- Concentration in Climate Justice and Faith (for M.Div. and MA. students)
- Curriculum innovations
- Public programming in collaboration with local, national, and global networks

Stage Two (planning in progress; launch dates set)

- Certificate in Climate Justice and Faith in collaboration with LWF, ELCA, LRC.
- Course/Training: Community Organizing for Climate Justice as Love in Action

Stage Three (exploring)

- Two internship sites for students in the Climate Justice and Faith Concentration
- Possible next branch: Cloud of Witnesses (Circle of Voices from Front-line Communities)
- Possible next branch: Annual Climate Justice Activist-Scholar or Activist-Artist in Residence
- Possible next branch: Circle of Affiliated Activist-Scholars and Activist-Artists

## WHY a Center for Climate Justice and Faith at PLTS? And Why Now?

**Racial and Economic Justice:** Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary has long been on the forefront of linking faith in Jesus Christ to the quest of social justice. Today, the climate crisis is a ferocious engine of racial injustice and economic injustice. The people ravaged or killed by climate change (who will measure in the hundreds of millions) are and will be disproportionately people of color, indigenous people, and economically impoverished people – here in the United States and the around the globe -- while those who cause climate change are primarily the world's high consumers. Data shows that higher percentages of Black and Latinx people in the US are concerned about climate change than are white people. To allow climate change to go unchecked is to say "Black lives do not matter."

**Creation Care:** Our moment in time is breathtaking...pivotal. Today's adults and young adults will determine whether climate catastrophe in its worst forms will be averted. Lutherans claim that God

created a world that is *tov* (Hebrew word translated as “good” in Genesis, but more specifically a good that is life-generating). The world’s high consuming people now threaten that very *tov*, Earth’s capacity to generate and re-generate life. We have become the “un-creators.” Yet God put the human creatures, in garden Earth to “serve and preserve it” (Genesis 2:15), and as a part of it; we are “dust of the ground” (Genesis 2:7). Like a tree has a purpose to heal, or house, or feed, we humans have a purpose. It includes serving and preserving God’s garden and embodying gratitude to God for it.

**The Gospel:** If we continue as unrepentant perpetrators of climate injustice and of un-creation, we obscure & betray the gospel. Lutheran traditions were born of courageous gospel-grounded resistance to power arrangements, lifeways, and beliefs that obscured or betrayed the Gospel. in the name of a dark-skinned Palestinian Jew named Jesus, we are called to no less.

**The Call:** At this testing point in human history something new is asked of humankind: to forge ways of living that build social justice wed to sustainable Earth–human relations. Where something new is asked of humankind, something new is asked of religion: to plumb the depths of our traditions for wellsprings of moral-spiritual vision, hope, wisdom, and courage, and offer these to the broader public. We, like Luther, are called to **re**-formation of church and society -- in our time, eco-justice reformation.

Lutheran traditions overflow with resources for eco-justice reformation. If Lutheran leaders do not dig deeply into the riches that Lutheranism offers for this time of crisis then those resources will go untapped. If we sit quietly within this disruptive daring legacy and do not tap it, then we withhold from God’s garden Earth and its creatures – human included -- the gifts that God has offered for 500 years through this protest-born legacy.

The Center for Climate Change and Faith carries forth PLTS’ commitment to cultivate in leaders of the church the gifts for being church in the face of this great moral-spiritual challenge of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and to do so in the gospel-grounded, re-forming, protesting, truth-telling, Spirit-led, disruptive, and daring mode that Lutheran Christians are called to embody in God’s beautiful and broken abode called Earth.

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<sup>1</sup> Students will be prepared to:

- lead congregations in developing or deepening climate justice work in their context.
- practice climate justice work as a spiritual practice, and lead others in doing so.
- recognize and address intersections of climate change with racial, economic, and gender-based inequity, and intersections of ecological well-being with racial, economic, and gender justice.
- articulate biblical, ethical, theological, and spiritual grounding for climate justice.
- articulate and employ a practical theo-ethical framework for building a more ecologically sustainable and socially equitable society.
- employ key resources of the scientific community related to climate change.
- collaborate with interfaith and community partners on climate justice.
- practice hope in the face of the climate crisis.

See: <https://www.plts.edu/programs/master-divinity/climate-justice.html>

<sup>2</sup> Many secular voices – in the science community, in the U.N., in civil society – are calling upon the religious community to play a role in the pan-human task of mitigating climate change.