

Interfaith Climate and Energy Campaign

“Let There Be Light”

AN OPEN LETTER TO U.S. AUTOMOBILE COMPANIES

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With this letter, we seek to open a new conversation about cars and their impact upon God’s creation and God’s children on earth.

We write to inform you of a gathering movement in the American religious community to establish increased vehicle fuel economy as a moral imperative for global sustainability, security, and justice. As we raise these issues in our councils, pulpits and pews, we seek candid discussions with all stakeholders to serve the common good.

We are deeply distressed by evidence that our reliance on oil, so central to the operation of the automobile, is warming the planet, contributing to the causes of war, and increasing the burden on the poor.

- Global greenhouse gas emissions are projected to increase average temperatures by 2.5 to 10.4 degrees Fahrenheit into the next century --- bringing rising seas, weather and agricultural disruptions, floods, refugees, migrating diseases and other dislocations which most harm the planet’s poor and vulnerable. The United States contributes 25% of these emissions, of which 25% comes from our passenger vehicles.
- To fuel our vehicles, the United States now imports more than 50% of its oil, almost one quarter of which comes from the Persian Gulf and from regimes which have historically been autocratic, corrupt, or violent.
- The petroleum-fueled automobiles now being built and marketed will bring disastrous pollution to peoples of developing nations and reduce access to affordable, cleaner transportation as automobiles for elites replace trains and transit for all.
- Increased fuel economy standards, after the 1970s oil embargo, led to a dramatic reduction in imported oil by nearly 50%. However, progress has been reversed since 1985 and our nation’s vehicles now have the lowest average fuel economy since 1980.

Because automobiles are having such an extraordinary global impact, choices about what cars to build raise fundamental moral issues. Automobile manufacturing now requires thinking about ethics, not just engineering, about values not just vehicles.

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We believe our Biblical scriptures and traditions point to fundamental priorities here:

Stewardship

God beholds creation as “very good” (Gen 1:31) ... calls us to “till and to tend the garden” (Gen. 2:15) ... establishes “the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you” (Gen 9:12) ... sets limits on the private use of creation’s bounties, “The Earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it” (Ps 24:1).

Justice

God calls us to “defend the poor and the orphan; do justice to the afflicted and the needy” (Ps 82:3) and consider the impact of our activities “for perpetual generations” (Gen 9:12).

Peace

Our traditions teach that human faithfulness, dignity, and the common good flourish in the order of a peaceable kingdom (Ps 104).

Over the past several years, virtually every major faith community in America --- Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Eastern Orthodox, and evangelical Christian --- has passed resolutions calling explicitly for bold policies to address climate change, energy conservation, and fuel economy with employment opportunity.

We write now to ask you in the automobile industry a more explicit question: what specific pledges --- in volume, timing, and commitments to marketing --- will you make to produce automobiles, SUVs, and pick-up trucks with substantially greater fuel economy?

To encourage discussion of these issues among religious Americans and the general public more broadly, our diverse faith groups will undertake a variety of fresh initiatives to establish greater fuel economy as a moral priority. These efforts will include programs to:

- bring the need for greater fuel economy before national and local denominational councils;
- send sermon and study materials to 100,000 congregations;
- train hundreds of clergy and lay people as spokespeople for energy conservation and fuel economy;
- publish articles on fuel economy throughout our extensive communications infrastructure in bulletins, newsletters, magazines, and media and e mail outlets;
- encourage bold efforts, nationally and locally, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from auto emissions; and,
- seek ongoing conversations with other stakeholders in the communities of labor, commerce, science, religion, and government.

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Problems of this magnitude will require time, reflection, and prudence. There are no easy solutions, but rather a variety of initiatives that we must examine together. The issue, however, is not simply technological capacity but moral commitment. To explore this dimension of our common challenge, we look forward to further ongoing dialogue.

Signed:

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