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**Revelation in a Time of Survival: Spirituality and Sustainability. A Zoom Series from Spiritual Leaders of the Greater Boston Area on Climate Change and the** **Pandemic.**

**“The Care of Creation – What we Know and What we Don’t Know”**

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My name is Rodney Petersen and I'm executive director of Cooperative Metropolitan Ministries. We're an organization that seeks to implement social justice as many of you seek to do. And we begin with an interfaith perspective on the pandemic asking religious leaders to talk about it, its relation to climate change, and the effect these events have on us as a people. We are interested in what our religious traditions can bring to the table.

Some weeks ago a friend, Sarah Mausner, came talk to me and she said she had this friend Demie who had put together a great PowerPoint on these concerns and wondered whether we could use it. The long and the short of it is that without much planning time we thought it good to proceed together.

Twenty years ago in alliance with the World Council of Churches and the Union of Concerned Scientists, Dr. Donald Conroy, then director of the North American Coalition on Religion and Ecology, brought out a book entitled *Earth at Risk*, drawing upon the example and scholarship of James Hansen, Michael McElroy, and Mary Evelyn Tucker, and other climate scientists to draw together the worlds to spirituality and science.

This series, which we're inaugurating today, grows out of the same concern for the health of the earth in these various domains. So tonight we have arranged with two people to lead our reflection: Demetrios Tonias and Demie Stratoplos.

The reason for running this series from today, September 1 until October 6, is to begin on the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation and end on Tuesday, October 6 running through St. Francis Day, October 4. We will convene different guest speakers for an hour each consecutive Tuesday from 530 to 630 in the evening.

In addition to today's proceedings, we will hear from those belonging to frequently marginalized groups as frequently coalescing around the Black Lives Matter Movement, the Muslim, Indigenous, Jewish, Catholic and Protestant communities over the course of the next six weeks. The results of our conversations will be shared with faith leaders who represent the UNEP.

Having said this, let me welcome each of you once again and just say how much it is a pleasure is to see you, whether you have your video turned on or off!

Fr. Demetri Tonias:

For the Orthodox Church September 1 marks the beginning of a new ecclesiastical year. This is the date that the festival calendar begins and the Orthodox Church embarks on a new year.

It will take its faithful to the feasts of Christmas and other celebrations to Pentecost and finally, in August, completed with the services in honor of the Virgin Mary.

And in our secular lives September 1 also marks a new beginning: the school and sports, returning from summer vacation. To Autumn belongs vocation. It is the time we put summer clothes away and bring the sweaters out of storage and look forward to the fall season and all that it has to offer, especially in New England.

In 1989 His All Holiness, the late Ecumenical Patriarch Demetrios. instituted the first day of prayer for creation to be commemorated every September 1 at the onset of the new year in the church calendar.

This selected date to pray for the environment calls to mind the first words of the creation narrative in the book of Genesis. For the Orthodox Christian consciousness, any discussion of the cosmos necessitates our looking back at the hexameron – the six days of creation in which God places humanity in a Garden of delight as stewards of everything that surrounded them.

The Creator fashioned humans according to the divine image and likeness with all the constructive and destructive power this gift entailed. The humans, however, we're not content to be like God. They wanted to be God. There's was a supreme act selfishness, in which the creatures attempted to place themselves above the Creator. Their desire was an ontological and impossibility, but nevertheless, one that necessitated institution of death because humanity was no longer in right relationship with God and the cosmos. Death protect the creation from us.

And so, humans shattered the image of God that was bequeathed to them in paradise. It was lost. Our collective journey is one in which we seek to return to Eden and the state for which we were created, where we are no longer a threat to ourselves and the rest of creation.

But first we must put ourselves in right relationship with each other and with creation. We must understand their with our godlike nature comes great responsibility. In short, we must be worthy of the creation entrusted to our care.

For this reason, the Ecumenical Patriarch instituted the Day of Prayer for Creation. For the preservation of creation is essential to our collective salvation.

The earliest Christian fingers understood that death was not so much the separation of the soul from the body as it was the separation of the soul from God.

God as the author of all creation can be discovered within nature.

This natural theology teaches that every leaf every cloud every drop of water points to the divine

Therefore, any act of violence toward nature is a selfish act of violence against God and furthers our estrangement from that which is wholly

It is in this light that is all holiness picture Bartholomew urges us to realize that the protection of the natural environment is the spiritual responsibility of each and every one of us.

Demetri Tonias: Are careful. The environment is a whole yacked in which we shed are selfish desire to be in control of all that is around us and performed the selfless act of stewardship, for which we were originally created

The distinction between image and likeness was an important one for the early Christians, the image we get at birth, but to be like God is another thing all together.

We acquire like this to the practice of godlike acts of virtue, our care for creation is an expression of such a holy virtue virtue that returns us to the glory which the first fashion humans rejected and there's selfish ambition.

Roman philosopher Seneca famously said that every new beginning come from some other beginnings and

The end of our neglect and abuse of the creation trusted to us can be the beginning of a return to paradise.

Each September 1 the Ecumenical Patriarch called all citizens of the world to begin this new season with a collective prayer of repentance for the damage. We have done to creation and a renewed commitment to care for the cosmos.

within Judaism, there is the concept of tissue and in Christianity medallia and their own way. Each expresses the idea of turning around and heading back home.

When we pray for creation begin the process of turning around and heading back home to paradise, we begin to heal the rift between ourselves and the divine we begin the journey back to the beginning back home will once again be citizens of paradise.

Thank you, Father, Dimitri.

Demie Stathoplos: Is so good to see everybody here on zoom our electronic collective miracle that allows us to connect during the pandemic.

I'm glad to see you, you who I know care for creation in so many ways. And you who like me know much about what we need to do and you who like me also know don't know much about what we need to do. I will tell you a bit about me, I'm a white middle aged middle class Unitarian Universalist who's had a chance in my varied career to meet many people with life experiences very different from mine.

Some I've met in the role of helper. Others have been helping me helping me learn to be a social worker an anti racist activist for a climate justice activist.

And many I've met as partners in the work to end depression and help our collective creation survive and thrive. In my helping role. I've met people who have come to our country from South and Central America, Africa, parts of Asia and central Europe fleeing famine war death threats torture or imprisonment.

I've learned from indigenous people about sustainable land and water practices that they've used for centuries.

I've learned from black and brown people about my unaware racism, I've learned from working poor people. What happens when the electricity goes out in the middle of a heatwave in the middle of a pandemic.

As you can tell I've been in many situations where I do not know. I didn't know how to connect how to help or sometimes even how to be with people whose life experiences were so different from mine.

I've made lots of mistakes.

I continue to make mistakes over time by listening to these voices and embracing my not knowing. I've been able to move into understanding caring and allowing myself to be led into new knowledge new actions and new connections.

Like many of you, I'm sure I've seen our society, how our society treats people at the margins and it has shaped me moved me and motivated me to take action actions for racial justice immigrant justice economic justice and climate justice.

But this weird unprecedented time has brought me to a deeper realization as well.

That we are in a profound time of not knowing. Humans have never faced an existential threat like the climate crisis.

There is so much we don't know about what to do the world we live in, has become so complex. So, interdependent with unintended consequences brimming from every action.

It's gotten difficult to tell what the next right action is should affordable housing a living wage and police reform be at the forefront of the climate movement.

How will we handle global displacement of millions of people do to shift in the climate and sea level rise.

Will reducing consumption hobble our economy and our ability to afford the climate mitigation and resilience measures, we need

So many difficult questions without clear answers. I hope in this talk tonight to touch on what we know needs to happen for us to take up this call to care for creation local specific actions will be an important contribution.

To slowing the climate crisis.

And then to make space to explore the ways in which we don't know yet how to take up this call.

And how as members and leaders of faith communities. We can sit in the not knowing

With prayer or meditation and perhaps hear small quiet voices from within from above, and from the margins to help guide us

We begin with love.

But we hold sacred. We will protect

Its father Tony has just told us, we must put ourselves in right relationship with each other and with creation.

Pope Francis wrote in his encyclical letter load auto see

St. Francis is the example part excellent of care for the vulnerable and have an integral ecology live down joyfully and authentically

He was particularly concerned for God's creation and for the poor and outcasts. He loved and was deeply loved for his joy is generous self giving his open heartedness

He shows us just how inseparable. The bond is between concern for nature justice for the poor commitment to society and interior peace.

The coronavirus pandemic, the Black Lives Matter movement, the ongoing wars in South Central and Western Asia and climate change are all inextricably linked.

By the way humans have done violence to the earth, and each other.

In the context of my Unitarian Universalist faith and it's seven principles. We've devalued the web of interdependence, to which we all belong

If ever there was a wake up call that we're all connected the pandemic is certainly brought that message home the effects of climate change aren't far behind.

Drawing on our traditions of prayer, meditation and deep listening, we can ask for guidance.

See connections across boundaries.

And assist each other to heal from the fears greed and disconnection that have led to our current situation.

We care for the earth and each other out of love.

Martha Ruth media move on. Go from Indonesia says

The way I see it, the forest or like my hair.

The water is like my blood, the sand and everything that God created on this earth. It's like a human being the same as me.

Gregorio mirrorball another indigenous activist says we're fighting for soil land food trees water birds were fighting for life.

When we take time to quiet our mind.

meditate or pray

We can notice what is happening to that which we love.

The Corona virus pandemic comes out of complicated economics societal and climate forces that expanded what markets for exotic animals in China.

Are difficult managing the virus worldwide has been the result of many factors, but there's no question that a major factor has been how much we don't know about it.

In addition to voting for leaders who believe in science and public health measures, we can pray or meditate to the wisdom to act in right relationship with each other during this difficult time.

We can listen to the heartbreak of loss resonating across our world, especially in communities of color.

The Black Lives Matter movement has recognized that black and brown people are more worried about climate change than white people because the effects of climate change are already falling disproportionately on communities of color.

Wednesday Harper, a black Atlanta based organizer puts it plainly. Nobody has to be sacrificed for the world to be better.

She goes on to say in much more profane terms that systemic racism perpetuates the myth that there isn't enough for everyone.

In addition to calling for leaders in the US to remove the ingrained systemic racism that is our legacy

We can meditate, pray and listen deeply for the wisdom and words to help release and heal the fear and greed that hold these systems in place.

wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen and Pakistan have poisoned the soil and water destroyed schools, hospitals and other infrastructure as well as killing and terrorizing generations of people

We can ask leaders to shift the resources us to develop and manufacturer weapons that perpetuate these wars.

Into efforts that mitigate the effects of climate change, racism and the pandemic.

We can pray or meditate for the release and healing of resentment fear and greed that perpetuate these wars and do violence to creation.

Things we know about mitigating climate change.

We know we need to reduce our individual carbon footprint.

The average American carbon footprint is 16 tons of CO2 per year compared with the worldwide average of four tons per year.

We need to reduce our output to an average of two tons per year by 2050 if we want to keep global temperatures from rising more than two degrees Celsius.

The drawdown project with the top 100 ways to reduce carbon in our atmosphere.

What we don't know yet is how to get everyone to prioritize these actions and how to mobilize everybody to take them.

We don't know if there will be unintended consequences to any of these actions and more deeply. We don't know what a more sustainable way of life will look like or how we will get there.

We can pray we can meditate for wisdom for new voices to lead us

And for the release of fear greed grief and disconnection that make it so hard for us to act on what we know.

The city of Newton, where I live, like many of our local communities as developed a climate action plan outlining the priority efforts, our community needs to take if we want to meet the goal of becoming carbon neutral by 2015

This graph shows that 85% of greenhouse gas emissions in Newton come from heating and cooling our homes and businesses and driving gasoline or diesel fuel vehicles largely with a single person inside them.

That is a lot

And it puts the burden of responsibility on us.

And it gives us an opportunity to act.

The main actions include switching to electric vehicles, reducing the miles driven

Installing heat pumps converting to renewables powered electricity and insulating our homes.

With the previous graph did not include his greenhouse gas emissions associated with our diet long distance travel and our purchases the consumer goods.

In short, our personal consumption.

This kind of consumption can add 20 to 40% more greenhouse gas emissions to those we already count.

Our city plan has no goals for reducing overall consumption, our leaders didn't know how to talk about this difficult topic.

Or set goals that would be acceptable to our residents.

I lead a climate Task Force at our church. Our extreme weather Response Team looks at how we can be resilient, as a community, in the face of more extreme weather events.

One project has been a map our congregants on a private Google Maps, we can see where our church neighbors live

In hopes that we can look in on each other. If the electricity should go out in a storm. The project is based on the research from a Chicago heat wave several years ago showing that people who lived in neighborhoods with good social connections survived.

Whereas others and neighborhoods without good social connections died in the heat wave

Our Climate Action Team supports people to take action through educational and motivational zoom meetings among groups of friends, neighbors book group or any other affinity group we provide information and encourage them to help each other, take action.

Our legislative team provides opportunities for people to support statewide climate legislation, guided by priorities laid out by you do mass action and mass power forward.

We're also looking at organizing faith communities across the state by district to increase our leverage in passing climate legislation.

our carbon footprint team helps people look at their personal carbon footprint and our mobilization team is on hide a hiatus during the pandemic, we hope, eventually to show up on that when the pandemic, we see

They say that faith is not knowing what the future holds, but knowing who holds the future.

As a Unitarian Universalist my personal belief doesn't attribute a distant God to be responsible for what happens next, my conception of God lives in our collective hearts and minds.

And I believe God's guidance will come out of our collective conscience.

For me, the challenge is bringing enough of us together that we can receive from each other. The wisdom of our global collective

To that end, I believe we need to listen deeply to each other and absorb the many perspectives that our global human community is bringing to the care of creation.

Why am I focusing on this idea of not knowing when there's so much we know to do

There are three reasons.

First

For the first time, humans across the globe are facing a common problem that can only be solved collectively climate change.

We've never had to solve an existential threat to humanity as a global community before the closest we've come

Are the UN climate talks and the World Health Organization pandemic response, although neither of these organizations have succeeded in bringing all countries to a common set of agreements to either problem.

To solve the climate crisis, we're being called to put aside national interests, on behalf of the greater global good

For climate change, in particular the greenhouse gas emissions of return nations far outpaced those of coordination, but it is the poor nations that will endure the larger effects on the people

We do not yet know how to build the broad Coalition's among multinational peoples.

In order to come to agreements that will benefit everybody

Second, when we set out to solve new problems. We make mistakes, lots of mistakes this pandemic is new, but we've handled others before this one the climate crisis is completely new.

Our leaders are going to make mistakes as they try to deal with the climate crisis in the US, the stakes by leaders are treated harshly, but we will need to expect and make room for the mistakes that will be made as the global community tries to mitigate and adapt to the climate crisis.

Besides embracing not knowing. We'll need to find ways to hold leaders accountable for admitting mistakes and correcting themselves without undermining their leadership.

And finally, current leaders around the world haven't been able to stop the progression of our climate crisis.

Our political leaders have failed so far in bringing us together as a global community to come to a mutual agreement and build a culture where mistakes can be made admitted and corrected.

It's time for these leaders to center new voices with new ideas on climate change.

indigenous leaders, people of color, young people and poor people are coming into the forefront of climate leadership.

We can let these voices that have been marginalized in the past. Let go of our need to control to know what's right, how to do things and welcome, not knowing as we welcome new voices into leadership.

billeted and wrote in March 2001 our religious communities are deeply important

Almost the only institutions left in our society that posit some goal, other than accumulation for our existence here on this planet.

Take good care of each other. But don't just take good care of each other, push each other a little bit to

This work has to be done fast and it has to be done lovingly and it has to be done, not only with an eye on the temperature around us.

With an eye on the temperature inside of us.

On our understanding of who we really are.

Not been we've been told, we are over and over and over again by all the images that flow through the cable or through the billboard any of the other places we have increasingly come to find our identity.

I believe that meditation and prayer will serve us in this time when we need to ground ourselves in who we really are what we truly believe and what is actually at stake.

I also believe that deeply listening to each other will allow us to heal from the fears disconnections greed and losses that we've all experienced and relieve us of the needs overconsume which we have all been programmed by the media to do

Peggy Clark rights and justice on Earth. We want to do what's right, but sometimes our desire doesn't translate into action.

And often, we're so busy with the details of our own existence. We just can't think about anything outside of the next few hours.

We want stronger communities and a healthier planet, but we don't have time to even learn about all the things we have to do to get there.

So we hope someone else will do enough for the rest of us. I don't do as much as I wish sometimes I'm embarrassed, not to be doing more but that's how we got here.

Good people not being able to get past the inertia of our individual lives.

In our churches, we can make real changes we can decide together distinct differently to act differently to live differently.

Houses of worship our centers of hope in these places people reach beyond themselves into the depth of community and the depth of spiritual

And return to their lives, knowing we can be more

Father Tony us tells us it's time for us to head back home.

Home to our right place in creation.

Thank you for your attention to these words this evening, I welcome your thoughts and feedback.

I also invite any of you who are leading climate work and your congregations to get in touch with me, our political leaders need to hear from our spiritual leaders, our voices together can make a difference.

Rodney Petersen: Each week next week, it will be more on black lives matter, matter for the environment. Let's again all say thank you to Demie Stathoplos and to Father, Dimitri.