

Remarks to the G8 Religious Leaders Summit  
Sapporo, Japan  
July 3, 2008

Rev. William G. Sinkford  
(As delivered)

I am honored and grateful to be with this group of religious leaders here in Sapporo. The purposes of this gathering could not be more important.

The document we will present to the G8 political leaders, including the section on climate change and global warming, is very well written and clear, providing a critical religious witness on these issues.

Yesterday, Madame Kamaguchi detailed the dangers to our environment, the facts of the reality of climate change, so clearly that there is no need to repeat them.

So let me begin, as must all citizens of the United States, with confession. My nation has rejected interdependence. We have rejected interrelatedness. We have been profligate and gluttonous. Blessed with an abundance of resources, we have appropriated the resources of others to support our own desires and lifestyle. The United States has become part of the problem, not part of the solution. Even now, we have refused to sign to Kyoto Accords. Those accords, are badly in need of updating.

Perhaps worst of all, we have provided a model of development to other nations which is unsustainable, and for many without our abundant natural resources, unattainable.

I pray for changes in my nation's policies and advocate tirelessly for those changes.

But for religious people, to focus on politics is not enough.

We must remember that our greatest effectiveness is not achieved by making strongly worded declarations of the expectations we have of others. The interfaith community long ago learned that power is not gained by stating expectations of others. We have learned that as long as we choose to take the

comfortable moral high ground and issue pronouncements from the promontory, we will be welcome to stay there, on the sidelines.

This religious leaders summit is an invitation to leave that safe promontory. We are given an opportunity to claim our power rather than merely request that world leaders re-shape the way they use their own.

On the brink of a gathering of political powerhouses this week, let us claim our own inter-related, interdependent power. Let us claim it theologically and spiritually. Let us claim our most practical and pragmatic interdependent power: a global communion of the faithful-the Hands of the Holy who cannot be denied.

My hope is not for forgiveness, but for a kind of salvation. We need a return to right relationship between people, creation and the Divine. I'm not talking about a return to lost Eden, not a return to a pre-industrial vision. We need a positive vision for the future.

Van Jones, one of the leaders of the growing environmental justice movement in the US, says that Martin Luther King did not become famous by giving a speech called "I have a complaint." He did not move the hearts of millions by saying, "I have a list of suggestions." Martin Luther King's power came because he preached, "I have a dream."

We need a vision of a green future that can move us from a culture of scarcity to a culture of abundance. We need a vision of a green economy which will not only reduce our collective carbon footprint, but create millions and millions of green jobs. In the US there are tens of millions of homes which need to be insulated; millions and millions of homes and buildings which could have solar panels, millions of buildings which should have roof top green space gardens. Moving toward a green future offers the possibility not only of avoiding the worst effects of climate change, but of creating jobs and incomes. As we move from a carbon-based economy, we need to dream of a green future which is robust enough to lift the poor out of poverty.

If we can dream this big, new doors of opportunity will begin to open. New industries will emerge, and new crops. Ms. Stellamaris mentioned Jatropa yesterday. This is a crop which can easily be processed into bio-fuel and it can be grown in less developed countries, giving them needed income to

address their many needs. Our best approach to bio-fuel to date has been to convert the developed world's corn production to fuel production. It reflects a mentality of scarcity and is helping to drive the growing food shortages and price inflation around the world.

These new doors of opportunity can lead us out of fear of the truth, out of the fear of giving away control, and into a place of renewed hope. Let us honestly declare that our global religious communion will place new and mighty expectations on our constituents, refuse to wait for the politically powerful to show us the way, and become the "healers of the breach" ourselves.

You and I have seen religious communities, around the world and in the US, that have embraced this light and acted courageously. They are "greening" sanctuaries, offering faithful legislative advocacy, developing and practicing environmental theology, and acting interdependently. Let us bless and empower them with spiritual leadership that they may lead us all toward the salvation we seek.

Our vision for a green future is still a-building. In my faith tradition, we say that revelation is not sealed. One of the most important skills we can all cultivate is the openness to the new.

The G8 political leaders will shortly arrive. The prophets among us must appeal to those among them who have ears to hear. But let us also make our own promises to them: that we are not waiting for them, that we are today's stewards of policies and imperatives from the world of faith. Let them be advised, let a message of expectation be served, but most importantly, let them hear our promise: a promise of hope and commitment-to a world made fair and all her people one.