

Hartford Courant

'Truth,' Faith, And Al Gore

Many State Religious Groups To Take Part In Screening Of Global Warming Documentary

By DAVID FUNKHOUSER
Courant Staff Writer

September 9 2006

Religious congregations will spread a different kind of gospel next month with 4,000 showings of "An Inconvenient Truth," the documentary released earlier this year on former Vice President Al Gore's effort to spread the word about global warming.

The screenings - in all 50 states - are part of the "Interfaith Power and Light" campaign, which aims to foster a connection between religious faith and ecology and to get people to act on the issue of climate change.

A Connecticut group has organized 105 showings, from church basements to Yale University to the Jewish Community Center in West Hartford.

"We're turning them away at this point," said Rabbi Andrea Cohen Kiener, the director of the Interreligious Eco-Justice Network, who said the group has no more copies of the movie to dole out. "This is really so gratifying."

Nationally the event could reach up to a million people, said the Rev. Sally Bingham, an Episcopal priest in San Francisco and one of the coordinators of Interfaith Power and Light.

"This issue defines who we are as human beings and what kind of world we are going to leave for future generations," she said. "The showing of this movie is a wonderful opportunity for us to educate people in the pews from the scientific perspective."

Interfaith Power and Light is providing local groups with materials to encourage discussions after the screenings.

"Once they see the film, we really believe that people will actually go to work - retrofitting congregations, retrofitting homes and changing their behavior," Bingham said.

Bingham has been preaching for a decade about the ties between faith and environmental stewardship. She organized Bay Area religious leaders around the idea of cooperating to buy power and promoting renewable energy, energy efficiency and conservation.

The Connecticut group has organized 30 churches and synagogues in a similar effort, said Kiener, who leads congregation P'nai Or of Central Connecticut.

"An Inconvenient Truth," released last spring, attempts to convince viewers of the reality of climate change and the human role in it. Scientific data presented in the film are said to show that the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere - a key "greenhouse" gas that blocks heat from radiating back out to space and helps warm the planet - has shot up since the beginning of the industrial era.

There is debate about how much of global warming is rooted in human activity and what effect it might already be having, from melting ice sheets and rising sea levels to fiercer storms. Most scientists agree

humans have had a hand in climate change and that if left unaddressed, the situation will grow much worse.

The Bush administration has acknowledged a human role in global warming, but the president said last month that more research should be done before any restrictions are imposed on greenhouse gases.

The film, directed by Davis Guggenheim and released by Paramount Classics, has sparked a grass-roots response among some people looking for ways to reduce their "carbon footprint" - whether by driving a hybrid car or choosing a clean energy option from an electricity supplier.

Three charitable foundations put up \$300,000 for the October screenings. Paramount agreed to let Bingham's group distribute 4,000 copies of the movie on DVD six weeks before the planned release this fall. (The general release version will be different, Bingham noted, with more information on how people can respond to climate change.)

"We wanted it for Ramadan, Yom Kippur and St. Francis Day," Bingham said - all tied to the first week of October. Those holidays "are about reconciliation and making peace with the world."

The screenings coincide with an annual forum on religion and the environment to be held Oct. 4 at the First Baptist Church in West Hartford, said the Rev. Thomas Carr, the church's senior minister and a founder of the Interreligious Eco-Justice Network.

Paramount Classics has grossed more than \$20 million from the film, making it the fourth highest grossing documentary of all time, the company said. The company has pledged 5 percent of box office receipts to The Alliance for Climate Protection.

Gore is keeping the ball rolling at his nonprofit Climate Project in Tennessee. This month he and a group of scientists will begin training more than 1,000 people to deliver a version of his road show on climate change to community groups around the country.

"I've been saying for about 10 years that it's the biggest moral and ethical challenge the human race has ever faced," Carr said. "We've never changed the very life systems of the planet. It's an amazing spiritual issue for congregations to deal with."

Contact David K. Funkhouser at dfunkhouser@courant.com.

Copyright 2006, [Hartford Courant](#)