

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media Contact

Anthony Moujaes

News Coordinator

Office: 216-736-2211

Email: moujaesa@ucc.org



UCC ministers plan Earth Day preach-in focusing on #KeepItInTheGround

National faith-based initiative focuses on fossil fuels and creation care April 24

CLEVELAND (April 15, 2016) — As part of Earth Day weekend, preachers of the United Church of Christ around the country will deliver sermons April 24 proclaiming “Keep it in the ground.”

The message — referring to fossil fuel reserves — is “the most important act of caring for God’s creation that our society can undertake today,” said the **Rev. Brooks Berndt**, the UCC’s minister for environmental justice. Berndt and the **Rev. Jim Antal**, conference minister and president of the UCC’s Massachusetts Conference, are organizers of the Earth Day preach-in that is part of the denomination’s social advocacy as “Our Stillspeaking Voice.”

“Embracing renewable energy sources while insisting that we keep 80 percent of the known fossil fuel reserves in the ground is an act of faithfulness to a loving, life-affirming God,” said Antal. “Allowing our current fossil fuel dependent economy to continue is a death sentence for life as we have always known it, and an abomination to any understanding of God.”

The preach-in features 25 preachers, a scholar and a local church, all of whom are highlighted on the [UCC’s “Keep it in the Ground” website](#). Additional local UCC pastors are encouraged to “join the April 24 preach-in and devote their worship services and sermon to ‘Keep in in the Ground,’” said Berndt.

Nationally-known environmental activist **Bill McKibben**, founder of the global climate movement 350.org, and **Diana Butler Bass**, author of the recently released *Grounded: Finding God in the World — A Spiritual Revolution*, are two participants. [Butler Bass’ book](#), which explores how people find their spiritual ground and embrace God in the soil, the water, the sky, in our homes and neighborhoods, and in the wider world, will be the subject of an April sermon series, “Treehuggers,” at the 4,000-member Cathedral of Hope UCC in Dallas.

“We have to keep 80 percent of the fossil-fuel reserves that we know about underground,” McKibben [told Yes Magazine](#) in February. “If we don’t — if we dig up the coal and oil and gas and burn them — we will overwhelm the planet’s physical systems, heating the Earth far past the red lines drawn by scientists and governments. It’s not ‘we should do this,’ or ‘we’d be wise to do this.’ Instead it’s simpler: ‘We have to do this.’”

“I think we ought to aim for keeping most of the remaining oil in the ground because I am a common sense kind of gal, said the **Rev. Donna Schaper**, senior minister of Judson Memorial UCC in New York City and featured preach-in preacher. “We all know that something big has to change. People of faith declare at Easter that we can rise again. We can! But without common sense applied to fossil fuels, we will actually sink ourselves and our beloved earth.”

“Every day, science tells us more about the end of nature as we have known it. The five warmest months in the past 170 years have been the last five months,” Antal noted. “It falls to us to launch the greatest social change movement the world has ever known. This can only happen if religion — which is the most powerful force on earth — channels the resolve of its adherents to make the changes science says we must, so that our children will know something of the Eden into which we were born.”

###

About the United Church of Christ The United Church of Christ is a mainline Protestant denomination with nearly 1 million members and more than 5,000 congregations nationwide. Headquartered in Cleveland, Ohio, the UCC is a church of many firsts, including the first mainline denomination to ordain a woman, the first to ordain an openly-gay man and the first predominantly white denomination to ordain an African American.

The UCC and its members are tireless advocates for social issues such as immigration reform, racial equality, LGBT rights, marriage equality, environmental protection and economic justice.