

## Light a Candle for Justice

by Meighan Pritchard  
Minister for Environmental Justice

How do we deal with environmental despair? After the November elections, one woman confided to me that her son has given up bothering to vote. Another woman voiced her sense of the futility of fighting on environmental issues when one politician, with the stroke of a pen, could wipe out years' worth of work by thousands of environmentalists.

In Advent, we light candles of Hope, Love, Peace, and Joy. We light them in the darkest time of year, when such light is most needed. We do not light the Advent candles of Despair, Defeat, Lament, and Grief. We may be feeling those things, but they do not spur us onward. If we choose not to engage in justice work, we guarantee that injustices will not be addressed. As hockey player Wayne Gretzky said, "You miss 100% of the shots you don't take."

God doesn't let us stay in our comfort zones or wallow forever in despair. God pushes us out in the service of something bigger. Justice, for example; Hope, Love, Peace, and Joy; God's realm. In September, 675,000 people worldwide turned out for People's Climate Marches. If we had all stayed home in despair, we would not have made a difference. And for those of us who marched, it was a day not of despair but of deep hope.

Recently the Senate failed to approve the Keystone XL Pipeline—by one vote. One vote! But it was enough. In the face of climate change, investing in fossil fuel infrastructure leads us in the wrong direction. The Senate will take up this issue again in 2015, but for the moment the pipeline is still only a proposal, because thousands wrote their legislators, made signs, sang songs, and got arrested. This pipeline was expected to be approved several years ago, and it's still waiting. The fight isn't over.

Our voices make a difference. As people of faith, we are called to till the earth and keep it, not to rape and destroy it. A vote for the fossil fuel industry

prioritizes money before God. So thank your legislators if they voted for the planet. Urge them to reconsider if they didn't.

There is progress. More people are educating themselves about climate change, reducing their carbon emissions, putting solar panels on their churches, and calling their legislators to account on climate change legislation. President Obama just made an emissions agreement with China. The tide is shifting.

Now is not the time to give up or to remain neutral. Desmond Tutu wrote, "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality."

Our God calls us to live into God's realm of Hope, Love, Peace, and Joy. We do so not by ignoring the depth of the challenges or the frustration of setbacks, but by facing them—and not getting stuck there. So light a candle in the darkness, and let it shine for all to see God's realm of justice.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*The Rev. Meighan Pritchard is Minister for Environmental Justice for the UCC's Justice and Witness Ministries.*

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