



**Black Interfaith
in the Time of
Climate Crisis**
Toolkit

Black Interfaith in the Time of Climate Crisis

“The Earth is a mosque, and everything in it is sacred.” Ibrahim Abdul-Matin tells of learning this basic tenet of Islam from his father when he was just five or six years old.¹ His eyes were opened to a new dimension of his faith upon this realization that the grass and trees and rocks around him were all extensions of the divine.

“Environmental justice [means that] no community should be saddled with more environmental burdens and less environmental benefits than any other.”
- Majora Carter

Islam represents just one of many religious, spiritual, and ethical traditions that center the Earth as sacred, and Abdul-Matin is just one of many Black Americans whose faith is deeply connected to creation care. As Jaime Green, a member of Elysian Fields Church of Christ in New Orleans put it, “The scripture tells us that we’re supposed to be good stewards of what God gave us.”

In many cases, this reverence for creation extends into action. From [a Catholic community in Louisiana](#) fighting to keep chemical plants out of their neighborhood, to [faith leaders in Charlotte](#) demanding divestment in fossil fuels, to a transformational [network of church-based gardens](#), Black faith communities across the U.S. are leading efforts to respond to the climate crisis.

“Our African ancestors believed that land was a gift from God. Because of this, they took great pride in the land and saw themselves as stewards of God’s resources.”
- Khristi Lauren Adams

This resource is intended to support your own efforts to make your community more sustainable. Read on for inspiration, opportunities to learn more about diverse religious and ethical responses to climate change, and practical ideas for action.

¹ *Green Deen: What Islam Teaches About Protecting the Planet*, Ibrahim Abdul-Matin, pp. 1-2.

BE INSPIRED

Religious and non-religious traditions alike center creation care as an important value, sacred responsibility, or central commandment. The following texts sample a few examples of calls to steward the Earth.

<p><u>Bahá'í Tradition (Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá)</u> Briefly, it is not only their fellow human beings that the beloved of God must treat with mercy and compassion, rather must they show forth the utmost loving kindness to every living creature... The feelings are one and the same, whether you inflict pain on human or on beast.</p>	<p><u>Buddhist Tradition (Nirvana Sutra)</u> A tathagata's [buddha's] helping hand sees no distinction of friend or foe. A tathagata always acts for other living beings, not just for him or herself.</p>
<p><u>Christian Tradition (Revelation 4:11)</u> Worthy are you, Lord our God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things; because of your will they came to be and were created.</p>	<p><u>Hindu Tradition (Isa Upanishad)</u> Everything in the universe belongs to the Lord. Therefore take only what you need, that is set aside for you. Do not take anything else, for you know to whom it belongs.</p>
<p><u>Jewish Tradition (Ecclesiastes 7:13)</u> When G-d created the first human beings, G-d led them around the Garden of Eden and said: "Look at my works! See how beautiful they are—how excellent! For your sake I created them all. See to it that you do not spoil and destroy My world; for if you do, there will be no one else to repair it."</p>	<p><u>Muslim Tradition (Qur'an 40:57)</u> Assuredly the creation of the heavens and the earth is greater than the creation of humankind; but most of humankind knows not.</p>
<p><u>Secular Humanist Tradition (Neil deGrasse Tyson)</u> We are all connected. To each other, biologically. To the earth, chemically. To the rest of the universe, atomically.</p>	<p><u>Sikh Tradition (Guru Granth Sahib)</u> Humans, trees, pilgrimage places, banks of sacred streams, clouds, fields. Islands, spheres, universes, continents, solar systems. The sources of creation, egg-born, womb-born, earth-born, sweat-born, oceans, mountains, and sentient beings. The Lord, knows their condition...having created beings, the Lord takes care of them all. The Creator who created the world takes thought of it as well.</p>

LEARN MORE

[At the intersection of faith and climate, work worth building on](#), Interfaith America, Ibrahim Abdul-Matin, Interfaith America Senior Fellow (Jan 2022)

“Part of indigenous resilience is to resist ideologies that compartmentalize reality in a way that makes the earth an object and a resource for our own development. There will be no peace as long as we are waging war against the earth.”

-Tore Johnsen

[Rev. William J. Barber II on the Scourge of Environmental Racism](#), from *Winning the New Green Deal: Why We Must, How We Can*. William J. Barber II (2020)

[Amara Ifeji works at the intersection of climate and racial justice](#), *The Christian Century*, Kristi Lauren Adams (Mar 2022)

[A historically Black town stood in the way of a pipeline – so developers claimed it was mostly white](#), *The Guardian*, Miranda Green (Sept 2021)

[Catholic award for Louisiana environmental justice advocate](#), Associated Press (Apr 2022)

[Charlotte environmental activists of faith press for racial justice](#), *The Charlotte Post*, Herbert L. White (Oct 2021)

[Faith groups increasingly join fight against climate change](#), Associated Press, Luis Andres Henao and Jessie Wardarski (Nov 2021)

[How environmental justice can unlock Black health and wellness](#), Greenpeace, Tanya Brooks (Feb 2022)

[Milwaukee Black community leaders shine at African American environmental pioneer event](#), WUWM 89.7, Susan Bence (Feb 2022)

[Nevada groups focus on climate impact on diverse communities](#), Associated Press (Aug 2021)

[The Black Church Food Security Network aims to heal the land and heal the soul](#), *The Christian Century*, Amy Frykholm interviews Heber Brown III (November 2020)

[The first African American Cardinal is a climate change leader](#), *Inside Climate News*, James Bruggers (Nov 2020)

TAKE ACTION

Each of us can play a role in creation care. Whether you are a faith leader or want to take action as an individual, there are lots of ways to be involved. The following are a few ideas for action you can take to make your community more sustainable.

For Faith Leaders

- Join the [Black Church Food Security Network](#)
- Organize an environmentally focused, interfaith [service project](#), such as a park clean-up, tree planting event, or recycling drive
- Pair your service project with a [dialogue](#) around the shared value of creation care
- Support [sustainable development projects](#) in your area
- Consider decreasing your congregation's carbon footprint by having [plant-based meals](#) at community events
- Start a [community compost program](#)

For Individuals

- Reconnect with the Earth by:
 - Planting a garden or a tree
 - Teaching kids about food production
 - Learning to compost
 - Adding houseplants to your home
- Reduce your carbon footprint by:
 - Planning trips to reduce driving
 - Using reusable shopping bags
 - Refilling a reusable water bottle
 - Avoiding [food waste](#)
- Advocate for broader change by:
 - Taking action with [Citizens' Climate Lobby](#), a nonpartisan organization building support for bi-partisan climate solutions
 - Donating to or volunteering with outdoors-focused organizations like [Soul Trak Outdoors](#).

“God created us directly from the Earth and that we must do all that we can to take care of it, protect it, and manage all of its bounty in a sustainable way.”
- Ibrahim Abdul-Matin, Green Deen

The Black Interfaith Project at Interfaith America centers the diversity of religious, spiritual, and philosophical expressions that have animated the Black experience in America since the time of enslaved Moroccan explorer, Mustafa Azemmouri, in the early 16th Century to the era of President Barack Obama and Vice President Kamala Harris. Additionally, the Black Interfaith Project explores the dialogue between those traditions, the bridgebuilding between the corresponding groups, and the implications for Black communities and America as a nation. The project is supported by a \$1 million grant from the Henry Luce Foundation.

Questions? Contact Alexis Vaughan at avaughan@interfaithamerica.org for additional support.

