

Religious Humanism

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The Clergy Letter Project

Is Evolving

by Michael Zimmerman

For approximately two decades The Clergy Letter Project has been the premier organization of clergy promoting the teaching of evolution in public school science classrooms and laboratories. What began with an open letter signed by thousands of Christian Clergy members asserting that evolutionary theory is first-rate science and does not conflict with religious principles, quickly grew to include similar statements from Unitarian Universalist clergy, Humanist clergy, Buddhist clergy, and Jewish rabbis.

Members of The Clergy Letter Project also opted to move beyond these letters and to bring this message of compatibility between evolution and religion directly to their congregations by hosting annual Evolution Weekend events. These events, occurring at thousands of congregations all around the world included sermons, discussions, lectures, classes for children, and much more, have reached well over one million congregants.

In recent years, however, a strong strain of anti-science sentiment and an often-associated resurgence of religious fundamentalism, has persuaded members of The Clergy Letter Project to broaden their horizons. Indeed, membership voted to look beyond evolution and articulate the position that there are a host of issues about which religion and science have come to similar conclusions. Promoting the compatibility of religion and science broadly helps the public to gain a better understanding of religion and demonstrates that the narrow fundamentalist perspective so much in the news does not represent mainstream religious views. Similarly, promoting the compatibility of religion and science broadly helps the public appreciate the importance of a scientific worldview.

Two recent decisions taken by the members of The Clergy Letter Project will provide a sense of how this enhanced direction has taken

shape. First, Evolution Weekend has been renamed Religion and Science Weekend to more fully reflect the important and positive relationship between religion and science. This is an opportunity for individual congregations to take action to explore how religion and science, working together, can help create a more just, greener and healthier world. Religion and Science Weekend is scheduled for the weekend closest to the anniversary of the birth of Charles Darwin: 12 February. In 2024, this is the weekend of 9-11 February.

Second, a team of clergy members and scientists have drafted a Climate Crisis Letter urging the religious community to take immediate action to help ameliorate global climate change. This letter, already signed by over 1,100 clergy members representing 15 countries, argues from both a theological and a scientific perspective that climate change poses an existential threat to life on Earth. “Scientific understandings and religious teachings alike teach us that we are connected as one human family and, further, we are connected to all life. Thus, our own survival is inextricably connected to the responsible stewardship of the Earth and all its creatures.” This powerful letter closes by asking a crucial, but often overlooked, question: How can we be good ancestors? If these efforts resonate with you, please join us. If you’re a member of the clergy, sign one of our clergy letters and our climate crisis letter. If you’re a clergy member or if you’re a lay person active in a congregation, sign up to participate in Religion and Science Weekend. To do either or both of these things, simply drop me a note at mz@theclergyletterproject.org. Similarly, drop me a note to sign up to receive our free monthly newsletter.

Finally, please share information about our efforts with friends and colleagues who also might be interested in participating but who may not yet have heard of us. Spread the word; change the world. Together we are making a difference.