



What have we

done to the earth
and to ourselves?

Living Earth August 2010 Re- [More Info](#)
flection

By Mary Minette

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ELCA Washington Office *"The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers' the heavens languish together with the earth. The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant." - Isaiah 24: 4-5* Is it hot enough for you?

In much of the world, the weather has been a bit unusual this summer -- weeks of extreme heat in the Northeast and MidAtlantic states, unusually cool weather in the Pacific Northwest, damaging storms in the Midwest. According to the [National Climatic Data Center](#), which gathers weather data dating back to 1880 from around the world, [global average temperatures over the first six months of 2010 are the warmest ever recorded](#).

Russia is suffering from [extreme heat and drought](#) that has caused wildfires, widespread failures in the country's wheat crop, and unhealthy levels of air pollutants in Moscow that along with the heat are being blamed for [rising death rates](#). In Pakistan, [floods have impacted one-fifth of the country](#) displacing millions of people from their homes and flooding croplands causing widespread hunger and misery. With that region's monsoon season only half over, the UN Secretary General visited the flooded areas and stated that ["he had never witnessed such devastation."](#) In China, [flooding and mudslides](#) have killed more than 1000 people so far this August. In central Tennessee, [heavy rains are threatening flooding](#) in areas that were already hit with floods this past spring. And in Greenland, a [97-square-mile piece of ice](#) (that's about four times the size of Manhattan) has broken off of the Petermann Glacier.

So is this climate change? Scientists are cautious people, and climate scientists may be even more cautious than most because of the scrutiny they face from climate change skeptics and the media. But ["scientists at the World Meteorological Organization \(WMO\) in Geneva say there's no doubt that higher Atlantic Ocean temperatures contributed"](#) to the disastrous weather in both Russia and Pakistan. So the answer is, well, maybe.

But regardless of whether anyone can definitively say that this summer is due to climate change caused by our use of fossil fuels, [this type of extreme, dangerous and costly weather](#) is exactly what scientists tell us we can expect in the future if we fail to address our emissions of carbon dioxide, methane and other greenhouse gases.

If you happen to be one of the people who doubt the conclusions of scientists about climate change, you may be saying "So what? There's a chance that they're wrong!" And you might argue, along with many of our political leaders that it will be too expensive, too difficult, too damaging to our fragile economy to do anything much about our dependence on fossil fuels right now.

But doubt works both ways: the scientists may be wrong, but they may also be right. And if they are right, and climate change is real, this summer is a sobering glimpse into our future. Looking at the human misery, the economic damage, and the environmental disaster that this summer's weather is bringing to so many parts of God's earth, can we afford to take that risk? And can we afford to wait until we know for sure?

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What can you do?

Consider a donation to [ELCA International Disaster Response](#), which is participating in efforts to help victims of the flooding in Pakistan.

[Learn more](#) about how climate change will impact those who are hungry and those who live in poverty. **A**

Prayer for the Journey

God, grant us the vision and wisdom to find a way forward in an uncertain climate. Help us to alleviate the suffering of our neighbors today, and to view with clarity the suffering they may endure tomorrow if we do not respect the limits of the earth, your creation and our home. Amen

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