

#9 Phase Out Fossil Fuels in the Diocese of Vermont by 2034

SPONSORS: Zero Emissions Task Force, the Reverend Earl Kooperkamp

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RESOLVED, That the 193rd Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Vermont* reaffirm its commitment to phase out fossil-fuel use in the buildings of its congregations and institutions, as expressed in Resolution 5, Transition to Renewable Energy, approved in 2020 at the [188th] Annual Convention; and be it further

RESOLVED, That this Convention commit the congregations and institutions of the Diocese of Vermont to the timelines, processes, and goals of [General Convention Resolution A098 Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation](#), adopted at the 81st General Convention, Louisville, 2024, which calls on all

“Provinces, Dioceses, Congregations, and all other institutions of The Episcopal Church . . .

- [1] to review in detail their use of fossil fuels, including fossil-fuel fired electricity, for transportation, heating and cooling, and other purposes as well as their financial reliance, if any, on investments in fossil fuel extraction, production, and refining;
- [2] create, by September 30, 2026, a plan for the reduction in use and eventual phase-out of their use of fossil fuels and fossil-fuel generated electricity in their operations and divestment of fossil-fuel based investments, with the target date for completion of December 31, 2034;
- [3] to post their plan and periodic updates on their websites and to report this information to the Office of Creation Care in a form and at a frequency provided by that office”;

with the understanding that this diocese, having divested from fossil fuel–based investments in 2016, will focus on that part of 2024-A098 that calls for eliminating fossil fuel use in heating and cooling buildings; and be it further

RESOLVED, That the current Zero Emissions Task Force be recognized as an official task force of the Diocese of Vermont and its Executive Council, and as such continue to engage and work with diocesan congregations and institutions to provide support for the phase-out of fossil fuel use in their buildings; and be it further

RESOLVED, That in order to follow through on this commitment to phase out fossil fuels from the Diocese of Vermont by 2034, we understand and agree that:

- By “fossil fuels” we include all systems powered by heating oil, propane, or natural gas;
- We will install no new fossil fuel systems in the Diocese and will instead replace fossil fuel heating and cooling systems with electrically powered systems supported by zero-emission renewable energy sources;
- The Diocese of Vermont and its institutions will no longer provide grants or loans for the purpose of installing new fossil fuel heating and cooling systems;

and be it further

RESOLVED, That the Diocese of Vermont acknowledge and address the financial challenges of the transition to zero-emission renewable energy and engage with the Zero Emissions Task Force on such possibilities as

- Prioritizing loan or grant funding for zero-emission renewable heating and cooling systems within the diocesan budget;
- Creating a low-interest revolving loan fund;

- Advocating that The Episcopal Church fund the Care of Creation Loan Program for dioceses, as approved at the 81st General Convention in Resolution A021;
- Procuring grants;

and be it further

RESOLVED, That the Zero Emissions Task Force report to the 194th Convention on its actions and accomplishments, with the intent to provide an accounting of how the Diocese has progressed towards the goal of phasing out fossil fuel heating and cooling systems from its buildings.

EXPLANATION

The purposes of this resolution are to bring the Diocese of Vermont’s timeline, goals, and processes for phasing out fossil fuels in line with General Convention [Resolution 2024-A098 Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation](#), to confirm the official status and ongoing work of the current Zero Emissions Task Force, and to recommit our diocese and congregations to love and care for Creation by addressing the ongoing devastation of climate change in concrete terms.

Our Planet

As Vermonters, we know — individually and as communities — about the threat of climate change. We’ve experienced the floods and destruction, we’ve seen our beloved snowy winters turn to mud, ice, and rain. But the path we’re now on leads to a scale and types of destruction we cannot begin to imagine. According to a 2023 UN Climate Report:

“The world is likely to pass a dangerous temperature threshold within the next 10 years, pushing the planet past the point of catastrophic warming unless nations drastically transform their economies and immediately transition away from fossil fuels. . . . Beyond that threshold . . . climate disasters will become so extreme that people will not be able to adapt. Basic components of the Earth system will be fundamentally, irrevocably altered. Heat waves, famines and infectious diseases could claim millions of additional lives by century’s end.”

Moreover, as climate change combines with habitat loss and other stressors caused by human action, the web of life holding our planet together is becoming perilously fragile. Ecologist Gerardo Ceballos, author of a recent report on the acceleration of the extinction crisis, compares our current situation to removing bricks from a wall:

“We’re eroding the capabilities of the planet to maintain human life and life in general . . . If you take one brick out, nothing happens — maybe it just becomes noisier and more humid inside [your house]. But if you take too many out, eventually your house will collapse.”

As Vermonters we also know that if we fail to address climate change we will continue to pay for its consequences in numerous ways here at home:

- Flooding since 2011 has already put Vermont in the top 10 states “for most federal disaster declarations in the country due to extreme weather” and has already cost our state billions of dollars by the estimation of major news organizations
- Washington County, home to our state capitol, “is now tied for being the second-most disaster prone county in America”
- Lyme and other insect-borne diseases will continue as warmer winters support greater tick and mosquito populations
- Industries such as agriculture (e.g., apple orchards), maple sugaring, and ski tourism will continue to be negatively impacted by warmer winters

Our Theology

As followers of Jesus who vow “to safeguard the integrity of God’s creation, and respect, sustain and renew the life of the Earth” we are called to act. Our Lord teaches us that the path to righteousness is through actions of care — not through platitudes or by having the right opinions:

³⁴ “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and **you gave me something to eat**, I was thirsty and **you gave me something to drink**, I was a stranger and **you invited me in**, ³⁶ I needed clothes and **you clothed me**, I was sick and **you looked after me**, I was in prison and **you came to visit me.**’

³⁷ “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

⁴⁰ “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’ (Matthew 25: 34–40)

Like “the righteous” in this teaching, we’re still asking “When did we see you Lord? “When did we do those things for *you*?” Jesus’s answer remains the same: in our daily actions large and small.

Two millennia later we understand that the vulnerable, the suffering we are called to serve includes not just fellow humans but also Creation: other species, entire ecosystems, and the Earth itself. As the late Pope Francis reminds us in his environmental encyclical *Laudato Si*:

“This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life. This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she “groans in travail” (Rom 8:22). We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth (cf. Gen 2:7); our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters.”

Finally, however arduous the task we face — and eliminating fossil fuels from our diocese is unlikely to be easy — as Christians we know that we are not alone:

“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but one of power, love, and sound judgement.” (2 Timothy 1:7)

History of the Task Force

In 2020, the Diocese of Vermont took action to combat climate change. At the 188th Annual Convention, delegates approved Resolution 5, Transition to Renewable Energy:

“RESOLVED, That the [188th] Convention of the Diocese of Vermont ask diocesan leadership to appoint a task force to offer to the [189th] Convention in 2021 a plan to end the use of fossil fuels in each of the parishes and properties of the Episcopal Church in Vermont and to transition to 100% renewable energy by 2030.”

A task force formed and began meeting in early 2021, but due to the complications of the Covid-19 pandemic the task force was not able to continue its work or report to the 189th Convention or any convention thereafter.

In 2024, delegates to the 81st General Convention of the Episcopal Church passed Resolution A098 Non-Proliferation of Fossil Fuels, which calls for the elimination of fossil fuels from all

Episcopal institutions and dioceses by 2034, and Resolution A021, which promised the formation of a Care of Creation Loan Program to aid this transition.

Also in 2024, Phil MacVean reinvigorated the work called for in the Diocese of Vermont's 2020 resolution by asking all congregations to complete and submit Parish Heating Surveys. Phil's leadership led to the creation of the Zero Emissions Task Force, co-chaired by Phil MacVean and Gaen Murphree, which held its first meeting in February 2025. The Diocese of Vermont supported and aided the ZETF in numerous ways, including placing Margaret Schotto, Manager for Diocesan Operations, on the task force; providing communications support from Director of Communications Sophie Kitch-Peck; and approving a grant to support the upcoming November 15 hands-on workshop, Powered by Love.

Since forming as the Zero Emissions Task Force in early 2025, the ZETF has focused on

- Building committee membership
- Soliciting and collecting Parish Heating Surveys, which provide critical baseline data
- Doing outreach and education with individual congregations about how they can reduce and eliminate fossil fuels from their buildings
- Planning Powered by Love, a hands-on workshop for church leaders throughout the diocese, to be held November 15 at Mission Farm, Killington
- Researching funding sources
- Liaising with other faith-based climate leaders — including the Green Caucus of the Episcopal Church, leaders of similar task forces in other dioceses, Zero Emission Churches in Canada, Vermont Interfaith Power & Light — and attending Blessed Tomorrow's National Faith Climate Forum and various webinars to better further the work and learn best practices
- Communicating with the Episcopal Church Office of Creation Care about processes and resources
- Continuing to meet, learn, and discuss how we can better assist our congregations in this challenging task

Between now and the Diocese of Vermont's 194th Convention in 2026, the Zero Emissions Task Force will continue this work, including:

- Work with Diocesan parishes and institutions to develop plans for eliminating fossil fuels, as called for by General Convention Resolution 2024-A098
- Develop a template that will help simplify each congregation's creation of the plan required by 2024-A098 and in setting goals and taking concrete steps
- Identify technical support and recommendations for implementation
- Investigate the creation of a diocesan loan and grant program
- Research additional funding sources
- Hold at least one annual workshop for vestries, facilities committees, Creation Care committees, and all interested parties providing concrete steps to phase out fossil fuels
- Develop and provide other kinds of outreach and education
- Communicate with the Episcopal Church, its Office of Creation Care, and climate leaders in other faith communities to understand best practice
- Continue to find doable ways to help our parishes make this transition, in a spirit of faith, engagement, and commitment that recognizes the pragmatic and financial challenges alongside the urgency of the climate crisis and our responsibility to care for Creation as members of the Jesus Movement.

Current members of the Zero Emissions Task Force are Cam Featherstonhaugh and Gaen Murphree, co-chairs, St. Mary's, Northfield, and St. Stephen's, Middlebury, respectively; Susan Ficklin, St. James, Essex Junction; Rev. Rachel Field, St. Mary's, Northfield; Frank Guillot, St. Paul's Cathedral, Burlington; Joann Erenhouse, St. Luke's, Chester; Phil MacVean, who attends congregations throughout the diocese; Margaret Schotto, Holy Trinity, Swanton. The ZETF is actively seeking new members as we build our capability; to learn more, email Gaen Murphree at gaenmurphree@gmail.com.

Why Focus on Buildings?

According to the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, heating and cooling buildings is the state's second-largest source of greenhouse gases (closely following transportation). According to the Energy Action Network's Annual Progress Report for 2023, Vermont's thermal sector (heating and cooling buildings) is predicted to become the leading source of greenhouse gases by 2030. Overall, Vermont is the second highest per capita emitter of greenhouse gases in New England, and the third largest in the Northeast.

Understanding Heating and Cooling with Zero-Emission Renewable Energy

Phasing out fossil fuel heating systems in Vermont means replacing them with **electrically powered systems** supported by **zero-emission renewable energy sources**.

Electricity from the grid can power a number of different heating and cooling delivery systems, such as forced hot air, heated slabs, and radiators. In these systems, the principal heating is provided by **heat pumps**, which use heat from the air (air-source) or heat from the ground (ground-source/geothermal), similar to the technology in your refrigerator. These modern heat pump systems are reliable and more efficient than traditional heating systems. Advances in technology mean that air- and ground-source heat pumps can now provide the heating and cooling system even in challenging spaces like church sanctuaries. Correctly sized cold-climate heat pumps provide heat when the outside temperature is well below zero. All of these systems are powered by the electrical grid.

Vermont has one of the cleanest electrical grids in the country: close to 100% of Vermont's electricity is generated from renewable sources. In 2023, the US Energy Information Administration reported Vermont's electricity sources as:

- 57% hydroelectric (mostly from Quebec)
- 16% solar
- 9% wind
- 17% biomass
- 0.1% petroleum or other

Because Vermont has an electrical grid that is almost entirely powered by renewables, congregations and diocesan institutions don't need to generate their own electricity to eliminate fossil fuel use. (Communities can, of course, consider rooftop or community solar installations as a way to generate all or part of their electricity needs.)

While biomass (wood, wood pellets) is a renewable energy source, it is not zero emissions. Burning wood or wood pellets emits CO₂. The Zero Emissions Task Force does recognize, however, that there might be some rare instances — for example, a historic chapel used only at Christmas and Easter — where wood burning is the best answer.

There continues to be confusion in many of our communities about natural gas, largely because it has been falsely marketed as a “bridge fuel.” Current science tells us that this is not the case. Natural gas is largely methane, which is emitted at all points along its extraction and distribution systems. Cornell environmental scientist Robert Howarth calls it no cleaner than coal when fully accounted for. Methane is the second-most important source of greenhouse gases next to CO₂ (accounting for 30 percent of all warming since the Industrial Revolution) and it is more potent. Over a 100-year period, methane traps 28 times more heat than CO₂; in the first 20 years of being released into the environment, it traps 80 times more heat than CO₂, making it an especially destructive choice given the closing window on averting climate disaster.

Eliminating the use of natural gas, propane, heating oil, and other fossil fuels from our buildings is critical to stopping the continued warming of our beloved “island home.” We want to carry out this work in a way that witnesses God’s love to our communities, in a spirit of kindness, honesty, mutual respect, fellowship, and trust in God.

Important Links and Sources

The 81st General Convention of the Episcopal Church, [Resolution A098 Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation](#)

The 81st General Convention of the Episcopal Church, [Resolution A021 Create a Care of Creation Loan Program for Episcopal Dioceses](#)

The Episcopal Diocese of Vermont, *2020 Convention Journal, [188th] Annual Convention*, [Resolution 5. Transition to Renewable Energy](#) [see page 45]

The Episcopal Diocese of Vermont, *2015 Convention Journal, [183rd] Annual Convention*, [Trustee reports](#) pages 55 and 91

For more on churches going green, go to the St. Stephen’s, Middlebury, [Creation Care Ministry webpage](#) or click [here](#)

For more on natural gas as a fossil fuel, go to the St. Stephen’s, Middlebury, [Creation Care Ministry webpage](#) or click [here](#)

For more on climate change, go to the St. Stephen’s, Middlebury, [Creation Care Ministry webpage](#) or click [here](#)

Abagael Giles, “[Climate-Fueled Flooding in Vermont Is Causing Both Worry and Adaptation](#),” *npr.org*, 27 August 2024.

[Robert Howarth, Methane Emissions from the Production and Use of Natural Gas, *EM: The Magazine for Environmental Managers*, Air and Waste Management Association, December 2022.](#)

Sarah Kaplan, “[World Is on Brink of Catastrophic Warming, U.N. Climate Change Report Says](#),” *Washington Post*, 20 March 2023.

Rachel Nuwer, “[Mass Extinctions Are Accelerating, Scientists Report](#),” *New York Times*, 1 June 2020.

Juan Vega de Sota, “[Vermont in Top 10 States with Most Federal Disaster Declarations, New Study Says](#),” *Vermont Digger*, 29 July 2024.

[Energy Action Network, Key Findings from the 23rd Annual Progress Report for Vermont.](#)

[U.S. Energy Information Administration, Vermont Profile Analysis, 19 December 2024.](#)

[Choose Energy, Energy Generation by State 2025 Report, March 2025.](#)

[Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, “ANR Climate Action Office Releases Annual Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory for Vermont,” 18 July 2025.](#)

Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, Climate Action Office, “[Climate Change Is Here — and Impacting All Aspects of Vermont Life.](#)”

** **Convention numbering:** While numbering of Convention Journals and the numbering used in resolutions have been consistent since 2021, discrepancies prior to 2021 meant the numbering has been off by a year. All 2024 Convention documents identified it as the 191st Convention, but it should have been identified as the 192nd Convention. The 2025 Convention documents are corrected to the 193rd Convention; references above to future and past conventions are consistent with this correction, with corrected past convention numbers in brackets.*