

Interreligious Environmentalism: Pragmatic Projects and Moral Competencies that Address Climate Change

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The academic disciplines of interreligious/interfaith studies and religion and ecology share substantial common ground: scholars in both fields claim interdisciplinarity, activist tendencies, and relationality to be key characteristics of their respective disciplines. Scholars within interreligious/interfaith studies name environmentalism among issues that transcend religious affiliation or creed, and scholars within religion and ecology recognize that environmental issues mobilize interfaith partnerships and collaboration. However, little academic research has intentionally brought the work of these two (relatively new) fields into conversation. As such, this paper explores how interreligious projects are addressing the global threat of climate change, and attempts to discern which moral competencies emerge from these various projects. To do so, I utilize the framework of pragmatic pluralism to analyze environmental projects within interreligious spaces, and ultimately identify six shared moral competencies: 1) showing solidarity with disenfranchised communities and religious minorities (particularly Indigenous Peoples), 2) demonstrating individual or communal leadership, 3) facilitating opportunities for relationship building, 4) participating in hopeful storytelling/narrative, 5) taking interpersonal or communal risk, and 6) resisting burnout and emotional despair.

Keywords: interfaith, interreligious, ecology, environmentalism, climate change, pragmatism

Framing Story: Flooded with Interfaith Encounter

In Fargo-Moorhead, where I spent my undergraduate years, springtime has become synonymous with flooding. The metropolitan area consists of two cities divided by the Red River of the North, which separates Minnesota from North Dakota and flows northward into Lake Winnipeg across the Canadian border. A historic flood struck the area in 2009, overwhelming local infrastructure and gaining national press. But the flood's underlying cause—changing weather patterns, including an accelerated thaw on our side of the border that brought unprecedented volumes of water upstream into Canada, where the river was still frozen—was not often discussed. Once rare occurrences taking place about once a century, drastic floods have now become commonplace in Fargo-Moorhead. Indeed, since the beginning of a wet climatic cycle in 1993, the Red River had passed into a flood stage at least once per year.¹

Predictions pointed toward another major flood in 2013, when I was nearing the end of my undergraduate career, and I was eager to do my part in the community's preparatory efforts. I helped organize an interfaith service project to fill sandbags—an effective first line of defense for protecting homes, businesses, and other buildings from water damage. The event was scheduled

¹ “Why is the Red River of the North So Vulnerable to Flooding?,” North Dakota State University, accessed Feb. 14, 2018, https://www.ndsu.edu/fargo_geology/whyflood.htm, and “Climate Change in Minnesota: 23 Signs,” last modified Feb. 2, 2015, Minnesota Public Radio, accessible at <http://www.mprnews.org/story/2015/02/02/climate-change-primer>.

for early April, right before the thaw. Those of us organizing the interfaith event promoted it widely, but we didn't have a great sense as to who would attend.

By way of context, my alma mater, Concordia College, is affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA), and is described by many as “pervasively Lutheran.” A majority of the school's students, faculty, and staff identify with the tradition, and the presumed universality of Lutheran values has often been described as marginalizing to those associated with minority worldviews, such as Evangelical Christians and non-religious students. In fact, during my time at this institution, efforts to create a secular student group *and* an Evangelical student group were twice rejected by college staff and administration. Both groups raised different concerns: atheists appeared to challenge the school's Lutheran mission with religious apathy or rejection, whereas Evangelical students represented an intimidating zeal in promoting a worldview that derived from a particular Biblical interpretation above all others. While both the non-religious students and Evangelical students experienced difficulty with gaining recognition on campus, this shared plight did not lead to a spirit of solidarity between the two groups. Instead, they perceived each other with some amount of distrust and skepticism.

For this reason, the arrival of student volunteers on the morning of the interfaith service project felt particularly powerful. Those who had turned up in the greatest numbers were, to my surprise, the Evangelical Christian students and the non-religious/atheistic students. As we gathered in the meeting location to depart for the sandbagging facility, it became clear that we all felt committed and called to address this urgent situation in our community, albeit for different reasons. While the joining of these three disparate groups—Lutheran, Evangelical Christian, and non-religious—admittedly led to something of an awkward bus ride, we nonetheless set out for a productive and collaborative day at the sandbagging facility.

Introduction

I lead with this story to demonstrate a learning that guides this paper: that important and urgent issues—including environmental ones—have the power to forge new partnerships, particularly between individuals or communities who would not normally interact.² This project also seeks to put into conversation two relatively young academic fields that deal with issues raised in this story: religion and ecology, on the one hand, and interfaith and interreligious studies on the other.

Synergies between these two fields already exist. Scholars within interreligious and interfaith studies have named environmentalism as an issue that transcends religious affiliation or creed, and scholars within religion and ecology recognize that environmental issues are beginning to mobilize interfaith partnerships and collaboration. Furthermore, scholars in both religion and ecology and interfaith/interreligious studies claim interdisciplinarity, activist tendencies, and

² Eboo Patel defines “interfaith cooperation” as the productive engagement of people who “orient around religion differently.” Although imperfect, this definition is meant to be inclusive of those who identify as religious, spiritual but not religious, agnostic, humanist, or atheist, or those who identify with multiple traditions. Patel also means for this phrase to be inclusive of *intra*faith dynamics (denominations within one tradition, i.e., between Baptists and Catholics), as people may still identify with the same broad religious tradition yet “orient around” different beliefs and practices. See Eboo Patel, *Interfaith Leadership: A Primer* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2016), 39.

relationality to be key characteristics of their work. Yet relatively little research has been done with the intention of bringing the work of these two academic fields into conversation. To further draw connections and advance this conversation, this paper will explore pragmatic environmental projects that take place within interreligious spaces, and analyze the moral or ethical competencies that emerge from these projects.

I borrow the term “moral competencies” and the framework of pragmatic pluralism from environmental ethicist Willis Jenkins. In his 2013 text *The Future of Ethics: Sustainability, Social Justice, and Religious Creativity*, Jenkins employs the phrase “moral competencies” to refer to the skills, tactics, and knowledge that religious and philosophical communities employ to creatively address climate change.³ One of Jenkins’ main assertions is that scholars should study environmental projects within religious settings *before* naming or establishing the moral or ethical competencies that undergird these projects. Although writing from within a Christian context, Jenkins advocates for a framework of pragmatic pluralism, which invites a diverse range of ethical and religious constituents (who do not necessarily share a common worldview or creation narrative) to cooperatively confront the shared problems that climate change presents.⁴ In this way, pragmatic pluralism provides a helpful framework for connecting the fields of interreligious/interfaith studies and religion and ecology.

As such, the goal of this paper is to analyze the moral and ethical competencies that emerge from interreligious environmental organizations or centers by utilizing the framework of pragmatic pluralism. I have selected three organizations to analyze within this framework—Interfaith Power and Light, GreenFaith, and the Center for Earth Ethics at Union Theological Seminary—because of their robust efforts in this space. By way of methodology, I reviewed each organization’s official literature and promotional materials, including annual reports, mission statements, programmatic information, press releases, and interviews with their founders and lead staff. From this analysis, I argue that the following six moral competencies, which emerge across the work of all three organizations, inform environmental projects in interreligious contexts: 1) showing solidarity with disenfranchised communities and religious minorities (particularly Indigenous Peoples), 2) demonstrating individual or communal leadership, 3) facilitating opportunities for relationship building, 4) participating in hopeful storytelling/narrative, 5) taking interpersonal or communal risk, and 6) resisting burnout and emotional despair. After discussing how the aforementioned organizations elevate these moral competencies in their interreligious environmental work, I draw upon recent scholarship from within religion and ecology and interfaith/interreligious studies to provide additional exposition about each of these six competencies.

³ Willis Jenkins, *The Future of Ethics: Sustainability, Social Justice, and Religious Creativity* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013), 18.

⁴ Jenkins draws upon the philosophical pragmatic tradition to articulate his approach: “This book takes a broadly pragmatic approach to religious ethics. It starts from concrete problems and works with the ideas and practices generated from reform projects attempting to address them. It investigates how projects use their beliefs and practices to simultaneously sustain and revise some tradition of life by creating new opportunities for meaningful moral agency in the face of overwhelming problems. By interpreting those projects in light of the disciplinary arguments surrounding the problems they address, it intends to test and improve their experimentation. On this approach, ethics is a form of collaboration in the process of moral and cultural transformation that makes agents become competent to the problems they face.” Jenkins, *The Future of Ethics*, 8.

Review of Three Interreligious Environmental Organizations: Interfaith Power and Light, GreenFaith, and the Center for Earth Ethics at Union Theological Seminary

Interfaith Power and Light

Interfaith Power and Light (IPL) is a national organization based in California, with local affiliates scattered across the country. The mission of IPL is “to be faithful stewards of Creation by responding to global warming through the promotion of energy conservation, energy efficiency, and renewable energy.”⁵ Founded more than a decade ago, this organization helps address global warming through grassroots education within 40 U.S. states, reaching an estimated 18,000 religious communities. In this regard, IPL has a supportive network of diverse religious communities that integrate sustainable practices and advocate on issues of public policy at the local, state, and national level.⁶

At its inception, IPL was not considered an interfaith organization. In an interview with IPL’s founder Reverend Sally Bingham, environmental ethicist Lucas Johnston records that IPL was originally a fledgling environmental group that focused only on Episcopal churches. At that time, in the late 1990s, it was called Episcopal Power and Light (EPL). Reverend Bingham and a lay practitioner laid the foundation for EPL by approaching Episcopal churches in California to promote Christian-based creation care and stewardship, which included asking churches to buy renewable energy from a local utility company, foregoing the fossil-fuel alternative. By the year 2000, EPL had brought renewable energy to approximately sixty Episcopal churches in California, and even had begun to partner with non-Episcopal Christian congregations through the California Council of Churches. Once this ecumenical Christian partnership was established, Reverend Bingham recalls, the next transition towards becoming an interfaith organization happened relatively quickly. Unitarian and Jewish congregations across California began to ask if they could take part in this effort to utilize renewable energy. In 2001, the organization changed its name to Interfaith Power and Light, and its outreach and collaborative partnerships changed accordingly.⁷

IPL’s current work consists of spearheading a number of national programs and campaigns that are consequently adopted by its congregational and institutional partners. Through one such program, the Cool Congregations Program, IPL encourages houses of worship to undergo projects that will reduce their carbon footprints throughout the year. In 2015, seventy-six congregations and places of worship accepted this challenge, taking steps to improve building insulation, update heating and cooling appliances, adopt renewable energy, plant organic gardens, install rain barrels, compost food scraps, and recycle waste. IPL estimates that these congregations jointly prevented five million pounds of greenhouse gases from entering the atmosphere—the equivalent of the energy used in about 250 American homes.⁸ IPL certifies and honors “Cool Congregations” on a tiered scale, offering awards to congregations that have achieved 10%, 20%, 30%, and 40% of total carbon reduction.

⁵ “Mission and History,” Interfaith Power and Light, accessed Feb. 14, 2018, <http://www.interfaithpowerandlight.org/about/mission-history/>.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Lucas F. Johnston, *Religion and Sustainability: Social Movements and the Politics of the Environment* (London: Routledge, 2013), 134–36.

⁸ “Cool Congregations,” Interfaith Power and Light, accessed Feb. 14, 2018, <http://www.coolcongregations.org>.

These national challenges take shape across local areas in diverse ways, directed by the contextual needs and goals of the religious communities involved. This is exemplified in one impressive story from IPL’s 2015 annual report. For the past five years, the Washington State IPL affiliate has partnered with the Lummi Indian Nation (the original inhabitants of Washington’s northernmost coast) to protect native lands and water.⁹ In 2015, both groups worked together to stand against proposals for coal-export terminals along the Pacific Coast, which would cause an increase in levels of toxic coal dust and pollution on mostly tribal land. It was proposed that North America’s largest coal-export terminal be placed at Xwe’chi’eXen (also known as Cherry Point), located in the far northwest corner of Washington. The Washington IPL affiliate and the Lummi Nation partnered to build awareness and advocate to their local government, presenting research that coal-export terminals are known to increase asthma and cancer rates among residents in surrounding areas. Both communities celebrated a huge victory in May of 2016 when the Army Corps of Engineers denied the necessary permits to build the coal-export terminal at Xwe’chi’eXen, stating that “it would have adverse impacts upon the Lummi Nation.”¹⁰ Stories like this exemplify that IPL has created space both locally and nationally to address pressing environmental issues across religious and cultural divides.

GreenFaith

A second organization crossing religious and philosophical lines to address climate change is GreenFaith, whose mission is “to inspire, educate and mobilize people of diverse religious backgrounds for environmental leadership.”¹¹ With the tagline “Interfaith Partners for the Environment,” GreenFaith’s work is inspired by its members’ shared beliefs that “protecting the earth is a religious value, and that environmental stewardship is a moral responsibility.”¹² To achieve this mission, GreenFaith houses a number of programs that equip organizers to implement sustainable practices in their places of worship. GreenFaith is increasingly partnering with minority religious groups in the U.S., including Hindu, Muslim, and various Native American/Indigenous communities. Its website offers environmental statements from Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, and Muslim perspectives, exemplifying the breadth of communities with whom the organization works.¹³

GreenFaith has identified three core values that distinguish and define the organization: spirit, stewardship, and justice. The first, spirit, recognizes that religious traditions make space for “the sacred” to exist in nature—be it in their traditions’ texts, or in the experiences that religious believers have in nature. As an organization, GreenFaith addresses this first value by encouraging environmentally themed worship, as well as celebrations of creation within congregations. The second core value, stewardship, speaks to an individual’s or community’s capacity for action. Recognizing that religious communities may have unsustainable habits, GreenFaith works to

⁹ “Annual Report 2015,” Interfaith Power and Light, accessed Feb. 14, 2018, <http://www.interfaithpowerandlight.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/DN-IPL-AR-FINAL-e-file-copy.pdf>.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ “Mission and Areas of Focus,” GreenFaith, accessed Feb. 14, 2018, <http://www.greenfaith.org/about/mission-and-areas-of-focus>.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ “Religious Teachings on the Environment,” GreenFaith, accessed Feb. 14, 2018, <http://www.greenfaith.org/religious-teachings>.

provide resources that help conserve energy, food, and water. The final core value, justice, acknowledges that some communities and individuals in the U.S.—namely African Americans and those living in poverty—are disproportionately affected by climate change. To address this, GreenFaith commits to education and advocacy work around issues of environmental justice.

GreenFaith executes the three core values of spirit, stewardship, and justice through its various organizing and advocacy efforts. Highlighting one such example, GreenFaith organized a national campaign called “First 100 Hours Vigils” in late January 2017, encouraging interfaith gatherings, reflections, prayers, and services during the first 100 hours of Donald Trump’s presidency and the new U.S. administration. The campaign’s published materials on the vigils read, “During [these] first 100 hours . . . it’s vital that people of faith show our love for the Earth, and our commitment to people, planet, and communities.”¹⁴ In a report following the event, GreenFaith organizer Estrella Sainburg wrote that 68 multi-faith vigils were organized across the country, many of which were hosted in collaboration with local Interfaith Power and Light affiliates. Sainburg’s report notes that while the programming of each vigil varied, “what did not waver was support for a clean environment.”¹⁵

In another, more localized effort, GreenFaith sponsored a group to travel to the Standing Rock Indian Reservation (Cannonball, ND) in response to an invitation from Native American Elders for faith leaders to show their support during the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) protests. The GreenFaith Fellows in attendance included religious and lay leaders within Jewish, Buddhist, Christian, Muslim, Unitarian Universalist, and Native American communities. Reflecting on her desire to travel to Standing Rock and demonstrate solidarity with Indigenous Peoples, GreenFaith Fellow and Unitarian Universalist Zeb Green stated:

My ancestry traces back to the European settlement of Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Virginia. My family has been in North America since the beginning of colonization; we were responsible, in one way or another, for pain and suffering that Europeans brought to the First Nations. . . . I can't undo the past; I have to learn from it and avoid making the same mistakes. I will not turn away from those that are asking for my help. I can't ignore the Indigenous voices saying our culture is still hurting their communities. . . . [However,] I have no desire to shame my ancestors. I intend to honor them and the gifts they have given me. What better way is there to honor someone than to help make amends for their transgressions.¹⁶

Many of the non-Indigenous GreenFaith travelers attending Standing Rock did so to show solidarity and support for a historically abused and vulnerable group in the U.S. Another Christian GreenFaith Fellow, Beth Ackerman, was at Standing Rock when the protest efforts came to fruition. On December 4, 2016, the Army Corps of Engineers (under President Obama’s administration) announced that they would not grant the permit to drill the pipeline under the

¹⁴ “First 100 Hours Vigils,” GreenFaith, accessed Feb. 14, 2018, <http://www.greenfaith.org/programs/environmental-justice/first-100-hours-vigils>.

¹⁵ Estrella Sainburg, “100 Hours and 68 Multi-faith Vigils,” last updated Jan. 27, 2017, GreenFaith, accessible at <http://www.greenfaith.org/programs/environmental-justice/100-hours-vigils-summary>.

¹⁶ “GreenFaith at Standing Rock,” GreenFaith, accessed Feb. 14, 2018, at <http://www.greenfaith.org/success-stories/greenfaith-at-standing-rock>.

Missouri River on native lands.¹⁷ Ackerman summarizes, “The celebrations were mighty and conveyed a sacred victory.”¹⁸ The attendance of the GreenFaith fellows, at the invitation of Native American faith leaders, illustrates the potential that organizations like GreenFaith have to help members of different religious traditions organize and pool their resources to address urgent environmental causes.

Center for Earth Ethics (CEE) at Union Theological Seminary

The final organization profiled in this analysis, the Center for Earth Ethics (CEE) at Union Theological Seminary, opened its doors on Earth Day of 2015. Spearheaded by Karenna Gore—an attorney, journalist, author, and the daughter of Al and Tipper Gore—CEE “envisions a world where value is measured according to the sustained well-being of all people and our planet” and works to do so by “cultivat[ing] the public consciousness needed to make changes in policy and culture that will establish a new value system that is based on this vision of the world.”¹⁹ To actualize this mission, CEE engages religious traditions and communities guided by social ethics to create a framework for eco-justice. Its programs are designed to concretely address environmental issues of the day, including financial divestment and the inclusion of minority voices in interfaith settings (particularly Indigenous voices).²⁰

As articulated on its website, CEE is currently executing four main programs: the Eco-Ministry initiative, the Sustainability and Global Affairs initiative, and the Original Caretakers initiative, and the Environmental Justice and Civic Engagement initiative. Beginning with the first, the Eco-Ministry initiative seeks to connect religiously diverse faith leaders with environmental leaders, towards the end of affecting local, national, and global change.²¹ Through this initiative, CEE leverages its seminary affiliation by hosting conferences that focus on ecological competencies in religious education. One such conference, called “Faith and Ecology in Seminary Education,” took place in December of 2016, in partnership with the Jewish Theological Seminary, the Green Seminary Initiative, the Center for Earth Ethics, and the Interfaith Center for Sustainable Development (based in Jerusalem). This conference sought to convene diverse religious leaders concerned with environmental degradation, and trained participants on relevant environmental competencies.²²

A second program developed by CEE is called the Sustainability and Global Affairs initiative. Through this initiative, CEE connects its local environmental work to global

¹⁷ Unfortunately, the circumstances have since changed. On February 7, 2017, President Donald Trump signed an executive order authorizing the Army Corps of Engineers to proceed with the creation of the DAPL without requiring an environmental impact assessment.

¹⁸ “GreenFaith at Standing Rock.”

¹⁹ “Home,” Center for Earth Ethics, accessed Feb. 14, 2018, <https://centerforearthethics.org/>.

²⁰ “Programs,” Center for Earth Ethics, accessed Feb. 14, 2018, <https://centerforearthethics.org/#programs-intro>.

²¹ “Eco-Ministry,” Center for Earth Ethics, accessed Feb. 14, 2018, <https://centerforearthethics.org/programs/eco-ministry>.

²² See “Faith and Ecology Seminary Education Conference in New York City, December 14, 2016,” The Interfaith Center for Sustainable Development, accessed Feb. 14, 2018, <http://www.interfaithsustain.com/faith-and-ecology-conference-in-nyc/>.

sustainability efforts, including those specified within the UN Sustainable Development Goals.²³ Historically, scholars at CEE have conducted research projects that connect local environmental issues (such as health and sanitation) to the development goals that the UN articulates, analyzing how the UN's Development Goals may or may not inform local issues. In this way, the Sustainability and Global Affairs initiative concerns itself with environmentalism-in-practice, rendering international procedures accountable to local communities.

CEE's third program is called the Original Caretakers initiative, in which sustained, intentional partnerships with Indigenous Peoples are prioritized. This initiative was initially created for two primary reasons. First, Indigenous communities carry generations of experience and wisdom around environmental care, yet the academy (and the U.S. more broadly) has largely failed to honor this knowledge. Second, CEE recognizes that Indigenous populations are some of the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change—including poverty, hunger, and illness. In this way, the Original Caretakers initiative “supports the work of faith-keepers in Indigenous communities and seeks their guidance for [CEE's] educational programs.”²⁴

The fourth and final program developed by CEE is the Environmental Justice and Civic Engagement initiative. Recognizing that people of color and low-income communities are especially vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, this program seeks to work “at the intersection of social equity and the ecological crisis.”²⁵ Through this initiative, CEE connects faith leaders to national and global climate discussions, in an attempt to inform and empower local communities to address the challenges that climate change presents. In this way, the Environmental Justice and Civic Engagement initiative, alongside the Eco-Ministry initiative, Sustainability and Global Affairs initiative, and Original Caretakers initiative, demonstrates CEE's commitment to timely and urgent environmental issues in interreligious spaces.

Emerging Moral and Ethical Competencies within Interreligious Environmentalism

Upon reviewing these three interfaith-focused environmental organizations, it is clear that each exemplifies Willis Jenkins' description of “pragmatic pluralism.” The religious actors and constituencies involved with these organizations may differ when it comes to values, worldviews, or creation narratives, yet they nonetheless collaborate to address local or national environmental issues. Although each organization's work is contextually situated and executed, these institutions each display a shared set of six important moral competencies: 1) showing solidarity with disenfranchised communities and religious minorities (particularly Indigenous Peoples), 2) demonstrating individual or communal leadership, 3) facilitating opportunities for relationship building, 4) participating in hopeful storytelling/narrative, 5) taking interpersonal or communal risk, and 6) resisting burnout and emotional despair.

²³ “Sustainability and Global Affairs,” Center for Earth Ethics, accessed Feb. 14, 2018, <https://centerforearthethics.org/programs/sustainability-and-global-affairs/>.

²⁴ “Original Caretakers,” Center for Earth Ethics, accessed Feb. 14, 2018, <https://centerforearthethics.org/programs/original-caretakers>.

²⁵ Environmental Justice and Civic Engagement,” Center for Earth Ethics, accessed Feb. 14, 2018, <https://centerforearthethics.org/programs/environmental-justice-civic-engagement>.

I have drawn these conclusions by analyzing the work of Interfaith Power and Light, GreenFaith, and the Center for Earth Ethics at Union Theological Seminary and discerning shared themes across these organizations, but aspects of each moral competency are also discussed by scholars such as Lucas Johnston (religion and ecology), Oddbjørn Leirvik (interreligious/interfaith studies), and Eboo Patel (interreligious/interfaith studies). As such, I will draw upon these thinkers in this analysis, alongside scholar-practitioners such as Sallie McFague, Joanna Macy, and Ibrahim Abdul-Matin, to further articulate each of the six identified moral competencies. McFague, Macy, and Abdul-Matin are environmental scholars or advocates in their own religious communities (Christian, Buddhist, and Muslim, respectively), but tend to “look beyond” the parameters of their religious traditions to discuss the possibility and value of interreligious collaboration for environmental causes. In this regard, I draw on these three scholar-practitioners to offer concrete examples that complement the more theoretical work of Johnston, Leirvik, and Patel.

Moral Competency (1): Showing Solidarity with Disenfranchised Communities and Religious Minorities

Interfaith Power and Light, GreenFaith, and the Center for Earth Ethics at Union Theological Seminary all emphasize partnerships with disenfranchised or minority religious communities. More specifically, each organization has sponsored programs or created sustainable partnerships with Indigenous Peoples. In the case of Washington Interfaith Power and Light, the state’s local affiliate, a five-year partnership between IPL and the Lummi Indian Nation prevented the construction of pollution-causing and even toxic coal-export terminals along the Pacific Coast. GreenFaith similarly sponsored a diverse range of religious leaders and practitioners to travel to the Standing Rock Indian Reservation in North Dakota to protest against the Dakota Access Pipeline, a localized environmental issue that would have compromised water safety on Dakota and Lakota Sioux land. On more of a broad-based organizational scale, CEE has launched the Original Caretakers initiative, which seeks to honor Indigenous wisdom and experience around environmental care that is so often ignored in the U.S.

The focus on minority religious traditions across these interreligious environmental projects is laudable. Organizers across these initiatives cite the fact that disenfranchised communities in poverty—a disproportionately high percentage of which are Indigenous Peoples—are most severely affected by environmental problems such as barren soil, polluted water, and toxic waste. The examples from IPL and GreenFaith illustrate this: in both cases, land that belonged to Indigenous Peoples was designated for development that would compromise water, land, and air quality. Beyond the realm of activism or environmental projects, CEE’s Original Caretakers initiative also works with a board of Native American advisors in an effort to combat a form of interfaith solidarity that focuses solely on religious majorities or Abrahamic traditions.

Much of Oddbjørn Leirvik’s writings in his book *Interreligious Studies* focuses on the vulnerability and rights of religious minorities. (Leirvik focuses especially on vulnerable Muslim communities in a Norwegian context.) Leirvik elevates the issue of power and domination in interreligious spaces, which is another reason for working in solidarity with religious minorities or disenfranchised communities. He states, “It would be too simplistic to talk about interreligious

dialogue in civil society as a dominion-free activity.”²⁶ Leirvik challenges interreligious actors to be critically aware of who is included or excluded in these dialogues, activities, or enterprises.²⁷

While Indigenous Peoples and communities are currently elevated in the work of these three organizations, environmental issues are exacerbated for other disenfranchised groups in the U.S. as well, most notably people of color. Scholars in religion and ecology are now well aware of the phenomenon of “environmental racism,” which manifests through the increased pervasiveness of environmental risks or catastrophes in areas of the U.S. with higher percentages of racial minorities. As conveyed in a groundbreaking study by the United Church of Christ Commission on Racial Justice in 1987, race was found to be the most significant variable associated with the location of commercial hazardous waste facilities.²⁸ This report thus found that African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Native Americans, Pacific Islanders, and Asian Americans constitute racial communities in the U.S. that have been most affected by the placement of hazardous and toxic waste.²⁹ Thus, defending the rights and health of these and other marginalized communities is an important moral competency for environmental projects in interreligious spaces.

Moral Competency (2): Demonstrating Individual or Communal Leadership

Leadership skills such as consensus building, group facilitation, mobilization, and relatability are important for those who hope to effectively organize interreligious environmental projects. As exemplified in the projects that Interfaith Power and Light, GreenFaith, and the Center for Earth Ethics at Union Theological Seminary conduct, leaders and organizers are needed to plan, execute, and facilitate the group’s activities. However, not all leadership looks the same; it manifests through a variety of different roles. In some of the examples listed above, interreligious contingents included official representatives of religious communities; in others, lay practitioners took initiative to spearhead the advocacy or organizing work that needed to be done.

In his review of two sustainability initiatives in interreligious spaces, environmental ethicist Lucas Johnston emphasizes that leadership skills are paramount for success.³⁰ One of the first leadership qualities Johnston notes is the ability to engage in “worldview translation” to ensure that multiple constituencies are incentivized to participate in the project. Johnston summarizes: “Worldview translation is . . . a laborious process. It requires engaging citizens who are the targets of sustainable development, discernment of their interests, and the creation of materials and programs that foster their actualization.”³¹ Within interreligious spaces, leaders would be tasked to know enough about other traditions to appropriately speak to their values in order to draw them into the environmental project at hand. In this sense, worldview translation is a key trait in ensuring the mobilization of diverse constituencies.

²⁶ Oddbjørn Leirvik, *Interreligious Studies: A Relational Approach to Religious Activism and the Study of Religion* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 31.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁸ United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice, *Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States: A National Report on the Racial and Socio-Economic Characteristics of Communities with Hazardous Waste Sites*, 1987, accessed Feb. 14, 2018, <https://www.nrc.gov/docs/ML1310/ML13109A339.pdf>, xiii.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, ix.

³⁰ Johnston, *Religion and Sustainability*, 133–59.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 151.

Worldview translation also leads to consensus building. Understanding the “language” of each participant’s tradition, including their incentives for participating in environmental projects, a leader in this space would work to build consensus on the basis of shared ideas, goals, and values. Eboo Patel, writing within the field of interfaith/interreligious studies, notes that leaders in this space would shape interfaith activities that “bring together a wide range of people who orient around religion differently in compelling projects that highlight shared values and create space for powerful sharing, storytelling, and relationship building.”³² This leadership skill is quite relevant in environmental spaces. In his review of Interfaith Power and Light’s work, Johnston notes that one of the organization’s first tasks was to investigate resources within various traditions that speak to stewardship of creation, which could then be marketed in an effort to recruit a wide range of participants.³³

Alongside worldview translation, one of the perhaps unspoken leadership qualities needed in interreligious environmental spaces is the ability to be relatable. In both religious and environmental spaces, high-stakes values and moral considerations are at play. Navigating or facilitating these value-laden projects involves some level of sensitivity. Overpowering the group for the sake of “leadership,” be it through words or actions, is something that both scholars and practitioners warn against. Patel notes that self-righteousness can taint one’s best intentions: “To be an effective social change agent, people have to want to listen to you. And for that to happen, you have to make yourself relatable.”³⁴ Similarly, Muslim environmental activist Ibrahim Abdul-Matin argues that advancing the group’s mission “should not depend on the loud mouthing of any priest or imam. Nor should it be the rabble-rousing of any one activist group or individual protest.”³⁵ In this way, environmental leaders in interreligious spaces must have a level of self-awareness of their own relatability, taking care to represent the group with a level of humility and deference.

Moral Competency (3): Participating in Hopeful Storytelling and Narrative

Storytelling has long been a tactic in the separate spheres of interreligious and environmental organizing. Brought together, storytelling in interreligious environmental spaces avoids fear-laden stories of environmental destruction and despair in favor of elevating a moral imagination where diverse constituencies can work productively together to protect the resources upon which they depend. In this way, storytelling is used to define and share a vision as well as to inspire individuals toward action. Thematically, these stories tend to focus on interconnection—both among people as well as between other parts of the natural world.

Interfaith Power and Light, GreenFaith, and the Center for Earth Ethics depend on storytelling. This focus may manifest as a specific focus of training, or as an integrated characteristic of each group’s programming. For example, as part of the “Ground for Hope Initiative” hosted by GreenFaith and Interfaith Power and Light, a workshop in North Carolina explored how

³² Patel, *Interfaith Leadership*, 146.

³³ Johnston, *Religion and Sustainability*, 142.

³⁴ Patel, *Interfaith Leadership*, 158.

³⁵ Ibrahim Abdul-Matin, *Green Deen: What Islam Teaches About Protecting the Planet* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2010), 17.

storytelling allows people to build relationships with other interreligious actors. It was also named an important skill for getting to know local and state legislators for advocacy purposes.³⁶ Similarly, in recognition of Earth Day 2015, Interfaith Power and Light solicited stories from its network of affiliates about how their constituents celebrated the day. The organization received dozens of responses, many of which spoke to the interfaith-focused environmental projects that their network engaged in throughout the course of the day.³⁷ The collective power of this story-sharing exercise helps to remind organizers and activists that their efforts—which may seem small and disconnected—are actually a part of a larger, organized movement.

Scholars within interfaith/interreligious studies and religion and ecology also speak to the value of storytelling in environmental spaces. Functionally, these stories provide a hopeful vision of the future, and serve as a means for getting people involved and engaged. In his analysis of Interfaith Power and Light and the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC), Johnston explores how stories were frequently used as a motivational tool, and how they “contribute to the cultivation of a religious metanarrative of sustainability, often grounded in optimistic, empathetic anthropocentrism.”³⁸ In this way, stories are used to generate new “moral imagination” amongst diverse constituencies, creating a shared vision for a diverse group of stakeholders to work together towards a shared cause.³⁹

Storytelling in interreligious environmental spaces not only casts a vision, but it can also be used as a means to inspire action and engagement. Speaking from an interfaith context, Patel notes that narrative should be used strategically to motivate a group of invested people, encouraging them to take part in shared work.⁴⁰ Johnston conveys a similar sentiment, noting that strategic narratives in interreligious spaces not only inspire hope, but move people in the direction of responsible environmental behavior.⁴¹ Drawing on his experience engaging in environmental organizing within Muslim and interfaith contexts, Ibrahim Abdul-Matin also emphasizes the power of storytelling to inspire action. In *Green Deen*, he states:

We need to tell our stories. This book presents stories of Muslims and other people of faith who have demonstrated by their actions that they are willing to be actively engaged in protecting the planet Earth. Their inspiring stories serve as a guide to living a Green Deen [i.e., sustainable lives as Muslims] and show us how harmony can be built amongst all of creation. My hope is that, through these stories, you the reader will understand that we are, in fact, here with a purpose. I want you to be inspired by that purpose and the role that you can play.⁴²

Abdul-Matin makes it clear that stories can be used as a tool for inspiration, while simultaneously motivating listeners to participate in this effort.

³⁶“Storytelling Workshop, *Ground for Hope*,” GreenFaith, accessed Feb. 14, 2018, http://www.greenfaith.org/files/gfh-charlotte-2012/richard-fireman-storytelling-advocacy/at_download/file.

³⁷“Your Earth Day Stories,” May 1, 2015, Interfaith Power and Light, accessed Feb. 14, 2018, <http://www.interfaithpowerandlight.org/?s=your+earth+day+stories>.

³⁸ Johnston, *Religion and Sustainability*, 15.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁴⁰ Patel, *Interfaith Leadership*, 140.

⁴¹ Johnston, *Religion and Sustainability*, 15.

⁴² Abdul-Matin, *Green Deen*, 15 (emphasis in original).

Whether used as a tool for inspiration, action, or both, stories within interreligious environmental contexts tend to avoid sentiments of despair and environmental destruction. This focus on “positive” storytelling is not meant to sugarcoat the dire realities of climate change, nor to promise environmental utopia as a result of one’s participation in an activity or project. Rather, scholars and practitioners in this space have noted that fear and negative imagery tend to be more demotivating than action-inducing. Johnston conveys as much in his survey of two interfaith organizations that focus on environmentalism, noting that leaders tend to shy away from negative imagery because—while they adequately induce fear and concern—they do not ultimately produce positive change.⁴³ In *Green Deen*, Abdul-Matin shares a similar perspective, stating that “fear is one way to motivate people, but it [often] leads to despair.”⁴⁴

Thematically, interreligious stories in environmental contexts tend to focus on interconnection or interdependence. In interreligious settings, the framework of interconnection can be used to emphasize our human connectedness and dependence on one another to achieve common goals.⁴⁵ In an environmental context, interdependence speaks to our fundamental reliance upon non-human entities and systems that for these practical reasons are worth defending. One example of such a narrative comes from Sallie McFague, who, in writing from a Christian perspective, draws upon the theme of interdependence to create a vision that is relevant to her audience. She writes of the “univerself”—a concept based on kenotic, or self-emptying, theology, to underscore “the radical interdependence of all with all . . . emphasizing losing one’s life for others.”⁴⁶ This type of narrative reminds us that our actions do indeed impact others, whether we intend them to our not, and motivates us to choose to lead lives that influence others positively, or at least reduce the unintentional harm we cause.

Moral Competency (4): Facilitating Opportunities for Relationship-Building and Partnership

Collaborative partnerships are key to interreligious projects, environmental ones included. Strategic and productive partnerships do not emerge by chance, however; they must be built by those invested in the project at hand. As the organizations and centers discussed in this paper demonstrate, opportunities to build these types of relationships are often nurtured through the vehicle of shared work, such as advocacy, activism, or project execution. The Washington Interfaith Power and Light affiliate and Lummi Nation demonstrated the power of interreligious partnerships in preventing the issuance of permits required to build a coal-export terminal on native lands. Similarly, GreenFaith provided the opportunity for relationship-building through its “First 100 Hours Vigils,” which resulted in nearly 70 gatherings, reflections, prayer vigils, and services to demonstrate interfaith solidarity for environmental causes. The Center for Earth Ethics’ Eco-Ministry initiative also works to connect and train religiously diverse faith leaders in enacting local, national, and global environmental change. In each of these programs and initiatives, we see the power of collaborative engagement toward a shared goal.

⁴³ Johnston, *Religion and Sustainability*, 146.

⁴⁴ Abdul-Matin, *Green Deen*, 187.

⁴⁵ Patel, *Interfaith Leadership*, 139.

⁴⁶ Sallie McFague, *Blessed Are the Consumers: Climate Change and the Practice of Restraint* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 150.

Partnerships in interreligious environmental spaces must be built on a willingness to engage empathetically with diverse others, prioritizing interpersonal interaction and active collaboration. In his review of two interreligious environmental organizations, Johnston summarizes that empathetic engagement with other people or communities, which included “getting outside one’s own perspective [and] attempting to comprehend (not endorse) the deep values and core beliefs of others,” was the most important aspect of successful partnerships.⁴⁷ This type of partnership carries with it a foundation of intellectual humility, wherein interreligious partners respect one another enough to demonstrate openness to their ideas and worldviews, believing that they may indeed have something to learn from one another.

While a spirit of empathetic deliberation is key to interreligious partnerships in environmental spaces, the willingness to negotiate differences between each party’s concerns need not be sacrificed. Environmental concerns are typically complex and contextual, making one-size-fits-all solutions difficult to imagine. Thus, interreligious partners need to spend time learning about the needs of the other stakeholders involved, and work together to negotiate plans that can be mutually agreed upon. Johnston found that forgoing this sometimes cumbersome and lengthy process often leads well-intentioned partnerships to fail.⁴⁸ Indeed, the building of trust that leads to each stakeholder’s willingness to discuss values, priorities, and both short- and long-term goals is one of the most important facets of any successful partnership.⁴⁹

As the profiled organizations and centers exemplify, shared environmental activities can serve both as means and ends of interreligious partnerships. Relationships can be built towards the end of executing a project, or the execution of a project may be what builds trustful and long-term relationships. In either case, an emphasis on shared work is crucial. This view is affirmed by the work of environmental practitioners like Abdul-Matin, who speaks to the value of building interreligious partnerships to achieve environmental goals:

One way to make such interfaith connections is through work—in community gardens, in Gulf cleanup efforts, in deconstructing old buildings and salvaging useful materials. Through work we form operational and emotional bonds that build community around our shared love of God and the planet. Service is the bond that connects people of all faiths. In the environmental movement, it will be incumbent upon Muslim, Christian, Jewish, and other faith congregants to connect in a spirit of service to our shared Earth.⁵⁰

In his work as a Muslim environmentalist, Abdul-Matin has been inspired by the potential of interfaith partnerships, which may lead to a greater mobilization of concerned individuals. This view is affirmed in the work of Interfaith Power and Light, GreenFaith, and the Center for Earth Ethics, as well that of scholars such as Lucas Johnston in his review of interreligious projects.

⁴⁷ Johnston, *Religion and Sustainability*, 196.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 143.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁵⁰ Abdul-Matin, *Green Deen*, 16–17.

Moral Competency (5): Taking Interpersonal or Communal Risks

Collaborative partnerships are key to advancing interreligious environmentalism, but the risks that both communities and individuals take in making themselves vulnerable to each other should not be ignored. This moral competency is not directly discussed in the online materials of Interfaith Power and Light, GreenFaith, or the Center for Earth Ethics. Within the programs that each of these organizations run, however, we can see where risks may be taken: negotiating high-stakes or potentially charged projects between diverse constituencies (i.e., divestment), navigating potentially irreconcilable differences, or dealing with interpersonal tension or conflict. Scholars such as Johnston, Patel, and Abdul-Matin also respectively speak to the possibility of interpersonal or communal risks in environmental and interreligious spaces.

Speaking first to the possibility of communal risk, Johnston notes that collaboration and partnerships between two groups require vulnerability, a spirit of generosity, and the willingness to be changed. When discrete religious groups decide to enter a partnership with integrity, Johnston notes, this typically challenges members of the community to risk losing the comfort of their shared norms and values.⁵¹ Communal risk also manifests in both groups’ expressions of their deep beliefs and core values, with the possibility of being changed as a result of this level of vulnerability. Building trust across lines of difference requires vulnerable interactions, wherein groups may reveal their core values, concerns, and hopes. In any genuine exchange about values and beliefs, both groups run a legitimate risk of adapting or evolving as a result of knowing and understanding their partners. In an interview that Johnston conducted with Martin Palmer, Secretary General of the Alliance of Religions and Conservation, Palmer put this idea succinctly: “Partnership is actually about the risk [that] you might change.”⁵²

Partnerships may lead to communal risk or change within groups, but they also require individuals to step outside their comfort zones. Patel argues that interfaith leaders require a quality that he calls “grit.” Because interfaith organizing requires the risk of working with people you may disagree with on foundational concerns, Patel warns, “you are going to encounter prejudice, tension, disagreement, and conflict along the way. Occasionally, this will be of the ugly sort. With some frequency, it will be directed at you.”⁵³ While this type of encounter would hopefully be the exception rather than the rule, the negotiation of core values—environmental ones included— involves personal risk that may not always be rewarding.

Abdul-Matin describes personal risk as “meeting people where they’re at” to make collaborators comfortable or willing to work with you. Partnership may at times require stepping back to educate those with less experience or know-how. On the flip side, if you are the one lacking information or experience, it may require the admission that you need additional support. To this point, Abdul-Matin succinctly summarizes, “I learned that to meet people where they’re at, you must leave your comfort zone.”⁵⁴ Johnston conveys a similar sentiment with his concept of “an ethic of personal risk,” wherein interreligious partners are expected to extend moral consideration

⁵¹ Johnston, *Religion and Sustainability*, 23.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 139.

⁵³ Patel, *Interfaith Leadership*, 157.

⁵⁴ Abdul-Matin, *Green Deen*, 186.

by “stretching the ‘self’ to include others (ethnic, cultural, ethical, or non-human), through an expanded understanding of ‘neighbor.’”⁵⁵ Successful sustainability leaders in interreligious spaces, Johnston argues, are thus willing to risk their own comfort to approach their diverse partners with humility and vulnerability, in an effort to empathetically consider (but not always agree with) their worldviews or values.⁵⁶

Moral Competency (6): Building Resilience to Resist Burnout and Emotional Despair

Long-term organizers in interreligious or environmental spaces are familiar with the burnout that can emerge as a result of lackluster results, little advancement, and emotional despair. Thus, it is no surprise that Interfaith Power and Light, GreenFaith, and the Center for Earth Ethics each address this topic in their programs and initiatives. The resilience of faith-based environmental organizers after Hurricane Katrina was a key theme at GreenFaith’s 2016 “North American Convergence” conference hosted in New Orleans.⁵⁷ In the “First 100 Hours Vigils” program hosted by GreenFaith and numerous Interfaith Power and Light affiliates, many local groups spoke to the need for communities to come together and resist despair. Organizers of one vigil in Minneapolis advertised the event with the following description:

Now more than ever, we need to craft a narrative and practice of resistance and resilience. We do so by being in community, bringing our full selves to the table, and calling on the wisdom and stories of our diverse faith traditions. Join us for an evening of reflection, ritual, song, and community to cultivate the sustenance we need to respond powerfully in the year ahead.⁵⁸

Like GreenFaith and IPL, the Center for Earth Ethics has sponsored programs related to resilience. Taking cues from the People’s Climate Movement, the Center for Earth Ethics has sponsored People’s Climate Resistance Story Circles to encourage communities to pause and reflect upon their motivations as environmental organizers.⁵⁹

Within the scholarly community, Joanna Macy—a scholar of Buddhism and deep ecology—is one of the leading thinkers on building resilience against emotional numbness and burnout. One of the primary vehicles for this effort is her workshops hosted through the Work that Reconnects Network, an organization that she helps to cultivate and organize. Macy speaks to the importance of “honoring our own pain” in engaging with these issues, offering a set of exercises that encourage group sharing of frustration, anger, and sadness about climate change. Regarding the value of this exercise, Macy claims that by daring to experience our own pain, “we learn the true mean of compassion: to ‘suffer with’...What had isolated us in private anguish now opens

⁵⁵ Johnston, *Religion and Sustainability*, 154.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁵⁷ “North American Convergence 2016: New Orleans, Louisiana,” GreenFaith, accessed Feb. 14, 2018, <http://www.greenfaith.org/success-stories/new-orleans-convergence/?searchterm=resilience>.

⁵⁸ “Vigils for the Earth during the first 100 hours,” Interfaith Power and Light, accessed Feb. 14, 2018, <http://www.interfaithpowerandlight.org/vigils-for-the-earth-during-the-first-100-hours/>.

⁵⁹ For more information on climate resistance story circles, see “Commit 2 Respond,” Unitarian Universalist Ministry for Earth, accessed Feb. 14, 2018, <https://www.uumfe.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Commit2Respond-Climate-Justice-Month-2017-Toolkit.pdf>.

outward and delivers us into the wider reaches of our inter-existence.”⁶⁰ In this way, Macy utilizes collective storytelling and lament to help build a broader community of concerned individuals, a tactic that for many can lead to more resilient and long-lived environmental practices.

Through her experience leading the Work that Reconnects Network, Macy also has come to depend on relationships as a source for resiliency. Reflecting upon an interfaith retreat that focused on the environment, Macy writes:

We were people with different cultural and religious backgrounds, yet, despite the differing tradition systems to which we belonged, the prayers and affirmations that spontaneously arose in that circle expressed a common faith and fueled a common hope. Those words bespoke a shared commitment to engage in actions and changes in lifestyle on behalf of our Earth and its beings. They expressed a bonding to this Earth, going beyond feeling sorry for the planet or scared for ourselves. They were an affirmation of relationship—relationship that can be spiritually as well as physically sustaining, a relationship that can empower.⁶¹

Relationships in and of themselves can be sources of sustenance and resistance, perhaps even more so with religiously and philosophically diverse groups and individuals. Macy recognizes the strength in diversity as well, stating, “Diversity is a source of resilience. This is good news because this time of great challenge demands more commitment, endurance, and courage than any one of us can dredge up out of our own individual supply.”⁶²

While resilience-building is key to interreligious environmentalism, it is worth noting that everyone has their limits. Speaking about his work creating interreligious spaces, Patel emphasizes that everyone gets to “draw their own lines.”⁶³ For some, the line to fatigue, burnout, or despair may be a few steps farther than for others, but it is important to give space to the diverse needs and limits of the group, and for individuals to feel comfortable expressing these limits. Because we are playing the long game, as Patel would say, this work should be done humanely, with self-care and resiliency in mind.⁶⁴

Conclusion

This paper employed the framework of pragmatic pluralism to identify moral and ethical competencies relevant to interreligious environmentalism. Reviewing the work of three environmental organizations that utilize interreligious methods—Interfaith Power and Light, GreenFaith, and the Center for Earth Ethics at Union Theological Seminary—reveals a shared set of six moral competencies: showing solidarity with disenfranchised communities and religious minorities, demonstrating individual or communal leadership, participating in hopeful storytelling

⁶⁰ “The Spiral,” Work that Reconnects Network, accessed Feb. 14, 2018, <https://workthatreconnects.org/spiral>.

⁶¹ Joanna Macy, *World as Lover, World as Self: Courage for Global Justice and Ecological Renewal* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 2007), loc. 1510–1514 of 3179, Kindle.

⁶² *Ibid.*, loc. 355–357 of 3179, Kindle.

⁶³ Patel, *Interfaith Leadership*, 158.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 159.

and narrative, facilitating opportunities for relationship-building and partnership, taking interpersonal or communal risks, and building resilience to resist burnout and emotional despair.

It is worth noting that at any given time—within the context of a particular project—some of these moral competencies may be more salient or relevant than others. Additionally, within the context of a particular project, some competencies may intersect or, conversely, come into tension with one another. One example of this interconnection can be seen between storytelling and resiliency; while these two moral competencies may have distinct traits, in some cases storytelling was used *as a form of* resilience-building. Speaking to possible tensions, we can see how the moral competencies of avoiding burnout (on the one hand) and demonstrating leadership (on the other) could perhaps lead to conflicting goals: it can be difficult to prioritize mental or emotional well-being when there is simply too much work to be done.

Each of these moral competencies emerged by analyzing the work of the three organizations, but their definitions can be reinforced by drawing upon the work of scholars in both religion and ecology and interfaith/interreligious studies. Thinkers like Lucas Johnston, Oddbjørn Leirvik, and Eboo Patel illuminate how these moral competencies are relevant in both environmental spaces and interreligious spaces. By bringing these thinkers into conversation with one another, we can gain a more complete understanding of how to create successful interreligious partnerships to address environmental concerns. Interfaith Power and Light, GreenFaith, and the Center for Earth Ethics at Union Theological Seminary are all testaments to the profound and impactful work that is possible when these concepts are indeed united.

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