

Rabbi Renée Bauer
Interfaith Coalition for Worker Justice
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Good Evening. My name is Rabbi Renée Bauer and I am the director of the Interfaith Coalition for Worker Justice of South Central Wisconsin. It is an honor to be here this evening to be part of this powerful interfaith gathering.

Yesterday was Yom Kippur, the most holy day of the year for Jews. Yom Kippur is our day of atonement. It is a day we take responsibility both individually and communally for our misdeeds- misdeeds we did actively and those we did through our inaction.

One of the biblical readings we read on Yom Kippur is about Jonah who runs away from God's call to help save a nation of people. The Biblical text says he goes to sleep during a time of disaster. In synagogue yesterday Jews were called to wake up and not follow Jonah's path of avoidance. And today our country is being called awake by the Pope who is insisting that we wake up and take action to address two major crises of our day- namely climate change of the economic inequality.

For me, who works with a single issue organization that focuses on economic justice, but knows that "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere" a powerful piece of the Pope's message is that he connects the various crises of our day. As he says in the Encyclical, "Everything is connected....We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded and at the same time protecting nature." (encyclical #139). So we "hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor" (no.49).

This connection is not new and not exclusively in the realm of the Catholic Church. The classical rabbis of my tradition connected the biblical commandment of not destroying trees when at war to prohibitions against conspicuous consumption by humans. How we treat the earth and how we function socially have and will always be linked.

We, as members of different faiths, stand together in solidarity bridging the divides that often keep us apart. So too must we, as social justice advocates on different issues, must heed the call to join together our movements for economic, environmental and racial justice and break apart the false barriers that keep us in our various silos.

We are here tonight because change that is needed will come from the ground up. Today the Pope spoke to congress but he knows change will come from regular groups of people like us who are gathered in parks and plazas all over the country. In July of this year, the Pope was quoted saying, "The future of humanity does not lie solely in the hands of great leaders, the great powers and the elites. It is fundamentally in the hands of peoples and in their ability to organize. It is in their hands, which can guide with humility and conviction this process of change."

May we have the courage and wisdom to know that the change to bring more justice and sustainability to our world is in our hands and may we move forward together in unity and in power. Amen.