

2019-20 Climate Change Chronicle 14

The Pandemic, a Classroom for Climate Change

In the midst of the COVID-19 crisis a number of articles have been written about the relationship between the pandemic and climate change. This is another one. In this chronicle I will show how our approach to the pandemic can teach us a great deal about what to do or not to do to prepare for climate change.

The similarities

The pandemic and the climate change challenge have several things in common.

For one thing they are both universal in nature. The pandemic affects all countries, their systems, their peoples and their cultures. Climate change has done likewise but in different ways in different countries.

Next the pandemic is affecting all other systems—the economic systems, the political systems and the legal systems. The same thing is true of climate change.

Further both the pandemic and climate change are affecting all communities and their respective cultures.

Finally, because both the pandemic and climate change are affecting all countries, there can be beneficial sharing of experiences.

So what are the differences?

The differences

The most obvious difference is the time frame. Though nothing is for sure with the pandemic, most specialists believe that it will last for a couple of years, perhaps longer. Our scientists are telling us that climate change is going to be with us for a number of generations.

Then comes the complexity problem. Those dealing with the pandemic are counting on a vaccine to provide a cure. There is no vaccine to deal with

climate change. It is far more complex. Climate change demands different approaches in different communities and parts of the Earth.

Finally—and this is the major problem—those dealing with the pandemic are depending upon existing systems to manage our way through it. But it has become increasingly apparent that these systems—the economic, political and legal systems—are a primary cause of the problem. We can't deal with it effectively until we create new systems.

Before moving on, here is a brief story that illustrates the pandemic and climate change coming together, resulting in an extremely difficult and seemingly unmanageable situation.

A coming together

David Zaremka is the Coordinator of the African Great Lakes Initiative of the Friends Peace Teams in western Kenya. He has been a coordinator for many developing projects for a number of years. He sends out regular reports on the situation in Kenya each month. .

In a recent report he noted that Zambia is in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. But he also noted several other problems. The country has been invaded by hordes of locusts that are eating up food crops. The country is trying to protect the food crops with insecticides. But Kenya is also struggling with climate change. Torrential rains are washing away the insecticides. In addition, flooding has triggered massive landslides destroying homes and livestock. One hundred and fifty thousand people have been displaced. The corona virus is bad enough but how can a people come to grips with a pandemic in the midst of the climate change devastation? I'm sure there are similar situations in other parts of the world.

davidzaremka.com/2020/04/24/600-more-on-covid-19-in-kenya/

The path ahead

I don't have any solutions to the problems I've been discussing but I do have some suggestions that might lead to a solution. We know we can't

use our current economic, political and legal systems to deal with the climate change problems. So where do we start?

We start, I think, with the awareness that we have entered a climate changing world. Our scientists have been telling us this for some time now. We have taken over the evolution process from Earth and are allowing our systems to determine Earth's future. So how can we deal with this?

I was thinking about this walking in a park the other day. A mother was sitting on a blanket as her two children were chasing one another. The boy was about four and the little girl was about a year and a half. The toddler was having trouble keeping up with her brother. She fell down a number of times until she found her way back to their mom's waiting arms.

So what makes an infant decide to walk to her mother? Obviously the child would seek her mother, someone she trusted. I think most parents with small children have had this experience. I know we did.

We waited for the day each one of our children was ready to walk. We would be in the living room sitting apart from one another with our arms stretched out to them. And they would get up and fall down, get up and fall down. We would cheer them on to walk from mommy to daddy. But we did not teach them how to walk. They learned to walk by themselves in their own new world.

In a climate changing world the first step is the awareness of a relationship, a personal relationship that recognizes Earth as part of us, our Mother.

This is my constant hope and prayer—that our world will care for Mother Earth so she can continue to care for us and for our children, grandchildren and future generations.

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