Calling for Climate Justice for the Beloved Community: An Open Letter from Women of Faith, Women of Color

We write as women of color and women of faith, knowing that climate change touches our lives. It impacts our families and especially our children's health, wellbeing and their ability to succeed. As women of color, we are impacted by the climate crisis along with our everyday crisis of putting food on the table, caring for our loved ones and seeking healthcare. We write to urge policymakers, elected officials, healthcare professionals and church leaders to take action to implement climate solutions for the benefit of our communities.

Communities of color—our communities—are at the frontlines of the climate crisis. Many of our families live on the fenceline of polluting industries. And our communities too often are located in pollution corridors along busy road arteries. Even as access to God's creation can improve health and wellbeing, our communities are more likely to live in nature deprived communities. With less green space and lack of clean air, our children and our families suffer. Poor air quality in a majority of our communities, which is a consequence of pollution and climate change, creates huge disparities in health. Asthma, allergies and other pulmonary issues coupled with lack of access to healthcare are just some of the climate impacts that are impacting our families first and worst. Climate change is not only impacting our children's health, nutrition and development - it is also impacting their mental health. We see our children losing hope in the future because of climate change. It is clear that Black and Brown communities aren't equipped to handle the physical, mental and spiritual damage of climate change.

Our stories of climate impacts abound in our communities. Air pollution, often driven by climate change, causes lung cancer, strokes, heart diseases and respiratory illnesses. These illnesses are raging in marginalized communities. When we are confined to limited levels of income and denied access to healthcare, these illnesses often go without adequate treatment. Yet, in accordance with the common refrain of the faithful, "we will not be denied," we will not be denied healthcare or a healthy life for ourselves or our children.

We loudly proclaim to our policymakers that they must respect the values of human dignity and conscience and protect our communities from the harm of pollution and climate change. We do not ask for a patchwork approach that looks at only the symptoms, but for redress that deals with how God's good creation deteriorated to the point of climate crisis - with the burden of the crisis being most heavily placed on our communities. We must speak to the root cause of these climate injustices. We urge our policymakers to educate themselves and to engage with climate issues. They must embrace climate action.

We call on our own communities to be more civically engaged and gain a greater understanding of the harms of climate change. We have to pick up the torch of action and bring to bear our tenacity for relationships and coalition building. We must be advocates and counter the forces that degrade our air and place our neighborhoods in pollution's path through redlining. Our communities can no longer stay on the margins of decision-making. Our ancestors fought bitterly and at great personal cost for our future. It is our duty to engage policy makers at every level, including planning commissioners, and bring our voices to the forefront.

We reaffirm intentional use of churches in our communities, knowing that the Black Church is the oldest African-American institution in the U.S. and that Latinx churches are community cornerstones. We call on our church members to educate themselves about the climate crisis and engage with policymakers. There is no separation of church and justice. The church has always been at the frontline of action and advocacy and our church leaders need to be a voice for climate solutions and climate justice. We urge our churches to leverage community resources, engage in community dialog around climate issues and help educate our communities. We also call on faith-based institutions to revere the women they depend on to be the fabric of the community as we face climate injustices.

For our healthcare providers, especially those connected to our faith communities, we urge all healthcare professionals to track the climate change ailments in our communities that are impacting women and children. We must empower ourselves with data. One of the challenges we face is that healthcare professionals often do not understand the health connections to climate and may not then communicate this information to their patients, especially those that are young, pregnant, or elderly. Faith-based health teams need to receive training on climate-related illnesses and educate congregants on the climate health issues that impact our communities. Our communities need healthcare advocates that know about the connections between climate and health equity. We can no longer, as a community, wonder if our addresses were different, would our health outcomes and healthcare be different.

The Black and Brown community has influence and agency. We see ourselves not as lost, last or forgotten but as belonging to a strong and resilient contingency of Black and Brown mothers, sisters and daughters. We have a voice for self-advocacy and are forces for change. We are a network of significant prevalence and agency.

As a community, we need more resources to learn more about climate-related risks. We need remediation for contaminated sites that are located in or around our neighborhoods. We need resources for weatherization and for measures that can make our families more resilient to climate change. We need resources to learn more about climate-related risks. We need public transportation that relies on clean energy and does not add to climate change. We need to prevent polluting industries from being located in our communities. And we need local, state and national policymakers as well as healthcare professionals and church leaders to stand with us as we advocate for the future of ourselves and our children.

Sincerely,

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