

Fighting climate change one small act at a time

Light bulbs and solar panels won't solve the climate crisis. They're signs of something greater.

From the Editors in the [August 10, 2022](#) issue



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There have been two heavy blows to climate change action in the United States in recent weeks. In *West Virginia v. EPA*, the Supreme Court handed down a devastating decision that weakens the executive branch's ability to address climate change. In its 6–3 ruling, the court eliminated the EPA's authority to direct electric utilities to shut down coal-fired power plants in favor of wind, solar, and other renewable forms of energy. Weeks later, Joe Manchin—a Democratic senator from West Virginia who has profited significantly from the coal industry in recent years—killed a promising congressional climate policy plan, citing inflation.

These two moments have wide-reaching consequences. For those who recognize the need for swift and large-scale action on climate change, the outcome could hardly be worse. Congressional, judicial, and executive tools that might guide the US's

response to climate change remain in the toolbox, unused. It's enough to make a person feel hopeless.

In [this issue](#), [Anna Woofenden writes about green churches](#), focusing on small steps that congregations are taking to create their own responses to climate change. It's hard not to wonder: What's the point? We aren't going to solve climate change with light bulbs and solar panels.

That's a question worth taking seriously, and it has long been important for Christians. One answer lies in the distinction, often made in L'Arche communities, between being a sign and being a solution. Churches, like all intentional communities, are called to be signs. We cannot solve world hunger, but we understand that when we feed hungry people we signal our belief that a better way is possible. We can't solve child sex trafficking, but we understand that when we welcome vulnerable refugees we participate in God's vision. We do these things out of love and for the sake of love. Scalability, in the teachings of Jesus, is never the primary concern.

The same is true of the ways the climate crisis calls us to act. We have struggled to show our love for the planet, for its air and water and plants and trees. We have struggled to acknowledge our indebtedness to nature. The Christian tradition has been slow to understand that love of the planet is as vital and compelling as love of neighbor. But indeed, both are the same love.

As a sign, we point toward what we know is God's way: a gentler, more connected, more whole way. As a sign, we proclaim God's redemptive work. As a sign, we consider the resources we have right here, right now. As a sign, we move away from end-times thinking and disaster-oriented models and toward our belief in God's alternative vision—a reality in which we participate by faith.

In *Practically Divine*, Episcopal priest Becca Stevens writes, "The bravest thing we can do in this world is not cling to old ideas or fear of judgment, but step out and just do something for love's sake." Each act we take against climate change, however small, is an act of love.

A version of this article appears in the print edition under the title "Small acts, big signs."