***Shared with Creation Justice Ministries for Earth Day Sunday 2020 by Rev. Dr. Ian Mevorach, Co-Founder and Spritual Leader of Common Street Spiritual Center. Direct questions to ian@commonstreet.org***

**The Story of Renewable Natick**

Natick, MA, a suburb of Boston, is a town that recently hired a Sustainability Coordinator to help reduce energy waste, boost recycling and composting, and in other ways increase the town’s sustainability. In the fall of 2017, Jillian Wilson-Martin, Natick’s Sustainability Coordinator, organized a local screening of Al Gore’s “An Inconvenient Sequel,” which describes the severity of the climate crisis and the urgency of acting now to prevent a worst case scenario. As a local faith leader known for speaking out about environmental justice, I was asked to be on the panel for the Q & A after the screening.

At the end of the film, Al Gore challenges the audience to transition their church, their school, their company, their town, or their city to 100% renewable energy. During the Q & A, I asked the question, “Can Natick do this?” Jillian’s answer was, “Yes, but I can’t do it alone.”

I am the pastor of Common Street Spiritual Center in Natick, MA an experimental interfaith church associated with the American Baptist Churches USA. We are a community that believes a more sustainable and peaceful world is possible, and we also believe in being the change we want to see in the world.

In partnership with the First Congregational Church in Natick, we launched a campaign called “Renewable Natick” in February of 2018, with a goal of moving our town into a 100% clean energy future. Faith communities have a unique ability to speak to moral issues such as the climate crisis, and inspire people to come together and take action. We have spiritual language and practices that help people discover a sense of calling, of conviction, and of partnering with God in the struggle for justice. We also know how to build communities of trust and action.

Renewable Natick has brought together a community of activists who have been working hand in hand with our Sustainability Coordinator and Sustainability Committee to move our town as rapidly as possible away from fossil fuels and towards clean energy. At Natick’s 2018 Fall Town Meeting, Renewable Natick brought a resolution to the floor which called for a transition to net zero greenhouse gas emissions, in the public and private sectors, by 2050. For months prior to the meeting we lobbied local town meeting members and other elected officials, and worked behind the scenes to wordsmith the resolution and build public support. My speech in favor of the resolution, before Town Meeting, could be considered my most important sermon of 2018. The resolution passed resoundingly at Town Meeting, with a vote of 88 to 12, and enlarged the moral legitimacy and urgency of local efforts to address the climate crisis.

Since then, our story of local advocacy for climate justice has continued. Renewable Natick has been continuing its work, and our church has also been instrumental in the development of a regional hub of the Sunrise Movement, which is a powerful youth-led movement for climate and economic justice. In general, our church has become an anchor institution and support for local movements for environmental and social justice.

Churches and other faith communities have historically been major drivers of social change. This is true all over the world. In United States history faith communities provided leadership for the civil rights movement and the abolition movement, for worker justice movements, peace movements, and in the movement for LGBTQ rights. Faith communities have the moral authority to speak out when the status quo needs to be changed, and to caste alternative societal visions that look more like what Jesus called the Kingdom of God.

We are facing an environmental crisis that includes super storms and extreme weather from a destabilized climate, unsafe and overpriced drinking water, habitat destruction and species extinction, and toxic pollution that threatens the most vulnerable communities. Each community of faith, in its own context, can discover an environmental justice calling. We can come together to speak out, organize people, and accelerate the pace of change towards what is right and good and pleasing in the sight of God, the Creator and Sustainer of Life.