As religious leaders representing diverse faith traditions and congregations in Iowa, we believe that global climate change is a moral issue. We feel a particular responsibility to speak on behalf of those whose voices are not heard – the most vulnerable in our society and in our world, including children and future generations.

Carbon pollution is a major driver of global climate change which threatens the health of our families, the well-being of our communities, and ultimately the earth. Current impacts of climate-disrupting carbon dioxide emissions include severe storms, deadly heat waves, drought, flooding, and wildfires. Given that power plants account for 40% of U.S. carbon emissions, we support the efforts of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to finalize the carbon pollution rule for new power plants and to issue a strong draft rule for reducing carbon pollution from existing power plants and finalize it by June 2015.

Carbon pollution is an environmental justice issue. Historically many power plants have been located near low-income neighborhoods, near communities of color, and in Midwest farm communities. These areas contribute much less to the problem yet are being hit the hardest in terms of health and climate impacts. Many of these citizens have preexisting health conditions that make them more vulnerable to heat waves, reduced air quality, and other consequences of burning fossil fuels. These communities also have fewer resources to adapt to climate change and therefore mitigation – reducing the causes of climate change – is critical.

In addition, we must understand the moral responsibility that we have in light of the global disparity between the amount of carbon pollution released by the United States and other developed nations in comparison to developing nations around the world. Developing nations have far less capacity for adapting to climate change, and will bear much more of the impacts. We support efforts to use these carbon pollution standards as leverage to encourage carbon pollution reductions by other developed and growing economies worldwide.

As people of faith, we look for signs of hope in moving toward the future. The Midwest’s manufacturing base gives us the opportunity – and responsibility – to take the lead in developing clean energy technologies that can meet our energy needs and protect the earth for future generations. In Iowa, over 4,000 people work in the wind industry, and job growth in the solar industry is on the rise as well. Additional clean energy jobs in energy efficiency, transmission, and research and development means that we do not have to sacrifice employment opportunities for controlling carbon pollution.

Climate change significantly exacerbates issues on which our congregations and faith communities are already working: issues like hunger, clean water, disaster relief, refugee services, and conflict resolution. It is the role of faith leaders to help others connect the dots between climate change and its impacts, and to advocate for meaningful solutions. We believe that limiting carbon pollution from power plants is a key part of that solution. We call upon people of faith to provide leadership on this issue and act in the interest of the common good.

Signed,
A Statement by Religious Leaders in Iowa on Global Climate Change
April 2014

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Roman Catholic Diocese of Davenport

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Presbytery of Des Moines

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Rev. Tim Button-Harrison
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Bishop Richard Pates
Bishop of Des Moines
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Rev. Dr. Rich Pleva
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Rev. William Spangler-Dunning
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*The listing of faith community names is for identification purposes only.