Dear friends,

Bushfires are consuming large swathes of Australia. Cyclone Idai destroyed portions of Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Malawi. The lungs of the earth are burning in the Amazon Rainforest. A few months ago, our team was thwarted from conducting a training in the Philippines due to an enormous typhoon, only to reschedule just as a volcano erupted. Extreme weather events are just one aspect of global climate change. Alongside mass species die-off and new emerging diseases, human communities are struggling as crop cycles are disturbed, potable water runs out, and climate migrants land in areas already stretched thin of natural resources, increasing the challenge for everyday survival. Identity conflict is spiking across the world as these real and perceived threats to stability and security continue to mount. It is a daunting reality.

In the midst of this, however, there is hope. Last year, in both the G20 Interfaith Forum in Tokyo, Japan, and the Religions for Peace World Assembly in Lindau, Germany, religious leaders from around the world spoke of the stewardship of creation as a spiritual obligation. The best of our religious traditions and shared spiritual values call us to recognize our responsibility to the planet and to each other – to be good cohabitants, servant leaders, and lovers of the earth. The Qur’anic Surah Al-Baqarah, for example, calls us to “eat and drink from the provision of Allah, and do not commit abuse on the earth…(2:60).”

This month, I will be traveling to Brigham Young University to participate in the Wheatley Institution’s annual Student Conference on Religion in the Public Sphere (SCRIPS). This year’s conference is titled, “Faith and Place: Religion, Ecology, and Conflict in Contested Spaces”. Each year, students from around the country gather in a retreat center in Aspen Grove and focus on specific themes under the directed leadership of several experts. I will guide students to think critically about the unique challenges of interfaith collaboration to address issues of environment and conflict, and to produce a relevant policy paper or program design.

In the midst of the warm DC winter of 2020, we are reflecting on the ways that the collective mistreatment of the earth is driving violent conflict and how to mobilize faith to help tackle this extraordinary challenge. Natural disasters, resource competition, and climate concerns have the capacity to radically disrupt otherwise peaceful or stable communities. Specific attention needs to be paid to the nuanced approaches and peacebuilding methodologies that address conflicts that are driven and exacerbated by environmental issues. This crisis has prompted ICRD to name “Religion & Environmental
Stewardship” as the topic of this year’s 2020 Faith-in-Action Award Dinner, scheduled for May 21, 2020, at the Army Navy Country Club in Arlington, Virginia.

We are thrilled to announce that, this year, ICRD will be honoring Karenna Gore as the award recipient for her exceptional work to raise the public consciousness around climate-related issues and the relationships between religion and ecology. Karenna Gore is the Director of the Center for Earth Ethics at Union Theological Seminary and serves on the board of Riverkeeper – an environmental non-profit dedicated to the protection of the Hudson River and its tributaries.

In the recent *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis calls the body of Christ toward “a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet. We need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all.” We must rise to the historical moment that confronts us and embrace His Holiness’ invitation, and the invitation of the best of all of our religious traditions, to work together beyond our differences to find solutions that protect our future, our children’s futures, our fellow creatures, and our planet. The climate conversation is long overdue and stands to affect us all. Join ICRD as we begin to reflect on how to incorporate environment into our future programmatic initiatives. Together, we can make faith part of the solution.

Warm regards,

James Patton

With the conclusion of our 20th year of operation, ICRD is making one final fundraising push to celebrate this momentous occasion. Our work began with the vision of Dr. Douglas M. Johnston, who recognized that religious values and religious leaders were underutilized in peacebuilding and conflict resolution around the globe. Join ICRD in celebrating twenty years of Dr. Johnston’s vision and consider making a contribution today. With your help, we can make faith part of the solution!