

How Georgia Congregations Support Climate Solutions

Summary

How can Georgia's 15,000+ houses of worship become leaders in climate solutions? In this Drawdown Georgia webinar, co-hosted with Georgia Interfaith Power & Light (GIPL), moderator Hannah Shultz talks with three faith leaders, Reverend Jenny Phillips of the United Methodist Church's General Board of Global Ministries, Maher Budeir of Roswell Community Masjid, and Joanna Kobylivker of Adamah ATL, about how their communities are reducing emissions, building disaster resilience, and engaging youth in climate action.

Key Takeaways

- GIPL helps Georgia's faith communities organize Green Teams and adopt practical climate solutions like energy efficiency, solar, and EV charging, using the Drawdown Georgia framework as an accessible roadmap for congregations.
- The United Methodist Church has committed to net-zero emissions by 2050 across its ministries, facilities, and investments, and is deploying solar-powered disaster response trailers, including one already active in Valdosta, Georgia, following Hurricane Helene.
- Roswell Community Masjid is designing its next campus to meet the Living Building Challenge, one of the world's most rigorous green building standards, incorporating reclaimed lumber from a 75-year-old barn and preserved green space for community reflection.
- Adamah ATL connects Jewish tradition with climate action through its Jewish Climate Leadership Coalition, a free network of about 350 institutions nationwide, 11 of them in Atlanta, and through youth programs that give teens concrete ways to address climate anxiety.
- Panelists agreed that meeting congregations where they are, whether through cost framing, small wins like eliminating styrofoam, or connecting climate action to shared values instead of politics, is essential to building lasting engagement.

Transcript Notice: This transcript was generated automatically and may contain transcription errors. It has been lightly edited for clarity. Please refer to the video for the most accurate record.

Lisa Lilienthal: Good morning, everyone, thank you for joining us. We have a really interesting and increasingly relevant conversation taking place today, about the many ways our faith communities in Georgia are engaging in climate solutions, and how these solutions are benefiting congregations and local communities.

If you're joining a Drawdown Georgia webinar for the first time, welcome. As you may know, Drawdown Georgia is an initiative of the Ray C. Anderson Foundation — we launched in 2020, after two years of research on the most effective and available climate solutions specific to the state of Georgia. Since then, we've created resources and tools for people working on those climate solutions in Georgia, and for interested citizens who want to learn more about how to make their homes more energy efficient, how to evaluate EV purchases, how to compost at

home and in their community, and much more. We invite you to visit our website, sign up for our biweekly Climate Digest, which aggregates climate solutions news from across the state, access our toolkits, and get to know the resources we have, like an emissions tracker that lets you see greenhouse gas emissions at the county level in Georgia, and how they change over the years.

So there are lots of resources available to you. We're fortunate to have a really strong network across the state, of all walks of life, working on climate solutions. Today, we're going to be talking specifically about some of the faith communities in Georgia, and some of the really interesting and meaningful work they're doing on climate solutions, and how some of that work is impacting the recovery beginning after the storms this past weekend. I'd like to welcome you, and now I'll turn it over to Hannah Shultz, from Georgia Interfaith Power & Light, who will moderate our discussion today.

Hannah Shultz: Thank you so much for having us today. My name is Hannah, I'm the Program Director at Georgia Interfaith Power & Light, also known as GIPL. We're an environmental interfaith nonprofit, and our mission is to work with faith communities across the state, to help them organize Green Teams and congregations, implement practical climate solutions like energy efficiency, solar, and EV charging stations on-site, and advocate for more just policies.

We've worked closely with the Drawdown team over the past several years, thinking about how we might help congregations implement the Drawdown solutions — we believe these solutions are a great roadmap for both individuals and congregations. A lot of times, when I work with faith communities, I get the question, well, what can I do to address the climate crisis? I think one of the biggest barriers to people taking meaningful action is knowing where to begin — it can feel really overwhelming. What I love about the Drawdown solutions is that they provide very practical answers to this question — very concrete things people can do, and a lot of these solutions feel very accessible. Things like energy efficiency upgrades, composting, things individuals and congregations might already be doing, or have thought about doing. GIPL is here to work with congregations to help them think about how they might implement these solutions — we've really designed our programs around the Drawdown Georgia solutions, thinking about how congregations can increase things like composting, recycling, EV charging, tree planting.

We believe faith communities can be such great leaders in this work. We know that almost every major faith tradition has an ethic of caring for the natural world and our neighbors, and so faith communities are really well positioned to be role models in their communities, to show people in their congregations what's possible, and to lead the way. There are so many good examples of how faith communities across the state are implementing these solutions and doing this work. I'm really excited to be here today with some leaders from a couple of different faith traditions, who are working in their own faith community, and with faith communities across the state and region, to implement these solutions and really model what's possible.

So welcome to our panelists — I'm going to introduce each of them, then turn it over to them to share a little about their work. First, we have Reverend Jenny Phillips with us. She's the Director of Environmental Sustainability at Global Ministries, which includes the United Methodist Committee on Relief, the worldwide humanitarian relief and development agency of the United Methodist Church. She pilots and integrates sustainability practices for agency operations and programs, including domestic and international disaster response, global health, and agriculture, and she works with faith communities on solar, energy efficiency, land use, waste management, and other programming. Jenny has a Master of Divinity from Union Theological Seminary in

New York, and a Bachelor of Arts in Communications from the University of Washington, and she's based in Decatur, Georgia. So welcome, Jenny.

We also have Maher Budeir with us. He's a civil and environmental engineer by training, and a father of four. He's lived in the northern Atlanta suburbs for over 25 years, and during that time has leveraged his training to help the larger nonprofit community, as well as the Muslim communities across the area, be more thoughtful and resourceful in the design and operation of their organizations and buildings. He's one of the founders of Amana Academy Charter School and the Roswell Community Masjid, and has served on both of their boards, as well as serving as RCM's Executive Director. Maher is BoardSource certified, a board governance trainer, and a graduate of UT Austin and UCF.

And lastly, we have Joanna Kobylivker, who is the director of Adamah ATL, a local chapter of the national Adamah organization, working to connect people and planet in Atlanta through Jewish environmental organizing, climate action, and youth empowerment. She also serves as a Jewish community organizer for GIPL. Joanna received a bachelor's degree in economics from Barnard College, and a master's degree in public health from Emory University. After working in project management for Emory Healthcare and Emory University for 10 years, Joanna pursued her passion for sustainability through various volunteer roles in the Atlanta public school system and her religious community. Her recent appointments with GIPL and Adamah serve to strengthen her commitment and abilities to promote environmental stewardship in the Jewish community.

So welcome to all of you — I'll turn it over to Jenny first, to share a little about the work you're doing.

Rev. Jenny Phillips: Thanks, Hannah, it's really good to be here. "We affirm our sacred calling to be responsible stewards and to lovingly tend all God has wrought. We recognize the inherent worth of God's creation, celebrate Earth's abundance and diversity, and, along with the entirety of the cosmos, give praise to its Creator. We recognize we are interconnected members of complex ecosystems, intricate webs of all life, all of which have their origins in God's gracious act of creation."

This statement from the United Methodist Church is actually a revised piece that our General Conference just approved this year. As was mentioned earlier, many faith traditions have statements like this, grounding their values in the work of divine creation, and acknowledging the centrality of our work as stewards of creation. Part of my role is to lift up these values, because even though statements like this exist, they're not always top of mind in the day-to-day life of the church — but they need to be, and they need to be given voice. So one thing I hope you'll all take away is that every one of us has a role in giving voice to these rich resources of our traditions, and making sure they're heard and known in your communities.

As a response to this, and other commitments by the United Methodist Church, the agencies of the UMC, which carry various responsibilities for the denomination, have made a commitment to net-zero emissions by 2050, across ministries, facilities, operations, and investments. We're committed to putting the gifts of our connection to work, as we work to achieve equity and justice in building a net-zero-emission economy by 2050. We're committed both to reducing our emissions, moving toward net zero, and to doing it in a way that acknowledges that the impacts of climate change and greenhouse gas emissions disproportionately affect those who already experience historic disadvantages — poverty, racism, and other disadvantages that put them at

greater risk. So the solutions need to put those folks, those voices, and those needs, at the forefront.

I'll take a couple minutes to share a bit about how we're bringing this commitment to the fore at Global Ministries. One area we engage in is disaster response, in the U.S. and internationally. Historically in the U.S., disaster response has typically included diesel generators — folks, as we know with Helene, have lost power, and of course they need electricity to get basic functions up and running again, and generators have been the answer. But we know that running those generators puts more emissions into the air, the very drivers of extreme weather events. So, to stop that cycle, we've been experimenting for a couple of years now with integrating solar into our disaster response, with trailers equipped with solar panels, inverters, and batteries that can be towed into the sites where responders are working, to provide energy to responders and communities. This is a photo from Florida in 2022. There's also an atmospheric water generator — another big need in disaster response is water, and the solution historically has been to ship in bottled water, which I expect this audience is aware is not the best thing for the planet. This draws humidity out of the air and purifies it into drinking water, and especially in places like the Southeast, there's abundant humidity to make water for people to drink.

We're also looking at ways to be more sustainable in water, sanitation, hygiene, and healthcare — using similar technologies, looking at how we can stop relying on diesel when we're working in low-income contexts with low energy access. We work with clinics around the world, including places where people may not have access to the grid, and rely on diesel generators to power their medical clinics. We're integrating solar at sites we work with, so they have abundant electricity without the noise and fumes that aren't healthy for patients, and we're looking at ways to be more sustainable with water too, when bottled water is currently being used.

Another thing we work on is training and equipping local churches, so they can look at their sites, resources, contacts, and the issues they're grappling with, and figure out how to integrate their environmental values into the solutions and ministries they engage in. One way we do this is through the Global Ministries EarthKeepers program — I notice on the participant list there are a number of EarthKeepers in the audience, so I'm really glad you're here, and feel free to note in the comments what projects you're working on, because people might be interested. This is a program where United Methodists apply with an idea they want to execute in their context, and through the training, we work with them on their project, helping them figure out how best to organize it, how best to tell the story, and how they can engage their project through an anti-racist lens, so they're really thinking about anti-racism in their project development, as part of our commitment to equity and justice.

Another way we're working on equipping local churches, partnering with others including GIPL, is identifying sources of funding for congregations to implement their projects. One of the things we're working on with GIPL is improving the process for church entities to file for direct pay — I won't get into that right now since our time is short — and partnering with one of our annual conferences on providing education for the Renew America's Nonprofits grant. That's all I have to share right now, but I know there'll be more opportunity to dive into these things later. Thank you.

Hannah Shultz: Thank you so much, Jenny, and I'm excited to ask you some more specific questions about some of those technologies in a bit. I'll pass it on to Maher now.

Maher Budeir: Thank you, and thank you for having us — this is really an amazing and inspiring conversation already. I appreciate what Reverend Phillips already introduced — it's really something common among faith groups, living up to our values, that's really the challenge at the bottom line, knowing what we know now.

I represent Roswell Community Masjid, one of several mosques in the area, in the northern suburbs of Atlanta. From its inception, RCM has committed to being green, and doing the right thing — we actually partnered with GIPL on projects in the very early stages. We opened our doors in 2008, and by 2011, we were operating in a small, humble building — GIPL reached out, and we were able to partner on creating some energy projects to help the community make the building more efficient, and do what it could to make an impact.

At this point in our evolution, we're blessed enough to be able to think about our next campus, designing our next campus, and this is where we went back to the principles of doing the right thing, and being good stewards of our blessings and the resources we're blessed with. We scanned different concepts for how to approach this capital campaign, and we landed on what's called the living building concept. The reason we landed on it is because it's really more holistic, encompassing social as well as material ideas about how to do the right thing — it does include equity and justice, it does include beauty, it does include respecting the place we're in, in addition to conserving water, energy, and materials. So we thought this was a perfect model for us, to express our cultural values, and help our community, and the larger community, appreciate and live those values.

Another aspect of the living building concept is that it's not only about building the building, but also about how it performs, and how, over its lifetime, it stewards resources, and what kind of psychological and social impact it has on the community. So it's really a holistic approach to creating new capital projects. It's a super ambitious project for a small organization like ours, but we're hoping the impact will be beyond just our community — we're hoping it will be a pilot for many other communities, to engage in the conversation and move forward on creating solutions that are mindful of our environment, mindful of our community, and beneficial to both. One of the great things about the living building concept is that it also reminds us how to not only be efficient in what we're doing and in using resources, but also how to avoid harm — how to avoid harm to the environment, and to anybody engaged in the supply chain of anything we use in the build. So it's a very exciting opportunity — we're hoping we can perform and execute it in the coming years, it'll take us two to three years, hopefully, God willing, to complete the project, and engage the larger North Fulton community in the conversation about doing the right thing.

One aspect of equity, beauty, and psychological well-being, which means connection to nature — we made sure we're preserving a good portion of the site as green space, and making sure it's a communal green space that can be enjoyed by the community, with reflection spaces as well as gathering spaces. We also have some of the lumber — this is vintage lumber, from a 75-year-old barn that was on the site. We partnered with local partners, including the Lifecycle Building Center, to deconstruct the barn piece by piece, by hand, and preserve the wood, so we can repurpose it in our build. It's one of the aspects of respecting the place, and commemorating what was already there, and continuing to allow it to live and benefit others. This is the entrance, the lobby of the future mosque building — the design is very simple, very respectful of the environment, uses natural light, all these things that impact us spiritually and socially, and facilitate our connection to nature, and express our respect for the environment. So we hope this will just be a start for a larger conversation in the larger community — hopefully it'll be a

pilot we're happy to share our experience with, we're documenting the project as much as we can, and hoping to share our experience with others, so they can do even better. Thank you.

Hannah Shultz: Thank you, Maher — I think this is such an inspiring project, and I'm really excited to be working with you on this, to learn from y'all, and see how other faith communities might implement some of those building aspects into their congregations too. I'll turn it over to Joanna now.

Joanna Kobylivker: Thank you, it's really an honor to be here, and I'm honored to represent both Adamah and GIPL, as they represent the Jewish community for both. Adamah is the largest Jewish environmental organization in North America, and our mission is to cultivate vibrant Jewish life and deep connection with the Earth, catalyzing culture change and systemic change through immersive experiences, Jewish environmental education, leadership development, and climate action — and I'll explain what that means here in Atlanta. Geographically, we have two retreat centers, one in Baltimore and one in Falls Village, Connecticut, and we have a lot of training programs for training future farmers. We have five community impact hubs, and Atlanta is one of those five.

What we do in Atlanta is take the national mission and connect people and planet in greater Atlanta through Jewish environmental education, climate action, and youth empowerment. What that really looks like — a lot of our education can look like going into a fifth grade classroom and talking about the connection to some of our ancient Jewish customs and rituals, and how that's really a celebration of harvest cycles, honoring the Earth. Almost all of our holidays are tied to some sort of agrarian cycle, so we like to elevate that for children — really, all ages benefit from that lesson. Some of our education can also look very hands-on — we do a lot of tree plantings, river cleanups, and education around pollinators.

Climate action is really our powerful engine, where we help people with their climate solutions — this is where we work heavily with Jewish institutions themselves, we work with synagogues, and we help them decarbonize their buildings, a lot of it in partnership with GIPL. Youth empowerment is a newer program for us, and we're working with Jewish teens — this can be a group that meets as part of their high school, or a youth group in their synagogue or community. We give them tools to express some of the climate anxiety a lot of our teens are feeling right now, and strategies they can use to be the change they want to see — asking their schools, why do we have water bottles everywhere, can we not have single-use plastic, can we recycle, can we compost. It's really giving them tools they can use to lead change. We also do programs with college students, on college campuses as well.

It's worth sharing how we do this, because, as Hannah mentioned, this is really overwhelming work — it's hard for any individual, anyone part of a community, to know where do I even begin. So we try to help people through this work in three ways. One, we provide gentle accountability — we have an infrastructure called the Jewish Climate Leadership Coalition, a free network any Jewish institution can join. By joining, you get access to a lot of our national tools, and some funding options. Every year, you put together what we call a climate action plan, a checklist where you go through and answer questions like, what have you done to decarbonize your building, have you installed solar, have you looked into renewable energy in different ways. It's not a blank piece of paper where an individual has to come up with what they need to do — we've already identified the ways you can get to net-zero emissions for your building, and we're here to help you. Here in Atlanta, we have 11 institutions that have joined; nationwide, there are

about 350. So that's the gentle accountability — we say gentle because no one gets in trouble, we meet everyone where they are, and anything they do is great, we celebrate it all.

Two, we build community, and that's where we do this work together, joyfully — that's where we have our tree plantings. The picture in the bottom right is some Jewish teens making what we call seed balls — wildflower seeds mixed with clay, that dry, and then you can plant these wildflowers wherever you see any kind of green space. Again, community is just coming together, but with a climate purpose to why we're together. Three, we offer resources and support, critical to enabling and empowering people to do this work — we give them the tools, point them to funds like the GIPL grants, and give them some coaching. I think what's nice about the coalition is it's a network — there could be an institution here in Atlanta very similar to one in another city, and they can share best practices, so no one has to start from scratch.

Hannah Shultz: Thank you again to each of you for sharing a little about the work you're doing. I'm excited to ask you some questions and dive into some of these projects in more detail. I also wanted to let all our participants know, if you have any questions, please put them in the Q&A feature in the chat at the bottom of your screen, and we'll have some time for Q&A at the end.

The first question I have for all of you — you've each touched on a bit of your faith tradition's values, and talked about living into these values and why that's important — but I'm wondering if you can say a little about why you think it's important that faith communities are implementing these climate solutions. What are some of the impacts we're expecting to see from faith communities — why are we organizing in this space in particular?

Maher Budeir: Happy to start on that one. I can think of two reasons why I believe faith communities must lead the way. One is the connection with values — if we fail to make that connection, that doing the right thing is part of our values, being mindful of hyper-consumerism, avoiding wasting resources, is a value connected to faith, as well as avoiding harm. That makes it really a responsibility of the faith-based community to lead, to make that connection. Another thought is that faith-based institutions are normally there for the long term — anything we do structurally within our organization is likely to last a very long time. Faith-based organizations are there for a lifetime, and hence our name for the project, Vision 99 — really for it to last for a generation, and after generation. So any impact can be multiplied over time.

Joanna Kobylivker: I actually meant to share in my opening — the name Adamah means Earth. In Genesis, we learn man, Adam, was created from Adamah, from the earth, from the soil. So from the beginning of time, we're made from the earth, and there's this built-in understanding that we can't destroy that from which we're made. Not that we're only motivated by guilt and shame, but just, this is part of who we are — we are one with the earth, it is us. And that's a guide. Also, historically, the faith community is often the voice representing those who are victims of injustice — it goes back even to, we all know, civil rights here in Atlanta, a lot of faith leaders came together. You look even further back, around the turn of the century, when people were working in coal mines under unjust conditions, it was the faith community that spoke up. So it is people of faith who speak up for those who need it, and push us to honor life — I think that's kind of universal.

Rev. Jenny Phillips: I just want to add, tagging on with what you're saying, Joanna, about a connection to history and tradition, and long-term commitment to justice — we're grounded in stories that extend across many generations, and our scriptures teach about so many situations where people faced a challenge that felt insurmountable, and they committed to working on that

challenge, whether or not they knew if they'd see the resolution. Climate change is exactly that kind of challenge. So we have a reservoir of resources to strengthen us, our spirits and our hearts. We also have these wonderful networks, so that I know when I'm done working for the day on climate change, and I go to bed at night, there are folks in other parts of the world who are getting up to pick up the baton and take up that work. We have a sense that we're not alone, that we're part of a much larger group of people around the world working together, part of a much larger story. Those are real sources of strength.

Hannah Shultz: I love that so much, and I love hearing — there are some differences in each of our faith traditions, in the language we use and the stories we tell, but the ethic is the same, and that's what's running throughout these traditions, building the story of why we should care. At GIPL, we talk a lot about how there are over 15,000 houses of worship across Georgia — I think it's clear from this conversation today that we all share this ethic of caring for God's creation, and stewarding the Earth. When we think about those 15,000 houses of worship, and the land and buildings and people in those faith communities, and how much strength we have in community — I'm thinking about all those buildings, and the ways we can be more efficient in energy use, and the land those congregations sit on, and the ways we can better steward that land. Each of you has started to share some examples of specific projects you're working on.

Rev. Jenny Phillips: I'd be glad to share a bit about our disaster response efforts in the wake of Helene. As you all know, especially with a Georgia-focused audience, though I know we have folks from elsewhere too, a devastating hurricane and tropical storm has hit huge swaths of the southeastern United States, and many people are without power and water. The United Methodist Church, through UMCOR, has significant disaster response programming, where local conferences organize and train throughout the "blue sky" parts of the year, preparing for how they'll respond when disaster strikes — then those networks go to work in times like this. One of the first resource deployments in Georgia was a solar trailer, a partnership between our partners at Footprint Project and the Ray C. Anderson Foundation, who partner with Drawdown Georgia — we're so grateful for the Ray C. Anderson Foundation's support for a large solar trailer that's been providing power at a response site in Valdosta. We're working with our partners at Footprint to deploy trailers in Florida, and solar resources in North Carolina, particularly around the Asheville area. We train volunteers to use this equipment, so when the time comes, they're prepared, and we're growing our resources by developing a sustainable response technology library, where, by next year, we'll have a number of smaller solar resources that folks engaged in the disaster program can try out, to see if they want these resources in their local tool libraries — just exposing more people to solar, and how doable it is to use in times like this.

Hannah Shultz: I think that's so fantastic. One of the new programs GIPL is developing right now is a resilience hub program — thinking about how we equip congregations and faith communities to be hubs in times of disaster, to serve as donation centers or shelters, thinking about solar and battery storage, water storage, food pantries, community gardens — all the things that would go into serving a community, both in "blue sky" conditions and when disasters hit. Really looking forward to working with you more on this.

Rev. Jenny Phillips: One thing we're thinking about more is what infrastructure is needed at a house of worship, to be able to bring in more resources effectively during a disaster — because we recognize that, sometimes, a house of worship will put solar on the building but can't afford the batteries, but with a switchover switch installed, you can pull up a trailer full of batteries, connect it to that solar, and suddenly there's power flowing. So another thing to think about, as

you're planning resilience, is connecting with your tradition's disaster response programming, to think about how you can partner and share that vision.

Hannah Shultz: Maher, I'd love to hear more from you about how you're incorporating some of these resilience strategies into the living building, since a lot of the same things that help cut carbon emissions also help make a building more resilient.

Maher Budeir: Absolutely, and this is actually an amazing aspect that drew us to this principle, because the living building isn't just efficient, but also resilient. We're in the middle of the design process with the engineers — the discussion is about how to build resiliency, in terms of power, in terms of providing water, in terms of creating a space that is a sanctuary in the event of a local disaster for the surrounding community, regardless of faith. This is going to be a sanctuary. Going through the living building process, and the details and design of the engineering, is an amazing exercise that helps us think through all the possibilities. We're creating a new capital project that's significant, and it would be a missed opportunity if we didn't make the best of it in terms of resiliency, and being a sanctuary for the community — that's to help our community ramp up to those principles and level of awareness and education. We're actually implementing a lot of these principles in our current, humbler space already — we started our environmental education programs there, and our composting program, with help from GIPL as well, to raise awareness in the community, and make sure our small, everyday actions matter and have impact.

Hannah Shultz: Yeah, I love that idea of making small impacts, because I think a lot of times people think you have to do these really big projects, but it can be something small, like starting to compost at home or at your house of worship, and see how that grows and inspires more action. Joanna, I feel like you have a lot of examples of smaller projects that have built into much bigger initiatives with some of the faith communities you've worked with.

Joanna Kobylivker: Yes, thank you. I was going to talk about two programs — one is a program GIPL started, the rewilding program. Some congregations have a small green space, but there's this pressure to have curbside appeal, so most just have grass that they mow, maybe some flowers, and there's real interest in, could we be better, could we have a gas-free landscaping plan. So we're working with congregations to rewild their green space, to the extent they can, and to the extent it's still aesthetically pleasing, but also responsible and mindful. We're offering small grants to a few institutions — there's one synagogue we're working with in Roswell, they have a really large green space behind their main building, somewhat overgrown, and they want to maintain it in a way that's still natural but usable. So there's work to evaluate, is there ivy growing up the trees we can trim back to preserve their health, are there more native plants we can introduce, because they thrive best in the climate and soil they're intended for — so we're really introducing those solutions to some of our congregations, encouraging them to reconsider the standard mow-and-blow, no gas-powered tools.

Another big program we do a lot is around zero waste. A lot of congregations feel really stuck — they have events, maybe 100 people, and it's not realistic to expect them to wash dishes for 100 people regularly, so a lot of institutions use disposables, and we try to offer solutions that are more manageable and feasible. Number one, no styrofoam — really encouraging all institutions, if you do nothing else, get rid of styrofoam, full stop, it's terrible. Nothing will be cheaper than styrofoam, but there's a point where, just because it's the cheapest, you can pay a little more and have a better material, so we encourage paper over styrofoam or plastic. Reusable is really the gold standard — I'll share, at my congregation, we have a hybrid approach, where on Saturdays

we use compostable plates, and we actually compost them, we partner with CompostNow, and we use real forks, because it's easier to wash a bunch of forks than a bunch of plates and cups. So that's our approach to being more mindful of the waste we generate. Are you in an area where you can have a compost service pick up your compost — in which case, definitely use compostable plates. And when you can, use reusable — if you have small board meetings, use a real cup, drink your coffee from a mug, it tastes better than out of a paper cup. So we try to encourage better choices. And, as Jenny mentioned, water bottles are just everywhere — I don't know anyone who doesn't have some kind of reusable water bottle, just bring it, leave it in your car. So, with a smile, we gently encourage these solutions.

Hannah Shultz: Thank you, Joanna. One other program I'm hoping you can circle back on — you mentioned earlier that you have tools for helping children and students express climate anxiety. I'd love to hear more about how you're engaging youth in this work generally, and specifically to combat eco-anxiety.

Joanna Kobylivker: Yes, thank you. We have a program called the Jewish Youth Climate Movement, part of our national Adamah programs — you basically create a local chapter, and it's truly teen-driven, they create a chapter, there's an adult sponsor, but they really decide what projects they want to work on. For the chapter I was part of at my congregation, we brainstormed around what climate solution we could do at this institution, and those teens wanted to build a pollinator garden on campus. We met up on a Sunday afternoon, cleared a center area, and de-weeded — a lot of work for these teens — and we talked about why pollinators are important. I think the physical work made them feel empowered, like, I'm doing something, I'm able to introduce pollinators to an area that was previously just overgrown weeds, where nothing was really growing.

Another great project — our institution is part of this coalition, and we were trying to identify why we have so much paper in our trash when we pay for recycling. The teens went on a scavenger hunt, going around to every room in the building, identifying which ones were missing a recycling bin — that was their way of taking action, helping their institution solve this problem, because if you don't have a recycling bin in a classroom, chances are the paper isn't going to make its way into recycling. It was really giving them tools to solve these problems.

Then, around advocacy, for one project we watched a documentary called Saving Juliette — a true story about the community of Juliette, Georgia, near Macon. They're near a Georgia Power plant that has a coal ash pond, and the soil is toxic — there are contaminations affecting the groundwater, and undeniable adverse health effects happening to that community. The teens watched the documentary, and wrote letters to lawmakers with influence over that region, saying, you need to support legislation that demands Georgia Power clean up these coal ash ponds. So it's giving them the information, and then something they can do with it. Being a listening circle for them, just letting them talk about what they're feeling — sometimes they just want to be heard. Our teens also made a video about the Okefenokee Swamp, highlighting the threat to the swamp — they did research, had background music, it was really cool, and in the end they said, support this bill that will deny future permits to the mining company, because these are issues facing Georgians, and that's some action you can take. So it's really letting them choose. And then for younger kids, we don't show them depressing documentaries — we engage differently, more like, let's talk about planting trees, why it's important, giving them tools they can take home. What are things you can do — even a third grader can help their family reduce waste, turn off the lights, maybe reduce water use — giving them appropriate action steps they can take.

Hannah Shultz: Yeah, I think that's great, and I'm so excited you're working with teens and youth — we talk a lot about how this is the future they're inheriting, so there's a lot of real anxiety there, and I know a lot of people's motivation for acting on climate change is to protect this future for their children and grandchildren. Expanding our youth programming is one of GIPL's goals for the next couple of years too, so thank you for sharing examples of how Adamah is doing that.

I want to shift the conversation a little, to talk about barriers, because we know there are these great solutions — Drawdown Georgia has given us this roadmap of what congregations can do — but we know there are still really practical barriers, obstacles, and challenges faith communities are facing in implementing these solutions. I'm wondering if each of you can share what some of those barriers are that you've seen, how you've overcome them, and what advice you have.

Maher Budeir: Since our project is pretty ambitious, the very first question we get from almost every group of stakeholders is, how can you justify the extra cost of going forward with a living building concept — and obviously this is part of education, part of raising awareness in the community. Number one, the most important thing is that the life cycle cost of a living building is way less than a traditional build, if you account for the service lifetime of the building, how much less you spend on utilities, on dealing with issues solved by resiliency, by having infrastructure that's much stronger and can withstand the test of time — that's the long-term answer. The short-term answer is, really, doing anything right, and doing anything well, is okay if it costs a little bit more, and it's worth the price — sticking to our values and doing the right thing is worth an extra 10 percent increase in cost. Going back to the simplest examples, if we always buy the cheapest styrofoam plate, we're not making an impact, we're dehumanizing our values, lowering our standards for short-term economic gain. So those are the kinds of challenges we have — with the capital campaign, it's always about cost, but it's also an opportunity to turn it into a learning opportunity, especially for the youth.

Rev. Jenny Phillips: I'm hearing this theme across all of us, about the need to help people think differently, and change the way they approach the basic functions of a faith community — it's interesting how challenging that is, isn't it? Even though, in general, the solutions all three of us are offering tend to make the world more pleasant, even in the immediate moment — Maher, the building you showed us is gorgeous, and has so much opportunity, both in water and energy savings, and in education. Joanna, when I hear you talk about how a regular cup is much more pleasant than a paper cup, you're right — and diesel generators that create fumes and noise, versus batteries that are silent and fumeless. It's a very important task to recognize that not everybody is where we are, to try to meet them where they are, and be patient as they work through their points of resistance, whatever they may be, and walk alongside them. We all have to discern how best to invest our time and energy, and when it makes sense, when someone isn't quite ready to walk along, to let them stay where they are, and find others who are ready to walk with us.

Hannah Shultz: I thought that was wonderful. I think we're good on time, so I'd also love for you to share, if you have a challenge you wanted to talk about, that'd be great.

Rev. Jenny Phillips: Well, I'll talk about a challenge I have not overcome, if you're interested in that — one we're working on together — the direct pay program. The direct pay program is a federal government program to provide payments to nonprofit organizations, including houses of worship, that install solar or EV chargers. There are a few different categories of energy devices the government will provide a payment of 30 percent back to an entity that installs them

and files for payment, and there are additional ways to increase that payment, based on a variety of criteria. It's an incredible opportunity for any faith house of worship or nonprofit organization — this doesn't usually happen, where the government is giving money for capital improvements to church buildings and houses of worship — but the process, as it's unfolding right now, is challenging. I want to share about that, because I think it's really important — when something is new, it can be hard, and sometimes people hit that first moment of difficulty and say, well, this will never work, this is not the right thing. Again, this is where leaders like you all come in, to say, well, let's take a minute, let's learn more, let's see if we can be part of making the road, and smoothing the road for others, by working through these problems. That's one of the many reasons Hannah and I are in conversation — right now we're in a lot of conversation about this program, with Lawyers for Good Government, and other organizations. We're taking our connections and building relationships, to both say, what do we need to know so we can educate our communities, and what do the folks running this program in the federal government need to know about the unique nature of our communities. There's no one but us to be these bridges, when we're engaging new technologies, new funding strategies — if you feel called to be in that place, but aren't sure you belong there, you belong there, and we need you, because it just takes people willing to jump in and do the work.

Hannah Shultz: Yes, absolutely.

Joanna Kobylivker: Yes, very quickly, about challenges — a very frequent challenge we get is, when you say climate change, there's like a physical "whoa" — I don't know, it's very political, I don't know, the board's not going to go for it. It's exhausting — we try to tell people there's nothing political about wanting clean air, clean water, and clean soil for yourself and your children. So it's trying to better clarify what we mean by taking action, why we do this work — though sometimes I'll adjust my script to say, well, let's talk about energy efficiency, the money we save by being more energy efficient we can put into other aspects of our building needs, our mission, and this is honoring our values. So you try to remove any word that sounds political, but then you also can't be scared to say what it is — you have to read the room, see what people are going to respond to. But eventually you do need to get to a place where you acknowledge there's a crisis we need to take care of, and we can do that in different ways, and it's part of who we are. So that's a challenge. I also just wanted to echo what Jenny said, about needing to be there in partnership, and do the work with these institutions — I could not echo that more, you need to be part of the solution. I noticed there was styrofoam at the coffee bar, I did some research, found that these cups are compostable and just as great, and only cost a few dollars more a week — I think we should do that. So it's really offering a solution, rolling up your sleeves, getting in there — Hannah and I have done dumpster dives for institutions, trying to, you know, you've got to do the work a little bit. We're on the same side, we want this, let's do it together.

Hannah Shultz: I think that's such a great message to share, Joanna, and a theme I've heard throughout all of your comments — how can we rally around something we're passionate about, and a lot of that is finding what your faith community is passionate about, which might look different for a lot of different faith communities, there's no exactly right way to do this. It's about finding where your assets, resources, and interests are, and building off of those.

While we're talking about challenges, we had some questions in the chat about working specifically with utility companies, and some of the requirements around solar. A couple things I'll say — one, GIPL has a solar program, we work with congregations to help them walk through the solar process, from getting proposals from installers, to working with your utility company to get specific questions answered, to finding funding and navigating the direct pay process — all

of that is included in our SolarWise program, so I'll put my email in the chat, and would love to follow up one-on-one after this call.

The other thing I'll mention, that we haven't talked about too much yet today — though, Joanna, you mentioned how youth are leading the way with advocacy — is that a lot of these Drawdown solutions we can implement in really practical ways, through programs like rooftop solar on our buildings, energy efficiency retrofits, but we know some of these solutions also require policy change. One of the ways we get at this through GIPL is through our work with the Public Service Commission — a five-member, statewide elected body that regulates Georgia Power. They regulate things like where our energy comes from, what plants are operational or closing, how much customers pay on utility bills, what solar policies we have, what energy efficiency programs we have. We do a lot of education and training with people in our networks about these proceedings, about the Public Service Commission, and ways people can get involved. As you have questions about utility companies and some of these policies, advocacy is a really great way to make sure we have policies in place that allow us to implement solutions like energy efficiency and solar for congregations. We're actually partnering with Southface this fall, on a whole series of workshops on the upcoming Integrated Resource Plan proceedings with the Public Service Commission, happening in 2025 — we hope you'll join us. These are workshops to do a deep dive on who the Public Service Commission is, what's in this integrated resource plan, and ways you can get involved. Next month, we'll focus specifically on climate equity in the IRP — we're planning to talk about the Drawdown Georgia work and solutions as part of this workshop too. So, a plug for that, and a mention of the importance of policy and advocacy in implementing these solutions.

I know our time is coming to a close, so I think the last question I'll put to the panelists, before we open it up for other questions — what's one piece of advice you want to leave folks with, as they're thinking about how they might engage their congregations or faith communities in this work? Maybe just a sentence, or a little nugget.

Rev. Jenny Phillips: Work on something you love.

Joanna Kobylivker: Everything matters.

Maher Budeir: I would reiterate the focus on youth, frankly — being an engineer, a pragmatic person, when youth change or adjust their habits to do the right thing, that can have a 50, 60-year impact. So even the basic math — statistically, the impact will be much longer lasting, and hopefully they'll pass it on as well.

Hannah Shultz: I think that's great, thank you so much. Thank you to each of you for the work you're doing. We'll open it up now, if there are any other questions from participants you want to ask our panelists today.

All right, so there's a question from an EarthKeeper in Milwaukee, who just finished an energy audit and is planning solar panels and heat pumps — Jenny, I think this one's for you. You mentioned some ways to add emergency battery loops — where could they find additional funding for geothermal heat pumps?

Rev. Jenny Phillips: Sure — the Inflation Reduction Act includes funding for heat pumps, the direct pay program is part of the Inflation Reduction Act. There's already programming and resources out there, on the Creation Care Network webinars and that kind of thing, but also know that the United Methodist Church is doing some extra work to create some directions

specifically for United Methodists. There's funding available through the direct pay program, to pay for 30 percent of geothermal heat pumps, and more, depending on other markers of the project — we can talk about that more another time. And adding an emergency battery loop — that's something where you're either buying batteries as part of your project development, which also qualify for direct pay funds, or there's an interconnection-type switch you can add to the building, that allows an external power source to talk to your energy system, and we can talk about that more too — if you want to send me an email, we can follow up.

Hannah Shultz: That's great, thank you, Jenny — those direct pay tax credits are definitely one of the best ways to explore some of these clean energy projects. There's another question here about energy audits — I'll take that one, and say that GIPL has an energy efficiency program, we provide low-cost energy audits to congregations, help connect them to professional engineers to provide that audit, and type up an audit report with customized recommendations for ways they can improve the energy efficiency of their buildings. Again, I'll put my email in the chat, and would love to follow up with any questions about how energy audits work, what's included in that report. GIPL also has some matching grant funds we've offered congregations, to help implement projects recommended in their reports — we'd love to work with your faith community on energy audits.

Another question — how can we encourage a diverse collection of faith communities within our small town in rural Georgia? I'll open that up to any of you.

Maher Budeir: The climate change topic will bring political questions — for some reason, in people's minds, they associate it with political divides. Frankly, the way I uncouple that personally is, stewarding our resources shouldn't depend on whether I can prove there is climate change or not. Doing the proper thing, respecting the water supply, how we generate emissions, how we use energy, how we treat materials, how we avoid harm in the process, is a human responsibility regardless — whether or not I can win an argument about climate change, or it gets politicized that way, it's really more directly associated with values. We talked earlier, and Joanna mentioned the connection to heritage — in the old days, nobody knew about climate change, but we still have heritage in every place that connects — doing the right thing, respecting resources, avoiding harm, are all principles of humanity from day one, and that's the approach we need to take, regardless.

Hannah Shultz: I think we'll close with this last question in the chat, which says: in a recent conversation with a faith-based organization exploring turning their building into a resilience hub, they mentioned there might be some barriers to utilizing federal grant funding to pay for improvements to buildings. Is this a challenge you all have experienced?

Rev. Jenny Phillips: Hey, Hannah, I know you probably have an answer to this, so I want to give space, but I also see Thea Becton is on this webinar, who works with the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Thea, I know you've done some terrific work on fund braiding — I'm not going to ask you to talk right now, but if you could send me a link, I'll ask for that to be distributed, because Thea's really done some amazing work identifying different sources of funding that aren't crossing over in other places, and I want her wisdom to come to this group.

Hannah Shultz: Yeah, that's great. I'd say this is such a true example of why this is such a team effort, to answer these questions — like you were saying earlier, Jenny, a lot of this federal funding is brand new, and we're still searching for a lot of the answers too, and it feels like a lot of times we answer one question and then find a whole new question we need to answer. It

really takes this whole team, approaching from multiple angles, to figure out the answers to some of these questions.

Southface just got some DOE funding, through the Renew America's Nonprofits grant, and there are some limitations there for faith communities — faith communities are eligible to apply for the Good Use grant, which is for energy efficiency, however, at least half of their building space use must be for non-religious activities. One example of some limitations around utilizing this funding — however, there are workarounds to things like that, they have funded faith communities in the past for projects, because a lot of faith communities have a lot of things happening out of their buildings, food pantries, daycares, preschools. I'm not sure if we can still utilize some of that funding by talking about the other mission work happening in your faith communities, but I'd say, please connect with any of us on this call, we'd love to hear about your specific circumstances, the funding you're trying to go after, and if that's not available to faith communities, please reach out to us — it's likely there are other funding streams we could point you to, where you'd be able to utilize this funding, and the IRA has significantly expanded what we might be able to access and offer to nonprofits and faith communities, so we're really excited about that too.

We're coming up on our time here, so I think we'll need to wrap up this call, but I wanted to say thank you so much to the Drawdown Georgia team, for helping put on this webinar and facilitate this conversation today. Thank you again to our panelists, for the work you're doing, and thank you to all the participants, for joining, for being so engaged, and asking great questions. You'll be getting a follow-up email from the Drawdown Georgia team, with a recording of this webinar, and our contact information, and each of the panelists has agreed to connect with any of you who want to talk to them, and ask specific questions, or just connect about their work further. So again, thank you so much, and I hope you enjoy the rest of your day.