Interfaith Power & Light
Fighting Goliath - Discussion Guide

These discussion questions provide a basic set of ideas for an engaged and directed conversation about the documentary Fighting Goliath (www.fightinggoliathfilm.com)

1) Take a few minutes to introduce yourself and tell people about Interfaith Power and Light in your state as well as the national campaign.

> *The Interfaith Power and Light campaign is mobilizing a national religious response to global warming while promoting renewable energy, energy efficiency and conservation. As of 2008, Interfaith Power and Light affiliates were working in 28 states with over 5,000 congregations. These nonprofit organizations help people put their faith into action and protect Creation.*

2) Provide some context about why new coal power plants are an important issue – see p. #2 "Coal Facts". If possible, tell them the location of existing and proposed new plants in your state.

3) Invite everyone to turn to another person and relate one image, moment or idea that surprised, moved or challenged them. Invite anyone to share what they or their partner said.

4) In the movie, some people said that getting involved felt personally risky or took them outside their comfort zone. Describe a similar situation you have been in and how your faith informed your decision.

5) How has your religious tradition compelled you to care for the environment?

6) If there are any children or teenagers present, ask them to explain why this movie was important to them.

7) Invite individuals to suggest an action that they can do individually or together.

8) Break into small groups of 5-20 people and brainstorm ideas to be more energy efficient. Have 1 leader from each small group share the ideas with the full group. If you have time, share this quote and have a discussion:

> *The CEO of one of the major coal burning utilities, Duke Energy, has said that "Energy efficiency is the 'fifth fuel' — after coal, gas, renewables and nuclear. Today, it is the lowest-cost alternative and is emissions-free. It should be our first choice in meeting our growing demand for electricity, as well as in solving the climate challenge."*

9) If this viewing will be followed up with other events, invite people to give a short presentation on a particular issue that relates to coal at your next meeting or event.

10) Remind everyone that their state Interfaith Power & Light leader will follow up with them by email. Provide contact information for your state Interfaith Power & Light office.

If you want to learn more and support the faith communities' work in your state:

www.theregenerationproject.org/State.htm

If you want to learn more about the work that is happening nationally:

www.InterfaithPowerandLight.org

The **Interfaith Power & Light** website provides you with ways to get involved with the interfaith religious response to global warming. You can choose to receive news and email alerts, see congregational resources and hear success stories from people of faith around the United States.

Please make sure every attendee has an opportunity to write down their contact information (especially email address) on the contact sheet. Please collect and mail or fax the sheets to the Interfaith Power & Light state or national office:
National mailing address: IPL 220 Montgomery St. San Francisco, CA 94104
Fax (415) 561-4892

COAL FACTS

Coal is the most carbon intensive of the fossil fuels used widely in the U.S. today, accounting for over 80% of carbon dioxide emissions from the power sector, even though coal generates only half of the nation's electricity. Carbon dioxide is the most significant pollutant causing global warming.

In a single year, a big coal plant emits as much carbon dioxide as 1 million SUVs.

Each new coal plant that is built carries with it a huge stream of carbon dioxide emissions that will likely flow for the life of the plant—60 years or more. Investing in conventional coal plants today locks us into several decades of global warming pollution.

Coal-fired power plants are the largest source of human-generated mercury pollution in the U.S. Mercury in mothers' blood and breast milk can interfere with the development of babies' brains and neurological systems and can lead to learning disabilities, attention deficit disorder, problems with coordination, lowered IQ and even mental retardation.

According to the nonprofit Union of Concerned Scientists, annual emissions from a typical coal plant include 10,000 tons of sulfur dioxide, the major cause of acid rain; 10,200 tons of nitrogen oxide, a major contributor to smog; 500 tons of small particles, which cause lung damage and other respiratory problems; 225 pounds of arsenic; 114 pounds of lead; and many other toxic heavy metals, including 170 pounds of mercury, which can cause birth defects, brain damage and other ailments.

Coal-burning power plants are risky long-term investments because of anticipated federal and state regulations of global warming pollution, unknown costs of carbon capture and storage and rising costs of constructing new coal-burning power plants.

Digging up hard-to-get coal will devastate Appalachia, where huge mountaintop-removal mines have already buried 700 miles of streams and 400,000 acres of forests. (Mountaintop-removal is a particularly destructive form of mining in which entire mountains are blasted apart to expose the coal seams inside; the rubble is typically dumped in nearby valleys.)

Interfaith Power & Light

Fighting Goliath – Writing a letter to the editor (LTE)

The opinion page is one of the most highly read sections of a newspaper and a great way to get your message out. The "letter to the editor" section is part of most newspapers. Online news sources also generally have a "comments" section. Both of these places are good ways to get your message out. All of the letters to the editor are reviewed and only a few can be printed. Below are some tips to help you get your letter printed.

1. Write clearly and concisely following the limitations usually given on the editorial page or letters-to-the-editor page. A concise, well-written letter is much more likely to get published.

2. Be prompt – if you are commenting on an article you will have much better chance of getting published if you can send your letter in the within 24-48 hours.

3. Be specific. If you're commenting on an article in the paper, mention the date and subject of the article. For example: "I disagree with Senator Smith's position as stated in the 1/16/09 article "Coal plants are good for the economy"

4. Be local. Talk about things that matter to people where you live. For example, if you live an area where there is great potential for wind energy, then tell people about it.

5. Be credible. Do your research and cite credible sources. But also speak from your own experience and from the heart.

6. Use your spell check and then proofread.

7. Sign your name and include your phone number and address if required. Keep in mind that most newspapers verify by phone that you authored the letter.

SAMPLE LETTER TO THE EDITOR

The recent article, "A new coal plant in Jonesville", left out some important details that every citizen of Jonesville should know to make an informed decision. Coal-fired power plants are the largest human-caused source of mercury pollution in the U.S. Current studies show that 1 in 6 babies born in the U.S. have harmful mercury levels in their blood. Coal power contributes 40% of our nation's carbon dioxide emissions each year – and carbon dioxide is the main gas responsible for global warming. But there is good news too – we can work together and solve our need for clean and safe energy. Utilities that have invested in energy efficiency programs have shown that meeting demand for electricity through energy efficiency is substantially cheaper than generating electricity in power plants. Renewable forms of energy such as wind and solar are an increasingly wise long-term investment compared to old, polluting technologies. Additionally, they help diversify our energy mix. As a Christian, I believe we have a moral responsibility to be good stewards of God's Creation and to consider how our decisions will affect future generations.

Interfaith Power & Light
Fighting Goliath – Mercury and Coal

The term "Mad as a Hatter" originated from hat makers who used large amounts of mercury which damaged their nervous system

- Coal-fired plants in the U.S. emit an estimated 52 tons of mercury into the atmosphere each year. They are the largest source of human-caused air mercury emissions in the U.S.

- Mercury's effects on humans include damage to the central nervous system, heart and immune system. The developing brains of young and unborn children are especially vulnerable.

- A national study shows 21% of all women child-bearing age have mercury levels in their bodies that exceed federal health standards. (U. of North Carolina)

- Current estimates from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) show that approximately 630,000 babies born in the U.S. each year have harmful mercury levels in their blood.

- A recent study found high levels of mercury in catfish caught in a rural area upstream of Pittsburgh and downwind from a coal-fired power plant. (Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health)

open pit coal mining

Sources: US EPA, Science Daily, USGS

Interfaith Power & Light
Fighting Goliath – Coal Facts

In a single year, a big coal plant emits as much carbon dioxide as 1 million SUVs.

Coal is the most carbon intensive of the fossil fuels used widely in the U.S. today, accounting for over 80% of carbon dioxide emissions from the power sector, even though coal generates only half of the nation's electricity. Carbon dioxide is the most significant pollutant causing global warming.

Each new coal plant that is built carries with it a huge stream of carbon dioxide emissions that will likely flow for the life of the plant—60 years or more. Investing in conventional coal plants today locks us into several decades of global warming pollution.

According to the nonprofit Union of Concerned Scientists, annual emissions from a typical coal plant include 10,000 tons of sulfur dioxide, the major cause of acid rain; 10,200 tons of nitrogen oxide, a major contributor to smog; 500 tons of small particles, which cause lung damage and other respiratory problems; 225 pounds of arsenic; 114 pounds of lead; and many other toxic heavy metals, including 170 pounds of mercury, which can cause birth defects, brain damage and other ailments.

Coal-burning power plants are risky long-term investments because of anticipated federal and state regulations of global warming pollution, unknown costs of carbon capture and storage and rising costs of constructing new coal-burning power plants.

Digging up hard-to-get coal will devastate Appalachia, where huge mountaintop-removal mines have already buried 700 miles of streams and 400,000 acres of forests. (Mountaintop-removal is a particularly destructive form of mining in which entire mountains are blasted apart to expose the coal seams inside; the rubble is typically dumped in nearby valleys.)

mountain top removal coal mining

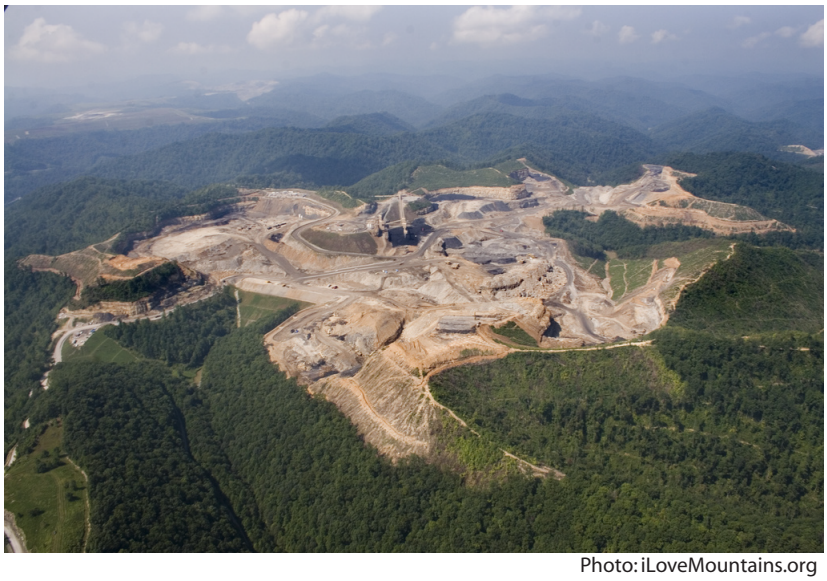

Photo: iLoveMountains.org