

**LOKA SYMPOSIUM**  
**FAITH IN ACTION FOR A FLOURISHING PLANET**  
May 28<sup>th</sup> to May 30<sup>th</sup>, 2019

***About***

The Loka Symposium will be held from May 28<sup>th</sup> to May 30<sup>th</sup> at Madison, Wisconsin under the auspices of the University of Wisconsin – Madison.

The Loka Symposium will bring together faith leaders from diverse religious traditions with scientists, scholars, policy makers and environmental experts to develop new and stronger faith-led environmental partnerships. The theme of the symposium is “Faith in Action for a Flourishing Planet” and will examine global progress in environmental and climate change strategies while investigating the potential for faith-led environmental action by building understanding, motivating change, and creating practical goals. As such, the symposium will integrate religious resources such as scripture, meditation, sacrament, ritual and symbolic art to support this exchange of faith-based and scientific ideas and strategies.

We aspire to have the symposium be inclusive and representative of faith communities and religious institutions that are dedicated to environmental change, reflecting diversity in faith, nationality, ethnicity and perspectives and welcome expertise from the domains of ecology, psychology, neuroscience, health, education, religious studies and research.

***Highlights***

The symposium will kick off with a public forum showcasing a conversation between faith leaders and scientists interspersed with art performances that will be live-cast that will have an audience of over 500. The following two days will be a closed event and limited to 50-60 participants. Each day will showcase 2 moderated panels, presenting a faith leader, a scientist, and an expert, and will be interspersed with group practice and walking meditations. The rest of the time will be set aside for group discussions and conversations.

**May 28<sup>th</sup> Public forum:** “The mystery of human consciousness and a living planet”; A Conversation between Environmental Faith Leaders and Scientists

**May 29<sup>th</sup> Morning Panel: Flourishing People, Flourishing Planet**

Human flourishing is generally defined as a state of self-actualization and fulfillment for all people with an individual right to freedom, happiness, and dignity and within the context of holistic wellbeing of the surrounding family and community. From a religious perspective, human flourishing often takes on reference to the perfect ideal of Jesus attending to the needs of others or Buddha gaining enlightenment to alleviate suffering for all sentient beings. There is

an implicit understanding that human flourishing necessitates the wellbeing of the sum and not just the parts. Expanding on this concept, a flourishing planet requires more than the judicious management and wise use of natural resources, it implies that the entirety of the planet must be in a state of good health and for us to achieve that, nature and humanity would need to flourish in tandem, in harmony. What would that look like from a faith-driven and scientific lens? Is there convergence on what a flourishing planet should consist of, and the role of humankind as part of the flourishing?

### **May 29<sup>th</sup> Afternoon Panel: The Role of Religious Leaders and People of Faith at a Time of Ecological and Climate Crisis**

We begin by examining our sensory experience of walking in nature mid-day to recognize that the environment is not external and alien to us. Our bodies are part of nature, of the planet and as we flourish, so it does and as it flourishes, so do we. Faith leaders have been present throughout the history of environmentalism, often channeling humankind to care for nature as part of their religious commitment and continue to do so today. This session will examine the history of religious environmentalism, both spiritual and scientific, and how we must determine the purpose of humankind to be that of caretakers.

### **May 30<sup>th</sup> Morning Panel: Finding Courage to Build Tomorrow**

Whether we create gardens or build cities, humans have always designed and re-worked this planet to function according to our needs. Therefore, we bear a unique responsibility to nurture, conserve and administer balance so the planet flourishes. Faith-led environmental activities emphasize the interconnection between community practice and religious practice and reinforce positive relationships within their traditions. What can the environmental movement learn and adapt from this approach to help address the environmental stagnation and lack of political will on a global scale?

### **May 30<sup>th</sup> Afternoon Panel: Resilience Building; From Concept to Implementation**

In psychological terms, resilience refers to the ability to adapt and bounce back from adversity, tragedy, trauma or stress. Similarly, climate resilience is the ability for human or ecological communities to bounce back from adversity and stress created by the impacts of global warming. The stronger the ecological integrity of an ecosystem, the more resilient they naturally are to disasters. Faith communities are naturally resilient; religious participation entails a shift from solitary to shared engagement with a community of like-minded people, creating conditions for companionship, sharing of sorrow and grief, cultivating forgiveness and learning calming techniques such as meditation or prayer. How do we take this abundance and scale it up to build resilience of the institution, the encircling society, the surrounding environment and the planet? How do we conceptualize and operationalize resilience building at all scales?

## ***What is Loka?***

The Loka Initiative is a new education and outreach platform for faith leaders and religious institutions at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Its mission is to support faith-led environmental efforts locally and around the world by helping build capacity of faith leaders and religious institutions on environmental protection, sustainable development, and global health issues, and by creating new opportunities for partnerships, public outreach, and project implementation. It has four programmatic components:

1. ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM: Establish an annual symposium that brings together select faith leaders from different religious traditions with scientists, academics, policy administrators, and the private and public sectors to collaborate on solving social and environmental problems.
2. ONLINE NON-CREDIT COURSE: Build an online course, broadly available to everyone, that integrates faith, culture, environment, and public health, and examines the role religion can play towards improving environmental, social and personal well-being.
3. CERTIFICATE PROGRAM: Create a two-semester certificate program specifically tailored for faith leaders, that provides the basics of environmental science and issues that affect human society and explores the ways religions can help. The main component in these courses will consist of experiential practices in project design, communications, media training, networking, and program management. As part of the course, faith leaders will partner with university students on assignments and group projects. Program graduates will leave with a project plan, a fundraising plan, and potential partners they can work with to achieve their goals.
4. FELLOWSHIP: Develop a fellowship program that places students with participating faith leaders for 6-9 months on new or ongoing projects. As part of this program, students can also train, fulfill media needs, monitor and evaluate project impacts and faith-based behavior change.

### ***Who is involved?***

The Loka Initiative is an interdisciplinary collaboration among different programs at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. It will be housed in the Center for Healthy Minds in partnership with the Center for Religion and Global Citizenry, Division of Continuing Studies, the Global Health Institute, the Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies and the Religious Studies Program. It will be directed by Dekila Chungyalpa, the founder and former director of the WWF Sacred Earth Program and the environmental adviser for His Holiness, the 17<sup>th</sup> Karmapa who is the head of the Karma Kagyu lineage of Tibetan Buddhism. Eminent scientists and thought leaders involved with this program include Dr. Richard Davidson, Dr. Jonathan Patz, Dr. Paul Robbins, Dr. Jordan Rosenblum, Dr. Ulrich Rosenhagen, Dr. Mary Evelyn Tucker, and Dr. Cal DeWitt. The program is endorsed by His Holiness the Karmapa, Phra Paisal Visalo, Dr. Katherine Hayhoe, Bill McKibben and many more.

### ***What does Loka mean?***

*Loka* (लोक) is an ancient Sanskrit word and often translated to “our world as the basis for all life”. The world evoked by *loka* is a complex and interwoven one, where multiple environments, species and dimensions interact to constitute a whole. It can thus mean a “world” as large as a planet as well as a single individual who constitutes an equally complex and interdependent “world.” Thus, each *loka* or world is in a sense many worlds, overlapping and embedded within each other. Evocatively, the word *loka* also means “vision,” the act of seeing that not only beholds a world but brings it into being.