

Handout From *Peaceful Uprising* site; section from [Tim's Story](#)

Tim DeChristopher came to Utah in his early 20s to work as a wilderness guide for at-risk and troubled youth. Tim was born in West Virginia, where his mother was an early advocate for the cessation of mountaintop removal coal mining. In 2008 as a student of Economics, Tim attended the Stegner Symposium at the University of Utah, where he was greatly moved and galvanized by Dr. Terry Root, a scientist for the International Panel on Climate Change. Dr. Root explained to the audience that elements of the climate crisis were already irreversible. Tim confronted Terry after her presentation and asked her if it were true that many species, natural wonders and bioregions were in imminent peril. Terry put her hand on Tim's shoulder and said the following: "I am so sorry, but my generation failed yours." Those words haunted Tim, and dramatically changed his personal worldview.

While Tim was taking his final exams at the University of Utah, advocates for Utah's wilderness like Robert Redford and the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance were attempting to bring attention to a controversial auction of Utah public lands, orchestrated by the outgoing Bush Administration. The auction included parcels adjacent to cherished natural resources like Canyonlands National Park. Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance and other regional advocates brought a lawsuit against the Bureau of Land Management in efforts to halt the auction pending further review and public comment. Through no fault of SUWA or their allies, the lawsuit could not settle the issue prior to the auction. On December 19th, Tim finished his last final exam and took TRAX to the protest that SUWA and others had organized outside of the auction. On arrival, Tim decided that the protest needed to be moved from outside of the auction to inside, where the action was happening. With no prior plan of action, Tim entered the building where the auction was held and approached the registration desk. When asked if he was there to bid, Tim made a quick decision. He registered as Bidder 70 and entered the auction.

Tim intended to stand up and make a speech or create some other kind of disruption. Once inside, however, Tim recognized the opportunity to stop the auction in a more effective, enduring fashion. He sat quietly with his bidder paddle lowered, until he saw a friend from his church openly weeping at the sterile transfer of beloved red rock lands away from the public trust and into the hands of energy giants. It was then that Tim decided to act.

At first, Tim simply pushed up the parcels' prices (some starting as low as two dollars per acre, and were ultimately sold for \$240 per acre). Once almost half of the parcels had been sold to oil and gas companies, Tim felt he could no longer bear to lose any more public lands. Tim bid on and won every subsequent parcel, until he was recognized as an outlier and escorted from the auction. Once it was revealed that Tim did not have the intent or the means to pay for the parcels he won, the auction erupted in chaos. Because Tim won so many parcels and inflated the prices of so many others, the auction had to be shut down. Due to the requisite thirty-day period between a canceled auction and its rescheduled

successor, the incoming administration took office before the auction could be rescheduled. Upon review of the parcels in question, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar dismissed the auction, declaring that the BLM had cut corners and broken many of its own rules, including a crucial statute requiring all federal agencies to take the impacts on our climate into account prior to auctioning off public lands for the purpose of energy development.

Tim's action garnered a great deal of media and public attention, and catalyzed an overwhelming influx of support and applause for his creative, effective, and nonviolent act of civil disobedience, which ultimately safeguarded thousands of acres of Utah public lands. Tim's bold act, coupled with his personal charisma and the gravity of his motivation, brought enthusiastic activists out of the Utah woodwork. Together with other activists who were equally concerned about the climate crisis and inspired by the effectiveness of Tim's action, including current Director Ashley Anderson, Tim founded Peaceful Uprising, a volunteer-based climate action group committed to defending a livable future from the fossil fuel industry.

Tim's action on December 19th radically changed the course of his life. After the current administration decided to indict Tim, despite the confirmed auction's illegality, Tim took his message to the widest possible audience to bring attention to the desperate need for effective action to combat the climate crisis. Tim also emphasized the ways in which his action had positively impacted his own life. "Ed Abbey used to say, 'Sentiment without action is the ruin of the soul,'" Tim said, addressing the crowd at 350.org's 10/24 International Day of Climate Action. "I would take that a little further, and say that principled action is the salvation of the soul. I may have to go to prison, but every day since that auction, I walk a little taller, and I feel a little more free."

It took the federal government more than two years to convict and sentence Tim. The trial was delayed a total of nine times by the Prosecution. Federal Judge Dee Benson dismissed Tim's initial defense (the "Necessity Defense," claiming that Tim's crime was the lesser of two evils when weighed against the threats posed by the illegal auction). The Defense's assertion of Selective Prosecution (as no other bidder had ever been indicted for failing to pay for parcels at an auction) was also dismissed. The threat of climate catastrophe that motivated Tim was banned from the courtroom and kept from the ears of the jury, as were the fact that Tim managed to raise adequate funds for initial payments on the parcels after the auction; the fact of the auction's confirmed illegality; and the dismissal of multiple parcels.

Despite the multiple rescheduled dates, climate activists, organizers, and advocates from all over the country came to Salt Lake City for Tim's trial to demonstrate their solidarity with a brave young man willing to offer up his own future to fight for the future of our planet. Supporters marched to the federal courthouse, where they remained for the trial's duration, singing revolutionary songs and never leaving the Courthouse steps despite freezing rain and rough

weather. Tim often expresses his own deep faith in the power of song, to unite people and empower them to act without fear. Referring to environmental and climate justice advocates in America, Tim summed up his own perspective: “We will be a movement,” he frequently stated, “when we sing like a movement.”

On March 3, 2011, after hours of jury deliberation, Tim was convicted of two federal felonies: one count of false representation, and one count of violating the Federal Onshore Oil and Gas Leasing Reform Act. Between his conviction and his sentencing hearing, Tim was able to tour the country, speaking to college students, climate activists and progressive audiences in every region. He assured supporters that he was fearless and unremorseful about his actions, and urged activists to be bold and brave in the fight for climate justice. Tim reminded his audiences that all meaningful social change in American history has required nonviolent civil disobedience. Tim urged activists to take the long view, and be ready to go to jail to defend their principles and their cause. “We don’t need to figure out how to keep me out of jail,” Tim explained to a concerned Santa Fe supporter. “We need to figure out how to get more people *into* jail.”

On July 26th, 2011, Tim was sentenced to two years in federal prison. In the presentencing report, the Prosecution openly admitted that Tim himself was not a threat to society or at risk to reoffend; the stated purpose of the sentence was to deter other activists from taking similar action to further the climate movement. In his final statement to the Judge, Tim said that he understood why the Prosecution saw him as a threat. “[My message] may indeed be threatening to the power structure,” he said. “The message is about recognizing our interconnectedness. The message is that when people stand together, they no longer have to be exploited. Alienation is perhaps the most effective tool of control in America, and every reminder of our real connectedness weakens that tool.”

After his sentence was issued, Tim was removed immediately from the courtroom and taken into the custody of federal agents. 26 people were arrested outside the Salt Lake City courthouse, and 26 solidarity actions happened at federal courthouses throughout the United States. The demonstrations were intended to express supporters’ outrage, and more importantly, to illustrate the climate movement’s undeterred commitment to continued action. Tim’s conclusion to his final statement to the courtroom at his sentencing hearing crystallized his own personal stake in that commitment:

Deeds not Creeds

Opening words:

Good morning.

It is difficult, but not impossible to live the life intellectual and the life ethical, to be an activist and to also tune into the spiritual. Today, may we salute our multifaceted lives.

Going into period of silence:

It has taken me many years to come to terms with the expression “worship service” for what we do here on a Sunday. Someone recently asked at a lunch “What are we worshipping?” For me the answer is that I worship the source of my values, of my better self - what evolution has endowed, what upbringing has given and something more: that experience of the good.

However shabby our lives may seem to us at times, however many awkward moral compromises we find ourselves having to make, there is that experience, that veneration of the good – that ultimately mysterious experience I am guessing we all share.

Is the “g” in “the good” spelt with a small “g” or a capital “G”? Today I have spelt it with a small “g”. I find that if I think consciously about it, it will have a small “g”; if I just experience it, it will have the flavour of a capital “G” as if it were a Platonic form. It’s a Schrodinger’s cat which is neither alive nor dead until you look inside its box. That’s a little bit of quantum physics for you ;-)

Reading:

I’ve taken my reading today from a tribute to the Rev. Margaret Barr written by a member of the British League of Unitarian and Liberal Christian Women, usually just known as the Women’s League. <http://www.unitarian.org.uk/WomensLeague/history.htm>.

I have chosen Margaret Barr because, in her work as a teacher and “non-missionary”, she so ably embodied the life intellectual and the life ethical, was attuned to the spiritual and very much a doer – a believer in “deeds not creeds”. She must have seemed a real stirrer type to Mahatma Gandhi when she and her sister joined him in village work, because his advice to her was “Stay out of jail and find some constructive work to do”.

Margaret Barr

One of the Unitarians' most outstanding women ministers - who became a legend in her own lifetime - was Margaret Barr. A Yorkshirewoman of Methodist parentage, she joined the Cambridge Unitarian Church while a student at Girton. After training at Manchester College, Oxford, followed by a six-year pastorate at Rotherham, she decided to go to India. In 1932, hearing that a minister was needed to serve the little group of Unitarian churches in the Khasi Hills of Assam in north-east India, she wrote to the Committee responsible for making the appointment: 'Here I am: send me.' However the committee refused to send a woman to such a lonely post.

So Margaret got herself a teaching job in Calcutta and began to pay unofficial visits to the Khasi Hills. Eventually, through sheer determination, she won: in 1936 she was given official charge of the churches there. The women in the churches here in Britain (mainly the Women's League branches) decided to raise enough money to pay her salary for the next three years, this gave her the confirmation and confidence to go ahead. That offer by the Women's Leagues was renewed year by year until 1964 but many of our branches, districts and individual members still make annual donations to continue the work there and two major projects by them has further boosted their funds (the latest one being in 2000 when we raised over £7,500.)

There she remained, apart from brief visits to Britain and America for 37 years until her death in 1973. For more than 10 years her base was at Shillong, the capital of Assam, where she devoted her energies to the care of the churches and founded two schools which, by the late 1940s were well-enough established to be handed over to others.

She determined to leave the town and settle in a remote village, Kharang, a place that could be reached only after a 25 kilometre walk along a rough and stony track. Here she established her Rural Centre, with a residential school attended by children from the surrounding countryside. She was not just a teacher but by turns nurse, midwife, counsellor, sustainer and friend to a great company of people. Meanwhile she continued to act as superintendent minister of the Unitarian Union of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. She loved it. Under her care the Rural Centre flourished and became famous throughout the region. Here she lived until she died, still in harness, in 1973. She was in her seventy-fifth year.

That is a very brief introduction. Margaret Barr and her predecessor, Hajom Kissor Singh, deserve a talk unto themselves. What I want to stress today is that she was very much an example of the Unitarian way of being more interested in getting important things done in this world than in elaborating a creed.

Address:

My title today, “Deeds not Creeds” comes from the Ethical Society tradition of the International Humanist and Ethical Union. Having attended the Washington Ethical Society in 1966 and 67, I know how compatible is their approach to the intellectual, the ethical and activist life to that of the Unitarians and Unitarian Universalists. Both are groups of people who are doers.

In Esprit, I wrote as part of my theme for this talk: “Unitarians and Unitarian Universalists have had a reputation throughout their history as people who do things. However, as human population soars to the 9 billion mark, and climate change, if unchecked, makes life under the equator intolerable (with consequent millions fleeing to more livable places) is there anything anybody can do? “

First let me acknowledge that no-one knows how fast the global climate is changing and what choices humanity will make that will influence the pace of that change. If unchecked, climate change will be devastating. Likewise, one does not need to be a Malthusian to see the enormous difficulties of a planet of 9 - or perhaps even 10 – billion people. Just think: food, water, shelter alone. The question is: are we powerless?

Let me tell you the story of a young man who decided he was not so powerless that he couldn't do something. Unlike Margaret Barr, he didn't keep himself out of jail – because what he decided to do was in the tradition of civil disobedience fostered by the Transcendentalist Thoreau, beloved by the UUs. This is no surprise because Tim DeChristopher was a member of a UU church in Utah.

From the website of Prairie Circle Unitarian Universalist Congregation, <http://www.prairiecircleuuc.org/environmental-warrior-tim-dechristopher/> here is the response of the First Unitarian Church of Salt Lake City as Tim awaited sentencing for his nonviolent disruption of the auction of parcels of Utah land, an auction that would have benefited oil and gas interests, and an auction that was eventually declared illegal.

First Unitarian Church of Salt Lake City is requesting that Unitarian Universalists stand with them in solidarity with climate champion, Tim DeChristopher, member of their congregation, as he awaits sentencing on July 26, 2011.

In December 2008 Tim DeChristopher was an undergraduate economics student at the University of Utah and he willingly admitted to participating in a federal auction to secure oil and gas leases. He ultimately won the rights to \$1.8 million worth of leases, but soon announced that he had no intent to pay.

However, later Tim did offer to pay his \$1.8 million tab via funds raised within an internet fundraising campaign, but the government refused to accept the money.

Mr. DeChristopher's infiltration of, and participation in the auction was to serve as a protest of U.S. energy and environmental policies.

In March 2011, a federal jury found Tim guilty of two felony counts of "interfering with and making false representations at a government auction." **(JT: The fact that the illegality of the auction was eventually confirmed, did not alter the charge).**

Tim now faces up to 10 years in prison and fines up to \$750,000.

(JT: In fact it turned out to be 2 years in prison and a \$10,000 fine).

The solitary actions being suggested are:

- Flooding local press offices across the country. A suggested letter template can be found by [clicking here](#).

(JT: Notice the technique: letter writing using a template letter ie a letter, preferably email, that can easily be modified to reflect the thoughts of the individual if desired.)

- Scheduling or participating in local demonstrations.

What are your thoughts? How should we, members of Prairie Circle Unitarian Universalist Congregation respond? **(JT: An email address was provided).**

(JT; So members are asked how the group as a whole should respond).

Now I want to finish this section by reading from Tim's final statement to courthouse: "You can steer my commitment to a healthy and just world if you agree with it, but you can't kill it. This is not going away. **At this point of unimaginable threats on the horizon, this is what hope looks like. In these times of a morally bankrupt government that has sold out its principles, this is what patriotism looks like. With countless lives on the line, this is what love looks like, and it will only grow.**" (JT: my emphasis>)

This comes from the website of the organization Tim founded: Peaceful Uprising which tells the whole story in detail: <http://www.peacefuluprising.org/tim-dechristopher/tims-story> which I will circulate in printed form.

Well, we've seen what Tim chose to do; what can we do? Unless an opportunity for civil disobedience becomes impossible to avoid, I plan to combat climate change and overpopulation through my twitter work, through financial support to useful NGOs and through writing letters (principally to governments).

Before I launch into the question of which NGOs are useful, let me say that at the present time your committee has put on hold a proposal to have a focus project involving donations to a chosen NGO. Our Fellowship will continue with donations to speakers from organizations (such as Plan and Amnesty International) as we have in the past and as we will be doing again shortly with Balmain for Refugees. Today we are primarily sharing information that may be useful for us as individuals and for the Committee under its present policy.

Both our President and I are long-term supporters of Plan <https://www.plan.org.au/rpp/sponsor> which, as well as helping individuals and villages by way of all round development, does have an indirect impact on the population question. For quite some time it has been emphasizing the particular rights of women and children.

Even in countries where the smaller family is not a cultural ideal, an NGO can talk about the benefits of spacing babies for a healthy mother and healthy children.

I personally am very enthusiastic about the work of Population media Center <http://www.populationmedia.org/>

Centred in Vermont, USA, Population Media Center works worldwide, using entertainment-education for social change. PMC's programs encourage positive behaviour change among the audience. In the fourteen years since PMC's inception, the organization has been a pioneer in the use of new methodologies for informing people about reproductive health issues eg In Papua New Guinea, it has put on a series of radio "soaps", which engage people in personal stories and illustrate the benefits of family planning. I should warn you that Australians are not likely to be able to use any donations for tax deductions unless that policy of our authorities has changed recently. Perhaps we could lobby about that with a template letter.

Now I shall hand over to my audience today to share your thoughts about NGOs of interest particularly ones useful in the areas of population and the environment.

Closing Words:

The difference between what we do and what we are capable of doing would suffice to solve most of the world's problems. Mahatma Gandhi