

## The Transition Initiative: One Way to Face Life after Oil

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**H**ow would your lifestyle change if oil was no longer cheap and readily available? For the founder of the Transition Initiative, Rob Hopkins, it means that relationships with others would become the most important resource for living. This growing movement challenges me to think about how my Christian fellowship can work together to conserve energy and build community.

A Transition Initiative is a group focused on building a resilient community prepared to face a future with less available fossil fuels. Transition communities are not just individuals going green: they are groups following a specific plan to reduce their energy consumption and build self-reliance. While every Transition Town is different, they share similar strategies, such as reliable public transportation, safe areas for walking and biking, access to alternative energy sources, a connected business community, accessible local food sources and community gardens, an emphasis on relearning “urban homesteading” skills, a commitment to preserving natural spaces, even creating their own currencies to keep the local commerce truly local.

It takes time, talk, and work to make changes like these. Is it really necessary to prepare for a future of scarcity? While it's unlikely that the world will run out of fuel soon, at least one authority on the subject—the International Energy Agency—claimed last year that oil production actually peaked in 2006. (The IEA is an organization that reports to twenty-eight industrialized countries about energy

issues.) That's where the term “peak oil” comes from—a term that hints at a scarce future. The IEA predicted that as we continue to probe our reserves for more black gold, we will have to find it in less accessible areas. Harvesting from unconventional sources—such as the controversial Alberta tar sands project—releases approximately 5 to 15 percent more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, adding to the problem of global warming. (To find out more about the IEA's report go to [green.blogs.nytimes.com](http://green.blogs.nytimes.com), and search for “Is ‘Peak Oil’ Behind Us?”)

The double whammy of climate change and peak oil actually sparked the Transition Initiative, which now has 103 recognized communities in the United States and more than forty in Canada. In 2005, teacher Rob Hopkins challenged his college permaculture class to create an “energy descent” plan for the town of Kinsale, Ireland, where he was living and teaching at the time. Together they envisioned changes that would transition the town from oil-dependent to sustainable and thriving, despite a smaller carbon footprint. Several of the students presented the plan to the Kinsale town council, which was convinced enough to adopt it. Hopkins saw that his class's approach could be adapted for use by other communities concerned about peak oil, and after the plan was published, the Transition concept began to spread by word of mouth and over the Internet.

Hopkins's website, Transition Culture, describes the philosophical ideas that support Transition and provides connections for communities who

want to know more. Other groups associated with Hopkins, such as the Transition Network based in the United Kingdom or Transition USA, provide step-by-step guides for groups who want to start an initiative in their own area.

While there are guidelines available, the movement relies on collaboration and creativity within each community. At its heart is the belief that oil is a declining resource and that we need to prepare ourselves to live without it. Hopkins views this as an opportunity to make our communities better. “I see this as a challenge that is about coming back to each other, learning how to talk and work together again,” he said in a recent interview. “When you talk to people who lived through the Second World War, you hear about how once the petrol was rationed, what became important was the people around you, the community, its resources and skills. I think we have to focus on our communities, and on preparing them for this inevitable and historic transition, because without them, we have no chance at all.”

The way I see it, we Christ-followers have a head start. We know that God created us for community with him and each other. Let's lead by example!

For more information about Rob Hopkins and the Transition Initiative, visit his blog at [transitionculture.org](http://transitionculture.org). For more information about Transition Towns in the United States, visit [transitionus.org](http://transitionus.org). ■

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