



The Catholic Coalition on Climate Change

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Catholic Climate Covenant
Care for Creation. Care for the Poor.

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Catholic Coalition on Climate Change

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops:

Department of Justice Peace and Human Development

Migration and Refugee Services

The Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities

Carmelite NGO

Catholic Charities USA

The Catholic Health Association of the United States

Catholic Relief Services

The Conference of Major Superiors of Men

The Franciscan Action Network

The Leadership Conference of Women Religious

The National Catholic Rural Life Conference

The National Council of Catholic Women

The Church's social teaching is a rich treasure of wisdom about building a just society and living lives of holiness amidst the challenges of our society. Modern Catholic social teaching has been articulated through a tradition of papal, conciliar, and episcopal documents. *The depth and richness of this tradition can be understood best through a direct reading of these documents.* But in brief, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) outlines *Seven Key Themes of Catholic Social Teaching* (<http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/projects/socialteaching/excerpt.shtml>):

- Life and Dignity of the Human Person
- Call to Family, Community, and Participation
- Rights and Responsibilities
- Option for the Poor and Vulnerable
- The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers
- Solidarity
- Care for God's Creation

Each of these commitments is an important dimension of Catholic Social Teaching and together they are dynamically related to one another and therefore should not be seen or applied in isolation from one another:

"The Christian faith is an integral unity, and thus it is incoherent to isolate some particular element to the detriment of the whole of Catholic doctrine" (*Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, <http://www.faithfulcitizenship.org>).

Many people recognize that the issue of climate change relates to the seventh theme, Care for God's Creation, which reminds us of our duty to "cultivate and care for" the gift of the Creation (Genesis 2:15). "If we harm the atmosphere, we dishonor our Creator and the gift of creation," (*Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good*, 2001 <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/international/globalclimate.shtml>). But it is also true that other principles of Catholic Social Teaching can help inform our consciences and actions as we face the question of climate change. As Pope John Paul II reminds us:

"[W]e cannot interfere in one area of the ecosystem without paying due attention both to the consequences of such interference in other areas and to the well-being of future generations" (1990 World Day of Peace Message, No. 6, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19891208_xxiii-world-day-for-peace_en.html).

Below are selected quotations from recent papal and Episcopal documents that help illustrate the connections between the principles of Catholic social teaching and care for creation in light of climate change:

Life and Dignity of the Human Person

“The way humanity treats the environment influences the way it treats itself, and vice versa” (Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter Caritas in Veritate, 2009, No. 51, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate_en.html).

“[H]ow can we separate, or even set at odds, the protection of the environment and the protection of human life, including the life of the unborn?” (Pope Benedict XVI, 2010 Address to the Diplomatic Corps, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2010/january/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20100111_diplomatic-corps_en.html)

“Our tradition calls us to protect the life and dignity of the human person, and it is increasingly clear that this task cannot be separated from the care and defense of all of creation.” (USCCB, Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action on the Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching, 1991, <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/ejp/bishopsstatement.shtml>)

Call to Family, Community, and Participation

“*The Church has a responsibility towards creation* and she must assert this responsibility in the public sphere.” (Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter Caritas in Veritate, 2009, No. 51 http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate_en.html)

“In a word, concern for the environment calls for a broad global vision of the world; a responsible common effort to move beyond approaches based on selfish nationalistic interests towards a vision constantly open to the needs of all peoples.” (Pope Benedict XVI, 2010 World Day of Peace Message, No. 11, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20091208_xliii-world-day-peace_en.html)

Rights and Responsibilities

“Responses to global climate change should reflect our interdependence and common responsibility for the future of our planet. Individual nations must measure their own self-interest against the greater common good and contribute equitably to global solutions.” (USCCB, Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good, 2001 <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/international/globalclimate.shtml>)

“The environment is God's gift to everyone, and in our use of it we have a responsibility towards the poor, towards future generations and towards humanity as a whole.” (Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter Caritas in Veritate, 2009, No. 48 http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate_en.html)

Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

“[E]nvironmental degradation makes the life of the poor especially unbearable.” (Pope Benedict XVI, August 27, 2006, <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/ejp/climate/>)

“[I]t is the poor and the powerless who most directly bear the brunt of environmental degradation. Unable to do otherwise, they live in polluted lands, near toxic waste dumps, or squat in public lands and other people’s properties without any access to basic services.” (Archbishop Celestino Migliore, INTERVENTION BY THE HOLY SEE AT THE SECOND COMMITTEE OF THE 62nd SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE UNITED NATIONS ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, 2007, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/secretariat_state/2007/documents/rc_seg-st_20071029_sustainable-development_en.html)

“The effects of climate change—increasingly limited access to water, reduced crop yields, more widespread disease, increased frequency and intensity of natural disasters, and conflict over declining resources—are making the lives of the world’s poorest people even more precarious.” (USCCB & Catholic Relief Services, Catholics Confront Global Poverty, 2010, http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/globalpoverty/ccgp_issues_climatechange.shtml)

The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers

“Stewardship—defined in this case as the ability to exercise moral responsibility to care for the environment—requires freedom to act. Significant aspects of this stewardship include the right to private initiative, the ownership of property, and the exercise of responsible freedom in the economic sector. Stewardship requires a careful protection of the environment and calls us to use our intelligence ‘to discover the earth’s productive potential and the many different ways in which human needs can be satisfied.’” (USCCB, Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good, 2001 <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/international/globalclimate.shtml>)

"Within the United States, public policy should assist industrial sectors and workers especially impacted by climate change policies, and it should offer incentives to corporations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and assistance to workers affected by these policies." (USCCB, Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good, 2001 <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/international/globalclimate.shtml>)

Solidarity

“The environment is God’s gift to everyone, and in our use of it we have a responsibility towards the poor, towards future generations and towards humanity as a whole.” (Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter Caritas in Veritate, 2009, No. 48 http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate_en.html)

“A greater sense of intergenerational solidarity is urgently needed. Future generations cannot be saddled with the cost of our use of common environmental resources.” (Pope Benedict XVI, 2010 World Day of Peace Message, No. 8,

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20091208_xliii-world-day-peace_en.html)

“At the core of the virtue of solidarity is the pursuit of justice and peace.” (USCCB, Seven Key Themes of Catholic Social Teaching, 2005 <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/projects/socialteaching/excerpt.shtml>)

“People living in poverty—both at home and abroad—contribute least to climate change but they are likely to suffer its worst consequences with few resources to adapt and respond.” (USCCB & Catholic Relief Services, Catholics Confront Global Poverty, 2010, http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/globalpoverty/ccgp_issues_climatechange.shtml)

“This great inequality between polluters and victims makes anthropogenic climate change into a fundamental problem of global justice.” (The German Bishops, Climate Change: A Focal Point of Global, Intergenerational and Ecological Justice- An Expert Report on the Challenge of Global Climate Change, published in 2006, updated in 2007, <http://catholicclimatecovenant.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/German-Bishops-Report.pdf>)

Care for God’s Creation

“Preservation of the environment, promotion of sustainable development and particular attention to climate change are matters of grave concern for the entire human family.” (Pope Benedict XVI, Letter of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople on the Occasion of the Seventh Symposium of the Religion, Science and the Environment Movement, 2007 http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/letters/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_let_20070901_symposium-environment_en.html)

“Can we remain indifferent before the problems associated with such realities as climate change, desertification, the deterioration and loss of productivity in vast agricultural areas, the pollution of rivers and aquifers, the loss of biodiversity, the increase of natural catastrophes and the deforestation of equatorial and tropical regions? Can we disregard the growing phenomenon of “environmental refugees”, people who are forced by the degradation of their natural habitat to forsake it – and often their possessions as well – in order to face the dangers and uncertainties of forced displacement? Can we remain impassive in the face of actual and potential conflicts involving access to natural resources? All these are issues with a profound impact on the exercise of human rights, such as the right to life, food, health and development.” (Pope Benedict XVI, 2010 World Day of Peace Message, No. 4, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20091208_xliii-world-day-peace_en.html)

“Our present crises – be they economic, food-related, environmental or social – are ultimately also moral crises, and all of them are interrelated.” (Pope Benedict XVI, 2010 World Day of Peace Message, No. 5, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20091208_xliii-world-day-peace_en.html)

“Global climate is by its very nature a part of the planetary commons. The earth's atmosphere encompasses all people, creatures, and habitats. The melting of ice sheets and glaciers, the destruction of rain forests, and the pollution of water in one place can have environmental

impacts elsewhere. As Pope John Paul II has said, "*We cannot interfere in one area of the ecosystem without paying due attention both to the consequences of such interference in other areas and to the well being of future generations.*"³ Responses to global climate change should reflect our interdependence and common responsibility for the future of our planet." (USCCB, [Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good](http://www.nccbuscc.org/sdwp/international/globalclimate.shtml), 2001, <http://www.nccbuscc.org/sdwp/international/globalclimate.shtml>)

“At its core, global climate change is not about economic theory or political platforms, nor about partisan advantage or interest group pressures. It is about the future of God's creation and the one human family. It is about protecting both "the human environment" and the natural environment. It is about our human stewardship of God's creation and our responsibility to those who come after us.” (USCCB, [Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good](http://www.nccbuscc.org/sdwp/international/globalclimate.shtml), 2001, <http://www.nccbuscc.org/sdwp/international/globalclimate.shtml>)

For more on the theme of Caring for God's Creation in light of climate change and the other [Key Themes of Catholic Social Teaching](http://CatholicClimateCovenant.org), please continue exploring the Catholic Climate Covenant website at <http://CatholicClimateCovenant.org>. We also recommend that you click through the “Catholic Social Teaching” tab on the left side of the USCCB Campus website at <http://www.usccb.org/campus>.