



Climate Change Faith and Advocacy

What is Climate Change? Human-induced climate change is the most serious and pressing ecological challenge facing the U.S. and the world today. While all of us are impacted by the changes taking place, our global sisters and brothers living in poverty and at the margins of society are the most vulnerable and least able to adapt, yet they have contributed the least to the greenhouse gas emissions causing global warming. Climate change raises serious moral and ethical concerns about the distribution and use of our planet's finite resources.

- With only 5% of the world's population, the U.S. emits approximately 20% of greenhouse gases generated by human activity.
- The glaciers in Peru, where most of the population depends on glacier-fed rivers for water supply and food production, have already lost one-third of their surface area and are predicted to have all but disappeared by 2015. The glaciers in the Himalayas, which provide water to the Columban mission country of Burma, are predicted to disappear completely by 2035.
- Already there are over 25 million climate migrants. Current projections estimate the displacement of 200 million people by 2050.

What does our faith tell us? In examining environmental questions, the concept of the "common good" is central in promoting the dignity, unity, and equality of all people. Achieving the common good requires us to recognize that we exist "with and for" others and that we act in such a way that respects and protects the fundamental rights of all humans, both for the people of today and also for future generations.

Pope Benedict XVI stated in his 2009 encyclical, "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." We recognize this interconnectedness of all life and recognize our call to share in the act of Creation by responsibly caring for the world around us.

Three themes in Catholic Social Teaching apply in a particular way to the Church's concern for the environment. These are:

- **Care for God's creation:** "Caring for the environment is a challenge for all of humanity. It is a matter of a common and universal duty, that of respecting the common good" (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 466). Every individual and institution must accept responsibility for caring for God's creation. Every creature depends upon the same global ecology, a series of separate yet interdependent systems that provide air, food, water, and basic resources.
- **Solidarity:** This attention to the environment also must reflect the special concern for the poorest members of the human community, as poverty and environmental degradation often go hand in hand. God created the bounty of the earth to be shared among all of his children, equitably and justly, and he commands us to be stewards of this great creation. To embrace our role as stewards of God's creation, we must employ "restraint and moderation in the use of material goods, so we [do] not allow our desire to possess more material things to overtake our



concern for the basic needs of people and the environment” (*Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good*, p. 8).

- **Option for the poor and vulnerable:** Global climate change poses one of the greatest threats to the most vulnerable among us. Because of poverty, age, health, and location, the poor are especially susceptible to the potential negative impacts of global climate change. The poor and vulnerable often do not have the economic and technological resources to either adapt to or ward off the expected impacts of climate change. Heat waves, droughts, and storms and consequent economic costs will fall most heavily upon the poor (*Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good*, p. 6). Since the "least of these" are most at risk from the climate change, Catholics have a particular duty to address the moral and human implications of climate change.

Where can I find more information in scripture about the Church’s stance on climate change?

Gen. 1: 31

Phil. 2:4-8

Matt 25:35-40

Gen. 1:27-31

Ps. 65:1,9-13

I Cor. 12:7, 12

Gen. 9:8- 17:9

Ps. 104:10-30

Deut. 15:7-11

What’s currently happening in Congress? A bill that directs the Secretary of the Treasury to establish a program to regulate the entry of fossil carbon into commerce in the United States to promote clean energy jobs and economic growth and to avoid dangerous interference with the climate of the Earth (and other purposes). *The CCAO supports the premise of the bill but does not support the targeted mission reduction levels which are not aggressive enough to reduce global temperatures sufficiently. The CCAO supports the idea of maintaining the EPA’s authority to regulate greenhouse gases.*

What can I do? While there is a role for technology and alternative sources of energy, we must at the same time fundamentally reconsider the lifestyles that we choose to lead and reduce our levels of consumption and waste.

We call on Congress to enact legislation on climate change that includes:

- Mechanisms to mitigate the impacts of global warming, particularly for vulnerable populations in the U.S. and abroad.
- Comprehensive, mandatory and aggressive reductions in emissions that follow scientific guidelines to reduce carbon emissions to 25-40% below 1990 levels by 2020 and to 80% below 1990 levels by 2050.
- A dedicated, sufficient and transparent fund to help developing countries and affected communities adapt to the impacts of climate change.
- Humanitarian assistance to climate migrants.



How do I contact my members of Congress?

Who are my members of Congress? How do I find out?

Contact your members of Congress and let them know you support climate change legislation by writing letters or emails, sending a fax, or calling.

- To find out your who your representative and 2 senators are, click:
<http://whoismyrepresentative.com/>
- To go directly to your representative's website to send them a direct email, click:
<https://writerep.house.gov/writerep/welcome.shtml>

Make a phone call

A letter is more powerful than a phone call, but both do help!

When you call Congress offices, it often helps to have key points written down before the call so you do not inadvertently miss anything. When you call, you will be speaking with the receptionist in your member of Congress's office. He/she may transfer you to your member's staffer who handles environmental issues. Most likely you will leave a message, but sometimes the staffers do answer the phone, so be prepared either way.

Sample phone script

Hello. My name is _____, and I live in (name city or district). I would like to speak with the Senator/Representative about (name bill, bill number, issue, etc.).

Write a letter

People who think members of Congress pay little or no attention to constituent mail are plain wrong! Concise, well thought out personal letters are one of the most effective ways we have of influencing law-makers. However, members of Congress get hundreds of letters and emails every day. Whether you choose to use snail mail, fax, or email, here are some tips that will help your letter have impact.

An effective letter to Congress needs only 3 things:

1. **Write your name and address on the letter *and* on the envelope.** Members of Congress want to know that you are one of the people they represent.
2. **Ask for a specific action from Congress.** Use the sentences below or your own words. For example: "I ask you to support the bill (name bill) introduced in Congress in January 2010." Or "I ask you to consider those who do not have a voice in this matter because they are children. Please support children of undocumented migrants."
3. **Give a reason.** Barack Obama's favorite phrase is, "I received a letter from..." What moves him to talk about these letters? Your story. Your reason. Your impetus for writing. Say something about your motivation and/or state a fact. Beware being *overly* emotional. For example:



- In the United States, 35 million people live in families that struggle to put food on the table. Some of the poorest areas in the country are rural.
- Our current farm policy provides large dividends to corporations but little to family farmers.

Other points to consider:

- If a certain bill is involved, cite the correct title or number. You can find it on www.thomas.gov.
- When referencing a bill in the Senate, it's S.# (i.e. S.4555). In the House it's: H.R.5555
- State any professional credentials or personal experience you may have, especially those pertaining to the subject of your letter
- Keep your letter short- one page is best
- Use specific examples or evidence to support your position

Addressing Members of Congress

Use these addresses in email messages as well as snail mail or faxed letters.

Letter to your Senator:

Senator (full name)
(Room #) (Name) Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Letter to your Representative:

Representative (full name)
(Room #) (Name) House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator:

Dear Representative:

Sample letter:

Dear Senator/Representative _____,

As you consider the Fiscal Year 2008 Budget, I urge you to support \$85 million for the State Wildlife Grants Program, our nation's core program for preventing wildlife from becoming endangered. This program supports innovative, on-the-ground conservation projects in every state, including ours, to conserve wildlife and the places they live before they become rarer and more costly to protect.

I strongly value wildlife, and so do many other residents and visitors to our community. *[Include personal examples and reasons why this program and your state's wildlife action plan matters to you!]* Taking action to conserve wildlife also helps prevent conflict over endangered species, and it will ultimately save taxpayer dollars down the road.

I would greatly appreciate your help weighing in with the Appropriations Committee in support of \$85 million for the State Wildlife Grants.

Thank you for being a friend to [state name]'s wildlife!

Sincerely,

You



How can I stay aware of legislation and politics involving issues of Climate Change?

Websites

www.columban.org/content/view/72/63/ - Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach's position on climate issues

www.catholicsandclimatechange.org – Catholic Coalition on Climate Change

www.usccb.org- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

www.usccb.org/sdwp/ejp/climate/regional.shtml - USCCB pastoral statements and letters regarding climate change justice

www.foe.org -Friends of the Earth- environmental organization

<http://www.fcni.org/energy/index.htm>- Friends Committee on National Legislation

www.climatechangenews.org- Climate Change News Digest

More

- Google and get involved in climate or environment groups in your local area
- Become a “friend” on Facebook of the Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach
- Read the CCAO’s monthly newsletter <http://www.columban.org> – Justice and Peace page, or email ccaoprograms@columban.org to receive the monthly online newsletter

- Follow S.2877 - Carbon Limits and Energy for America’s Renewal Act
 - To follow legislation, go to www.thomas.gov and type in S 2877
 - To watch any hearings in person (in DC) or via satellite, go to <http://www.thomas.gov/home/schedules.html> to see schedules. Your best bet is to click on the Senate Committee Hearing Schedule as it is updated the most often. Generally hearings are scheduled a day to a few weeks in advance.