

Environmental Impact on the Poor

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. (*Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good, USCCB*).

Church teaching

- ★ The wonder of God's creation reminds us of the need to protect the environment and to exercise responsible stewardship of the goods of the earth. (*Pope Benedict XVI, Welcoming Ceremony Address of 2008 World Youth Day*)
- ★ The real "inconvenient truth" is that those who contribute least to climate change will be affected the most and have the least capacity to cope or escape. The poor and vulnerable are most likely to pay the price of inaction or unwise actions. We know from our everyday experience their lives, homes, children, and work are most at risk. (*Bishop Thomas Wenski, Chairman of USCCB Committee on International Justice and Peace, May 2008*)
- ★ One area where there is a particular need to intensify dialogue between nations is that of the *stewardship of the earth's energy resources*. The technologically advanced countries are facing two pressing needs in this regard: on the one hand, to reassess the high levels of consumption due to the present model of development, and on the other hand to invest sufficient resources in the search for alternative sources of energy and for greater energy efficiency. The emerging countries are hungry for energy, but at times this hunger is met in a way harmful to poor countries which, due to their insufficient infrastructures, including their technological infrastructures, are forced to undersell the energy resources they do possess. (*Pope Benedict XVI, December 2007*)
- ★ Individuals and communities have started to change their lifestyles, aware that personal and collective behavior impacts climate and the overall health of the environment. While such lifestyle changes at times may seem irrelevant, every small initiative to reduce or offset one's carbon footprint, be it the avoidance of the unnecessary use of transport or the daily effort to reduce energy consumption, contributes to mitigating environmental decay and concretely shows commitment to environmental care. (*Archbishop Celestino Migliore, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations, February 12, 2008*)

Resources

- ★ **The Catholic Coalition on Climate Change** (USCCB) (www.CatholicsAndClimateChange.org)
 - ★ **Environmental Justice Program** (USCCB) (www.USCCB.org/sdwp/ejp/)
 - ★ **Catholic Campaign for Human Development** (USCCB) (www.USCCB.org/cchd/)
 - ★ **Catholic Relief Services** (USCCB) (www.CatholicRelief.org)
- (Last updated August 5, 2008)

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Why is climate change an issue for people of faith?

Honoring creation is another way to honor God who created all. If we value our relationship with God and God's creation, climate change must be for us a profoundly spiritual, ethical and moral issue. The human contribution to climate change represents one of the clearest examples of how human activity is damaging God's creation. We need to recover spiritual values that respect God's creation.

For those of us in economically developed countries, we must examine the ethic of responsible use of the world's resources. Climate change will demand of us a more responsible lifestyle that uses less of the world's resources so that we can begin to share the gifts of creation more fully with those at the margins of human development. For the sake of God's creation, for the poor and for all of us, we must learn to live more sustainably.

It is a moral issue because while the poor have contributed the least to climate change, they will suffer its worst consequences. Catholic social teaching, based on biblical and Church teaching call us to consider first how our actions affect poor and vulnerable people. We have a special obligation to respond to our brothers and sisters in need.

Why worry about climate change now? Isn't it a scientific prediction for the far off future?

People and ecosystems are already suffering from human-induced climate change. The fourth major assessment report of the climate science by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change this year documents with greater certainty than ever before that the warming atmosphere is already causing disruptions in climate pattern. Sea levels are rising, displacing people and disrupting agriculture. Droughts in certain regions are becoming more protracted with more people affected. Extreme weather events such as flooding and intense storms are becoming more frequent. These patterns will intensify the longer we delay taking action to reduce the causes of climate change.

Is the impact of global warming on the poor really going to be so much greater than what they're already dealing with?

The impacts of climate change will be superimposed on a world where already billions of people live in extreme poverty. The Millennium Development Project Task Force headed by Columbia University economist Jeffrey Sachs has recently documented the reality of current worldwide poverty in the UN Millennium Project Report, 2005. The scientific projections of the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change indicate that the impacts on poor countries are going to get worse in the future. In addition, developing countries have more limited resources at their disposal than do the richer nations to take steps to respond to the challenges posed by climate change.

ⁱ "A Catholic Approach to Climate Change." The Catholic Coalition on Climate Change.
<http://catholicsandclimatechange.org/pdf/Hard_Questions.pdf>.