



Resolutions To Action

LCWR Global Concerns Committee

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Climate Change Puts Earth at Risk

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EXPERIENCE

Many say that climate change is already impacting the poor in the United States and around the world. Darfur? A prolonged drought in the 80s and 90s forced shepherds and farmers to move into neighboring tribal lands. Katrina? While scientists are divided about whether or not climate change is producing stronger cyclones, such events are more likely because of climate change. Extreme weather events will impact cities and towns, food production and water supplies, health care and human services. Unfortunately, those who have contributed the least to climate change (people who are poor) are suffering the harshest consequences of climate change.

SOCIAL ANALYSIS

It is difficult to ignore climate change today. Over 2000 scientists from 180 countries around the world have just issued a summary of their fourth assessment on climate change as part of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. They say:

Science

- **Warming of the climate system is unequivocal:** global average air and ocean temperatures are rising, centuries-old snow and ice are melting, sea levels are rising.
- Most of the increase in global average temperatures is from increased greenhouse gases from **human activities**.
- More intense and longer **droughts** have been observed over wider areas since the 1970s, particularly in the tropics and subtropics.
- The frequency of **heavy precipitation** events has been observed in North and South America, northern Europe and northern and central Asia.
- **Continued greenhouse gas emissions** at or above current rates **would cause further warming** and climate changes that will be larger than those observed during the 20th century.

Impacts

- Many **natural systems** are being affected by earlier timing of spring events: leaf-unfolding, bird migration and egg-laying, earlier spring peak discharge in glacier- and snow-fed rivers, and earlier migrations of fish in rivers.
- Impacts on **human systems** include health and living conditions: higher heat-related mortality, spread of infectious disease vectors in mountain-

- ous areas, and increase in allergenic pollen in high and mid-latitudes. Warmer and drier conditions will lead to a reduced length of growing season in much of Africa and other places. Mountain settlements are at risk to floods from melting glaciers.
- Approximately 20-30% of plant and animal species will be at risk of **extinction** if increases in global average temperature exceed 1.5-2.5C
- Sea-level rise will cause coastal erosion and salt-water inundation of fresh water.
- Sea-level rise will also create millions of refugees; Pacific island nations are already feeling this impact.

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Solutions

Global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions have grown since pre-industrial times, with an increase of 70% between 1970 and 2004. Some of the solutions to curbing emissions could include:

- Aggressive development of existing renewable energy technologies, increased energy efficiency requirements and global trading system of greenhouse emissions
- More fuel-efficient vehicles, hybrid vehicles, cleaner diesel vehicles, biofuels
- Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) for coal-fired electricity generating facilities; wind; advanced renewable energy systems such as including tidal and wave energy, concentrated solar, and better photo-voltaic cells
- Efficiencies in home and office lighting; more efficient appliances and heating and cooling systems; improved stoves; better and more extensive insulation; passive and active solar design for heating and cooling
- Changes in lifestyle and behavior patterns that can decrease the carbon output from individuals: eating less meat, walking or bicycling more, consuming less
- New, sustainable and appropriate energy infrastructure investments in developing countries, upgrading energy infrastructure in industrialized countries, and policies that promote energy security can help lower GHG emission reductions.

REFLECTION

In recent years, the US bishops, the Vatican and others in our Catholic community have been reclaiming the ancient teachings about care for creation and our obligations to our planetary home. The creation stories in Genesis predate Earth Day by thousands of years! God's gift of creation and God's command to tend the garden take on new and urgent meaning as our activities are destroying "the foundations of [our] existence, [our] earth" Benedict XVI, July 24, 2007.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, God declares creation to be "very good" (Gen. 1:31), and asked humankind "to till and to tend the garden" (Gen. 2:15). The Psalmist says, "the Earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof" (Ps. 24 :1), and so we must assure that the Earth's gifts are shared with all. The Apostle Paul says: "The creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God." (Romans 8-19).

But because our very salvation depends on how we care for "the least of these" (Mt. 25:35), we must consider first and foremost the impact of our actions on the most vulnerable. And in God's covenant "which I make between me and you and every living creature for perpetual generations," (Gen. 9:9-10) we are bound to act today to assure the well being of life now and in the future.

Today Pope Benedict XVI encourages us to listen to the "voice of the earth." In a meeting with priests in Northern Italy, the Pope said: "...obedience to the voice of the earth is more important for our future happiness than the voices of the moment, the desires of the moment. ... Existence itself, our earth, speaks to us, and we have to learn to listen."

ACTION

Each one of us is being called by God to listen for our particular response to the threat of climate change and God's creation. As we discern our individual and corporate actions, we must also be mindful of climate justice and act in solidarity with the poor and the marginalized. Just recently, the presidents of major faith organizations sent a joint letter to the US Congress saying: "There is persuasive evidence that the consequences of climate change will fall disproportionately on the world's most vulnerable people and inaction will only worsen their suffering." (June 7, 2007)

Rooting ourselves firmly in our faith community can give us the courage and strength to address the task before us to renew the face of the earth. What can

communities of faith do? In addition to the solutions listed above, here are some other steps we can take:

- Become "carbon neutral": use the most efficient car possible; walk or bike rather than drive; replace incandescent bulbs with compact fluorescent ones; replace old appliances with Energy Star rated ones; use a programmable thermostat and keep indoor temperatures higher in the summer and cooler in the winter; purchase renewable energy from your electric utility; purchase "carbon offsets" (purchasing shares in organizations that encourage tree planting, for example) to reduce your emissions even more.
- Support businesses that share your values and are taking steps to reduce their energy use and that provide "green" products.
- Urge your legislator to increase renewable energy standards that will drive investments in new technology.
- Insist that the United States join other nations in crafting a "post-Kyoto" global climate change strategy.
- Work with local utilities to ensure that they offer renewable energy (wind, solar, biomass).
- Visit the new website of Catholics and Climate Change (www.catholicsandclimatechange.org), a complement to the USCCB website on climate change (www.usccb.org/sdwp/ejp/climate)

A Prayer Based on Psalm 104

O God,
who set the earth on its foundations,
who makes the springs gush forth
in the valleys,
living things both small and great,
and bread to strengthen the human
heart,
How manifold are your works!
Send forth your Spirit now,
renew our spirits,
and renew the face of the earth.