



Catholic Social Teaching and Care for Creation

Justice, Peace and Human Development

Catholic teaching considers climate change a "moral challenge" that, as individuals and as a human family, we are called to confront. In two important statements, *Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action on Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching* (1991) and *Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good* (2001), the Catholic bishops in the United States have provided reflections to help Catholics respond to the global crisis of climate change in the light of our faith. Pope Benedict XVI's 2010 World Day of Peace Message, "If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation," advances the Church's teaching, articulating similar themes.

- 1. Prudence calls the Church to engage in the issue of global climate for the common good.** In the words of Pope Benedict, prudence is the virtue that "tells us what needs to be done today in view of what might happen tomorrow." The Church's efforts promote prudent action to address the growing impact of global climate change and pursue the common good in a very polarized debate. The bishops' primary concern within the current public debate is to place the needs of the poor and vulnerable at the center of climate legislation.



God's creation is a gift and humans its stewards.

Both at home and abroad, the poor contribute the least to climate change, but are likely to suffer its worst consequences. *Corresponding paragraphs in Pope Benedict XVI's 2010 World Day of Peace Message: 5 and 9*

- 2. God's creation is a gift and humans are stewards of this gift.** As Catholics, we believe that the earth and the entire web of life is a gift, created and found "very good" by God. The web of life is one, and our mistreatment of it diminishes our own dignity and sacredness. Humans are called to be stewards to God's creation, safeguarding the created world and by our creative work, even enhancing it. But we must remember that we are "co-workers" with God, called to care for and protect the world; we are not to take the place of God. *Corresponding paragraphs in Pope Benedict XVI's 2010 World Day of Peace Message: 2, 6, 10, and 12*

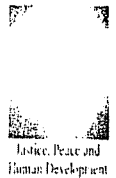
- 3. The universe is God's dwelling place.** The universe is God's dwelling, and nature a place where humans have met the Creator throughout all of history. One reason we must protect the environment is so that through nature, we can continue to contemplate the mystery of God. Dwelling in God's presence in nature, we experience ourselves as part of creation, not separate from it, although people have a distinct dignity and responsibility.



Department of Justice, Peace, and Human Development



Catholic Social Teaching and Care for Creation



Corresponding paragraphs in Pope Benedict XVI's 2010 World Day of Peace Message: 1, 2, 6, and 13

- 4. **The environment is a social good belonging to the whole human family.** The global climate is by its very nature part of the planetary commons, with the earth's atmosphere encompassing all people, creatures, and habitats. Our responses to climate change should reflect our interdependence and common responsibility. In a spirit of solidarity, we must act as a "family of nations" to exercise stewardship in a way that protects the integrity of God's creation and provides for the common good. *Corresponding paragraphs in Pope Benedict XVI's 2010 World Day of Peace Message: 7 and 8.*



- 5. **We are responsible for the unborn of future generations.** As stewards of the heritage of future generations, we have an obligation to respect their dignity and to pass on their natural inheritance, so that their lives are protected and, if possible, made better than our own. *Corresponding paragraphs in Pope Benedict XVI's 2010 World Day of Peace Message: 7 and 8*

Climate Change in Ethiopia



Photo by Andrew McConnell for CRS

Teshome, a farmer in Ethiopia, grows carrots to support his family. Drought, one effect of climate change, has affected Teshome's family and many others in his community.

One of the effects of global climate change affecting many countries has been severe weather, including both flooding and drought. In Ethiopia, the past several decades have seen repeated droughts, which have often led to famine due to farmers' inability to grow food during droughts.

In some parts of Ethiopia, Catholic Relief Services has been able to help small farmers such as Teshome Bekele, pictured above, adapt to the effects of climate change. CRS's project helps farmers diversify their incomes, introducing fruit, vegetables, spices, and fodder to add to the crops they have grown for decades. CRS hopes that growing a variety of crops less dependent on water will help farmers as climate change causes more frequent drought.

But in most other parts of the country and world, farmers haven't been so lucky. Experts agree that poor people are likely to be the worst hit by the impacts of climate change. The United Nations reports that by 2020, 75 million to 250 million people in Africa will be exposed to increased water stress due to climate change.



Department of Justice, Peace, and Human Development

2009-2010 World Day of Peace Message: 7 and 8



Catholic Social Teaching and Care for Creation



6. **With power comes responsibility.** Because of the blessings God has bestowed on our nation and the power it possesses, the United States bears a special responsibility in its stewardship of God's creation to shape responses that serve the entire human family. The United States should also lead the developed nations in contributing to the sustainable economic development of poorer nations and building their capacity to mitigate climate change. In addition, where jobs are lost as a result of new environmental regulations, society must help in the process of economic conversion to ensure the rights and dignity of all. *Corresponding paragraphs in Pope Benedict XVI's 2010 World Day of Peace Message: 7, 8, and 9*

7. **Individual rights are matched by corresponding responsibilities.** Freedom and the capacity for moral decision-making are central to what it means to be human. Economic freedom, initiative, and creativity are essential to finding effective ways to address climate change. However, these rights and freedoms are not absolute; they are matched by corresponding responsibilities to serve the common good. Likewise, science and technology are often signs of God's grace but their use must always be subordinated to moral principles such as respect for the human person and the well-being of future generations. "Environmental ecology" and "human ecology" are related. *Corresponding paragraphs in Pope Benedict XVI's 2010 World Day of Peace Message: 7, 8, 11, and 12*

Prayer to Become Stewards of God's Creation

Creator God,

As we feast our eyes on autumn reds and yellows,
we sense your creative power.

As we marvel at the uniqueness of each winter flake,
we rejoice that you know us each by name.

As we hear the songs of birds of spring,
we yearn to sing your praises.

As we breathe the delicious scents of summer flowers,
our souls rest in your love.

Forgiving God,

We have not lived out our responsibility to be faithful
stewards of creation.

For this, we seek your pardon.

Our over-consumption has impacted the poorest
members of our human family most of all.

For this, we ask your mercy.

Our actions have endangered both the lives of our
children today as well as those yet to be born.

For this, we seek your forgiveness.

Living God,

As we meet you in nature,

inspire us to see anew our place in the web of life.

In our daily lives,

help us to make daily choices that reflect global
solidarity.

As we reflect on the teaching of our faith,

equip us to advocate for laws and policies that
reflect your call to faithful stewardship.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives
and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for
ever and ever. Amen.



Department of Justice, Peace, and Human Development



Catholic Social Teaching and Care for Creation



8. **We must evaluate our lifestyles and reject consumerism.** Both individually and socially, we are called to re-evaluate our lifestyles and to reject the false promises of excessive or conspicuous consumption. Curbing the voracious consumerism of the developed world, and a more just distribution of resources are needed to lessen humanity's burden on the environment and to allow the poor a more equitable share of the earth's bounty. *Corresponding paragraphs in Pope Benedict XVI's 2010 World Day of Peace Message: 9, 10 and 11*



9. **The needs of the poor, weak, and vulnerable must be respected.** The poor and powerless in our own country and particularly in developing countries most directly bear the burden of our current environmental carelessness. The industrialized countries have historically emitted more greenhouse gases than developing countries. The common good requires solidarity with the poor and consideration of the poor and marginalized of other nations as true brothers and sisters who share with us one table of life. Developing countries have a right to authentic economic development that can help lift people out of dire poverty. Wealthier nations should share emerging technologies with less-developed countries. Strategies to confront climate change should reflect the genuine participation and concerns of those most affected and least able to bear the burdens. *Corresponding paragraphs in Pope Benedict XVI's 2010 World Day of Peace Message: 7, 8, and 10*

Read and Learn

- [Renewing the Earth: A Invitation to Reflection and Action on Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching](#)
A Statement of the U.S. Catholic Bishops, November 14, 1991 www.usccb.org/sdwp/ejp/bishopsstatement.shtml
- [Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good](#)
A Statement of the U.S. Catholic Bishops, June 15, 2001 www.usccb.org/sdwp/international/globalclimate.shtml
- [If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation](#)
Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace, January 1, 2010 www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/peace/index_en.htm
- To learn more about how climate change and poverty are connected, visit [Catholics Confront Global Poverty](#) at www.usccb.org/globalpoverty or www.crs.org/globalpoverty.
- To learn more about how Catholics can respond to climate change, visit the Catholic Climate Covenant web site at <http://catholicclimatecovenant.org/>.

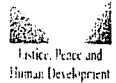


Department of Justice, Peace, and Human Development



To Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation

Pope Benedict XVI's 2010 World Day of Peace Message



Pope Benedict XVI's 2010 Message for the World Day of Peace, "If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation," is the latest in a long tradition of Church teaching on our obligation to care for creation. Quoting Pope John Paul II and Pope Paul VI throughout his message, the Holy Father affirms that environmental degradation is "a wide-ranging social problem which concerns the entire human family" (# 3). *Some themes and excerpts from this statement are provided below. The full text of the message can be found at www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/peace/index_en.htm*

Creation helps us to recognize our human dignity and God's love. "Seeing creation as God's gift to humanity helps us understand our vocation and worth as human beings . . . Contemplating the beauty of creation inspires us to recognize the love of the Creator" (# 2).

We have failed to carry out our role as steward. "The true meaning of God's original command . . . was not a simple conferral of authority, but rather a summons to responsibility. . . . Nature is a gift of the Creator, who . . . enabled man to draw from it the principles needed to 'till it and keep it' (cf. *Gen. 2:15*). Everything that exists belongs to God, who has entrusted it to man" (# 6).

We have misused the earth's resources and broken the covenant. "Man's inhumanity to man has given rise to numerous threats to peace and . . . development. . . . Yet no less troubling are the threats arising from the neglect – if not downright misuse – of the earth and the natural goods that God has given us" (# 1).

Our choices have impacted our brothers and sisters across the globe. "It is all too evident that large numbers of people in different countries and areas of our planet are experiencing increased hardship because of the negligence or refusal of many others to exercise responsible stewardship over the environment" (# 7).

There is an urgent moral need for solidarity with creation and those affected by climate change. "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 . . . ? Can we disregard the growing phenomenon of "environmental refugees" . . . ? Can we remain impassive in the face of actual and potential conflicts involving access to natural resources?" (# 4).

Climate Change Affects Farmers in Guatemala

"It rained for eight days, 24 hours per day. The rivers rose. In my village we lost 27 houses. Eight people died in one house. We lost our entire crop—maize, beans, wheat—then we lost the potatoes to rot because of the water," says 60-year-old farmer Efrain, of Sibinal, a town in Guatemala.



This farmer in Sibinal learned new techniques to deal with climate change. Photo by Elke Jahns/CRS

Efrain is talking about Hurricane Stan, which tore through Central America in 2005, killing more than 1500 people, most of them in Guatemala. In recent years, the frequency of climate-related disasters in the region has more than doubled, including hurricanes, windstorms, tornadoes, hail, heat-waves, gales and heavy rains. Many farmers also complain that Guatemala's dry season has all but disappeared.

Many communities across the globe are affected by climate change in similar ways. Luckily, Efrain's community has learned some adaptation techniques from Catholic Relief Services and its Caritas partners. Reforestation, new irrigation techniques, planting new kinds of crops, and disaster management programs are helping Efrain's community cope.



Department of Justice, Peace, and Human Development



To Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation

Pope Benedict XVI's 2010 World Day of Peace Message

Justice, Peace and Human Development

We have a responsibility to future generations. "A greater sense of intergenerational solidarity is urgently needed. Future generations cannot be saddled with the cost of our use of common environmental resources" (# 8).

Our current model of development must be re-evaluated. "Our present crises – be they economic, food-related, environmental or social – are ultimately also moral crises, and all of them are interrelated. They require us to rethink the path which we are travelling together" (# 5).

"I would advocate the adoption of a model of development based on the centrality of the human person, on the promotion and sharing of the common good, on responsibility, on a realization of our need for a changed life-style, and on prudence, the virtue which tells us what needs to be done today in view of what might happen tomorrow" (# 9).

We must develop cleaner technologies and assist developing countries in utilizing them.

"There is a need to encourage research into, and utilization of, forms of energy with lower impact on the environment" (# 9). "The international community has an urgent duty to find institutional means of regulating the exploitation of non-renewable resources, involving poor countries in the process" (# 8).

Individuals, families, communities, and the Church have a role to play. "Education for peace must increasingly begin with far-reaching decisions on the part of individuals, families, communities and states" (# 11). "Protecting the natural environment in order to build a world of peace is thus a duty incumbent upon each and all" (# 14). "The Church has a responsibility towards creation, and she considers it her duty to exercise that responsibility in public life, in order to protect earth, water and air as gifts of God the Creator meant for everyone, and above all to save mankind from the danger of self-destruction" (# 12).

The international community and nations have a duty to act. "The international community and national governments are responsible for sending the right signals in order to combat effectively the misuse of the environment. . . . There is a need to act in accordance with clearly-defined rules, also from the juridical and economic standpoint, while at the same time taking into due account the solidarity we owe to those living in the poorer areas of our world and to future generations" (# 7).

5 Ways You Can Cultivate Peace by Protecting Creation

- Learn more about how climate change is related to global poverty at the Catholics Confront Global Poverty Web site: www.usccb.org/globalpoverty or www.crs.org/globalpoverty.
- Take the St. Francis Pledge to Care for Creation and the Poor at the [Catholic Climate Covenant](http://catholicclimatecovenant.org/) Web site: <http://catholicclimatecovenant.org/>.
- Take action to ensure that climate change policies protect poor and vulnerable people, and sign up to receive the most recent legislative updates/action alerts at www.usccb.org/sdwp/takeaction.shtml.
- Join with family, friends, or fellow parishioners to pray for solutions that care for creation and care for the poor! Access USCCB prayer resources at www.usccb.org/sdwp/ejp/climate/.



Department of Justice, Peace, and Human Development