



We know from Genesis that God's mandate that we care for creation goes back to the very beginning of God's relationship with humanity. Within the Catholic Tradition, Papal Encyclicals, Pastoral Letters of the U.S. Conference of Bishops and the Midwest Bishops have given us a rich heritage of teaching regarding human relationships with all creation. However, creation care has been a neglected part of our faith life.

We have largely limited the application of our faith to the human realm. Most of us engage in "acts of charity" and neighborly acts. Within our various denominations, we too frequently narrowly apply the terms "stewards" and "stewardship" to financial matters, time and talent.

All these **are** important, **but** this is **not all** that God asks of us.

God's expressed relationship, God's covenant, **extends beyond** humans. In Genesis (9:12-15), following the flood, God conveys to Noah **three times** the extent of God's covenant. It is
between [God] and us and every living creature with us;
between God and the earth;
between God and us and all living beings.

Furthermore, God redeems *all* of creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:19).



With the growing awareness of how human actions are contributing to global warming, creation care is surfacing as a core component of a life of faith. The striking aspect about human-induced climate change is the scope of what is impacted – several different, global systems that support life as we know it. Our climate is at the center of the web.

The four important greenhouse gases emitted through human activity, in energy production and use, industrial activities, land use and agriculture, are: carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide and the fluorinated-gases. Carbon dioxide (CO₂), resulting from fossil fuel use, is the most significant greenhouse gas.

Some observational evidence of climate change include:

- increases in global average air and ocean temperatures;
- widespread melting of polar and glacial ice;
- widespread changes in precipitation amounts; and
- rising global average sea level.

In February 2007, British Broadcasting Corporation reported on "**How climate change hits India's poor.**" Six thousand people in the Sundarbans Islands have been relocated because their land is under water. The Sundarbans islands are experiencing what the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change projects to happen with growing warming trends: megadeltas in Asia and Africa will suffer due to high exposure to sea level rise, storm surges, and river flooding.



People living in poverty will be worst affected by climate change, and the poorest of the poor will be worst hit. Think Africa and Asia. Yet, the people of Africa and Asia have contributed only a very small percentage of the fossil fuel emissions that have played the biggest role in the global warming experienced. Those who have benefited least from the prosperity of the Industrial Revolution and its fossil energy consumption will suffer the most from its climatic consequences.

It is especially important for us to remember what Jesus says in Matthew (25:40,45) – we are held accountable for what we have done *and* what we have failed to do: "**Truly I tell you, just as you did to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did to me. . . . Truly I tell you, just as you did not do to one of the least of these who are members of my family you did not do to me.**"

Human-induced climate change is a global phenomenon. What we do here, affects others elsewhere and for years to come, either positively or negatively.



This is our challenge: how we embrace our responsibility as stewards of creation; how we practice creation care, starting with the heart of the web, climate stewardship.

It is important not to be overwhelmed and not to give up hope as real solutions to reduce carbon dioxide emissions do exist and can be implemented. These solutions range from individual actions to technological solutions for the energy sector, buildings, industry, transportation, and agriculture.

On a personal level, we can start by being energy efficient, conserving energy at home and in our communities, plus buying locally.

If we ranch or farm, we could also help through choosing farming and ranching practices that reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This includes conservation tillage and good rangeland management, for example through sustainable stocking rates and rotational grazing.

At the community or state level, we could support efforts and legislation that result in the deployment of technology and practices that reduces carbon dioxide emissions – from renewable technology investments in wind and cellulosic biomass, to carbon capture and storage, which has the potential to remove 90% of CO₂ emissions from coal plants and store them safely and permanently deep underground in geologic oil and gas formations.

Finally, we can communicate our concerns about climate change to our leadership, be it local or federal, secular or religious, and ask for constructive solutions.



Some of us might wonder why people of faith should be involved in legislation and communication with secular leadership on matters of stewardship; some of us might think that doing so is not the role of the faithful or the Church.

The truth of the matter is, for some of us, our respective faith traditions teach us that *“in every temporal affair, [we] are to be guided by a Christian conscience, since no human activity, even of the temporal order, can be withdrawn from God’s dominion.”* (Catechism of the Catholic Church 912)

“Therefore, let us recognize the responsibility of the church and its members to place a high priority on changes in economic, political, social, and technological lifestyles to support a more ecologically equitable and sustainable world leading to higher quality of life for all of God’s creation.” (Book of Discipline/Social Principles, Paragraph 160)

“The initiative of lay Christians is necessary especially when the matter involves discovering or inventing the means for permeating social, political and economic realities with the demands of Christian doctrine and life. This initiative is a normal element of the life of the Church.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church 899)

“The strength of a political system depends upon the full and willing participation of its citizens. The church should continually exert a strong ethical influence upon the state, supporting policies and programs deemed to be just and opposing policies and programs that are unjust.” (Book of Discipline/Social Principles, Paragraph 164.B)

We are taught that:

- *“[I]t belongs to the laity to seek the kingdom of God, by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God’s will.*
- *It pertains to [the laity] in a special way so to illuminate and order all temporal things with which they are closely associated that these may always be affected and grow according to Christ and maybe to the glory of the Creator and Redeemer.*
- *Moreover, by uniting their forces let the laity so remedy the institutions and conditions of the world when the latter are an inducement to sin, that these may be conformed to the norms of justice, favoring rather than hindering the practice of virtue.”* (From Catechism of the Catholic Church 898, 909)



We need to take to heart that positive steps are already being taken, and we need to find ways to support and expand those efforts. An example: in ND, the mayor of Fargo signed on to Mayors for Climate Protection and has provided leadership in reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the city. This year, the Grand Forks mayor signed on, after a group of concerned residents initiated conversation with him. Grand Forks is now looking at steps to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions. What can we, as people of faith, do to get other mayors to follow these constructive examples? We can invite

them to do the same.



There is a cost to taking action, especially in the implementation of certain technologies that reduce CO₂ emissions. In some instances, depending on the action, the financial cost is recovered within a handful of years as a result of energy savings; sometimes it is longer. **However, the consequences of not acting are even costlier and far worse, financially and otherwise.**

Non-action translates into two things on two different realms, both of which are unacceptable from a faith perspective and call into question our relationship with our Creator.

First, for the planet and its inhabitants: We pass on the consequences of increasing emissions of CO₂ to future generations. Stephen Gardiner, who has written on climate change and ethics, refers to this as the “problem of intergenerational buck passing.” What many of us are not cognizant about is that *“While more than half of the CO₂ emitted is currently removed from the atmosphere within a century, some fraction (about 20%) remains in the atmosphere for many millennia. Because of the slow removal process, atmospheric CO₂ will continue to increase in the long term even if its emissions is substantially reduced from present levels.”* (From “The IPCC AR4 Frequently Asked Questions, Question 10.3”) Twenty percent of all our emissions, yours and mine, will be around thousands of years after we are gone. Through non-action or inadequate action, we are “gifting” future generations a very much-altered world.

On another realm, between us and our Creator, there are also consequences. Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, Church of England, offers this for our reflection:

“I don’t think it is compatible with a Christian ethic to ignore the environmental degradation we face; it is . . . a moral question for everyone and therefore a present imperative. . . . [I]f we look at the language of the Bible on this, we come across a situation where people are judged for not responding to warnings. It is deeply built in; there are choices we can make, each one of us, to change things now and I think what the Bible and the Christian tradition suggest is that those who have that challenge put before them, but not only the challenge, but the evidence for it, and don’t respond, bear a very heavy responsibility before God.”



This brings us back to where we started – our relationship with God and our responsibility before God. God blesses us richly, and every second we draw our breath presents us with an opportunity for grace. We need to remember, as Luke 12:48 tells us, that *“Much will be required of the person entrusted with much, and still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more.”* We, in the US, are blessed with abundance. We have been entrusted with so much more than the majority of the human population, indeed, much more than any people in human history.

In Luke (13:6-9) and Matthew (21:18-22), Jesus makes us aware that it is **not** enough to live and take for one’s self and not produce fruit that others can partake of: *“For three years now I have come in search of fruit on it but found none. [So] cut it down. Why should it exhaust the soil?”* We are to share the goodness, the much that is given us, with others, now *and* in the future, so that life, other than our own and beyond our families, communities, and generation, can also be sustained.

While God does eventually “weed” out those of us with self-centered dispositions, we are given chances to change our way of being. Change usually takes time. Replenishing the ground of our being is what is needed. As Jesus tells us in Matthew: *“Whatever you ask for in prayer with faith, you will receive.”*

It is, therefore, up to us to ask God for God’s help, direction, and sustenance, and be genuinely open to receiving and following through with what we receive, especially now that we are confronted with global warming. For many of us this means stepping beyond our comfort zone; daring to open up and listen to God; and, ultimately, obeying our Creator by acting. For we **are** to be stewards of God’s creation, and our engagement is a sign of our love and respect for God’s creation, human *and* nonhuman, a demonstration of our responsibility to all who come after us. Our engagement is living testimony of our relationship with our Creator.

Leadership on Creation and Stewardship:

Denominational Statements and Resolutions that Address Global Warming/Climate Change

“One cannot dissociate the plan of Creation from the plan of Redemption. The latter plan touches the very concrete situations of injustices to be combated and of justice to be restored.” (Pope Paul VI)

- American Baptist Churches, USA: American Baptist Resolution on Global Warming (1991)
- Church of the Brethren General Board: Resolution on Global Warming/Climate Change (2001); Creation: Called to Care (1991)
- Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action (2006)
- Episcopal Church: Resolution on Environment (July 1991 70th General Convention); The Episcopal Church Executive Council Resolution: Urging the President to address global warming (June 2001)
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in America: Caring for Creation (1993)
- Presbyterian Church USA: Restoring Creation for Ecology and Justice (1990); PCU 210 General Assembly 1998: Global Climate Change
- United Church of Christ: Resolution "Global Warming" United Church of Christ Statement of Global Climate Change (July 1999)
- The United Methodist Church: Social Principles: The Natural World; Energy Policy Statement Adopted 1980 and readopted 2000 (From The Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church)
- The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops: Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence and the Common Good (2001)

Recent Statements

- **Papal Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace, January 1, 2008**
Excerpts below from **The family, the human community and the environment**
“Prudence does not mean failing to accept responsibilities and postponing decisions; it means being committed to making joint decisions after pondering responsibly the road to be taken, decisions aimed at strengthening that covenant between human beings and the environment, which should mirror the creative love of God, from whom we come and towards whom we are journeying.

In this regard, it is essential to “sense” that the earth is “our common home” and, in our stewardship and service to all, to choose the path of dialogue rather than the path of unilateral decisions. Further international agencies may need to be established in order to confront together the stewardship of this “home” of ours; more important, however, is the need for ever greater conviction about the need for responsible cooperation. The problems looming on the horizon are complex and time is short. In order to face this situation effectively, there is a need to act in harmony.

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. . . .” http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20071208_xli-world-day-peace_en.html
- **Papal Message to Environmental Conference, VII Symposium on Religion, Science and the Environment, Greenland September 2007** (excerpt below)
“Preservation of the environment, promotion of sustainable development and particular attention to climate change are matters of grave concern for the entire human family. No nation or business sector can ignore the ethical implications present in all economic and social development. With increasing clarity scientific research demonstrates that the impact of human actions in any one place or region can have worldwide effects. The consequences of disregard for the environment cannot be limited to an immediate area or populus because they always harm human coexistence, and thus betray human dignity and violate the rights of citizens who desire to live in a safe environment” (cf. *ibid.*, 8-9).
<http://zenit.org/article-20435?l=english>