



## The Catholic Coalition on Climate Change

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**Catholic Climate Covenant™**  
Care for Creation. Care for the Poor.

### Catholic Climate Coalition Members

United States Conference  
of Catholic Bishops:

Department of Justice Peace  
and Human Development

Migration and Refugee Services

The Association of Catholic  
Colleges and Universities

Carmelite NGO

Catholic Charities USA

The Catholic Health Association  
of the United States

Catholic Relief Services

The Conference of Major  
Superiors of Men

The Franciscan Action Network

The Leadership Conference of  
Women Religious

The National Catholic  
Rural Life Conference

The National Council  
of Catholic Women

*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.*  
**Pope Benedict XVI, July 2007**

## Catholic Coalition on Climate Change

### Catholic Seven Year Plan For Presentation to The Alliance of Religions and Conservation

November 2009

### INTRODUCTION

The Catholic Coalition on Climate Change is pleased to be a part of this historic celebration. We gladly accept the challenge and welcome the opportunity to submit a seven-year plan to expand the involvement of the Catholic community in the United States. Doing so will allow the U.S. Catholic church to:

- demonstrate greater respect and reverence for the gift of God's bountiful creation
- accept personal and communal responsibility for caring for this gift
- ensure that the lives of those most impacted by our neglect—namely the poor and the vulnerable around the globe—do not suffer any greater hardship either through climate change or efforts designed to address the problem.

While our efforts in the coming years will focus primarily on climate change, we will not neglect other important and pressing environmental concerns including air, water and land pollution. In both cases (climate change and broader environmental degradation) it is poor communities that suffer the worst consequences.

The key to our plan is the expansion and more complete embrace of the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change's signature initiative, the *Catholic Climate Covenant: St. Francis Pledge to Care for Creation and the Poor*.

In the United States, the Catholic Church is a powerful presence in many local communities and on many issues. It also has untapped potential to be a serious player. The U.S. Catholic community is:

- 18,000 parishes in 195 dioceses
- 8,500 elementary and secondary schools
- 244 colleges and universities
- the largest private provider of charitable services assisting Americans and immigrants in

- need
- the largest funder of community organizing projects
- the largest group of non-profit health care systems and facilities
- nearly 25% of the total U.S. population: approximately 70 million Catholics.

### **What is the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change?**

Begun in the spring of 2006, the Coalition is a partnership of thirteen national Catholic organizations:

- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
  - Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development
  - Department of Migration and Refugee Services
- Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities
- Carmelite NGO
- Catholic Charities USA
- Catholic Health Association of the United States
- Catholic Relief Services
- Conference of Major Superiors of Men
- Franciscan Action Network
- Leadership Conference of Women Religious
- National Association for Lay Ministry
- National Catholic Rural Life Conference
- National Council of Catholic Women

These groups have come together to more fully integrate climate change activities in their ongoing programs and among their constituents and to be a more unified Catholic voice through the efforts and with the support of the Catholic Coalition.

Early work of the Coalition included hosting three climate change hearings in the states of Florida, Ohio and Alaska. The goal was to take seriously the bishops' call from their 2001 statement on climate change, *Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence and the Common Good*. These three dialogues helped the attending bishops and other state leaders understand more fully both the complex issues (scientific, economic, social, political) surrounding climate change and the increasingly refined and embraced Catholic social teaching on the issue.

In addition to the hearings, the executive director of the Coalition has traveled extensively in the US to offer workshops and addresses on the work of the Coalition, the teaching of the Church and practical ways to care for creation and the poor.

The Coalition has also been a key partner in promoting the public policy agenda of the U.S. Catholic bishops and other Coalition members at the federal level. This policy insists that any legislative remedies to climate change must reflect a priority for poor people and the need to be much better stewards of God's gift of creation. These twin goals are at the heart of the efforts of the Catholic and other faith communities.

The 13 member organizations have approved of this seven-year plan and will be key to its implementation. More information about the Coalition can be found at:

<http://www.catholicsandclimatechange.org>.

The work of the Coalition is funded through the generous assistance of the National Religious Partnership for the Environment (NRPE) based in Massachusetts. The Coalition works with other NRPE members to strengthen the faith response to climate change across the spectrum of religious life in the U.S. NRPE members include the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, the National Council of Churches, the Evangelical Environmental Network and the Committee on Environment and Jewish Life.

### **Catholic Climate Covenant: St. Francis Pledge to Care for Creation and the Poor**

After a full year of planning and development, the Coalition launched in the spring of 2009 an ambitious, nationwide initiative designed to ensure a greater understanding and acceptance of the uniquely Catholic approach to climate change and to encourage individual and collective action.

The *Catholic Climate Covenant: St. Francis Pledge to Care for Creation and the Poor* calls upon Catholic individuals, families, parishes, schools, hospitals, and other institutions to take the St. Francis Pledge. The Pledge asks Catholics:

- **TO PRAY** and reflect on the duty to care for God's Creation and protect the poor and vulnerable.
- **TO LEARN** about and educate others on the causes and moral dimensions of climate change.
- **TO ASSESS** how we-as individuals and in our families, parishes and other affiliations- contribute to climate change by our own energy use, consumption, waste, etc.
- **TO ACT** to change our choices and behaviors to reduce the ways we contribute to climate change.
- **TO ADVOCATE** for Catholic principles and priorities in climate change discussions and decisions, especially as they impact those who are poor and vulnerable.

With a robust public relations campaign employing the theme, *Who's Under Your Carbon Footprint?*, the Covenant project made an unprecedented splash onto the national stage. This haunting question uniquely elicits the twin goals of the Catholic approach to this important moral issue: caring for creation (reducing greenhouse gas pollution) and caring for the poor.

A new website, [catholicclimatecovenant.org](http://catholicclimatecovenant.org), offers a variety of ways Catholics can fulfill the St. Francis Pledge, valuable resources which can be used toward this end, and has become destination website for anyone wishing to discover the breadth of Catholic activity and news on this important moral issue.

THE SEVEN-YEAR PLAN OF THE CATHOLIC COALITION ON CLIMATE CHANGE

Our twelve national Catholic partners have approved this plan to expand Catholic involvement in caring for creation and focusing specifically on the issue of climate change by utilizing our primary organizing tool, the Catholic Climate Covenant: St. Francis Pledge to Care for Creation and the Poor. The goal will be to build on our success with the Covenant and other environmental justice projects and programs implemented by the Environmental Justice Program of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and other Catholic partners and organizations. As we look forward to the next seven years, we will continue to utilize existing organizational partnerships and build new relationships to ensure successful outcomes.

In some instances, the Coalition will be the primary animator of these activities. The collective voice and mission of the Coalition adds weight to some of these efforts that would otherwise seem diffuse. In other instances, individual Coalition members will reach beyond the abilities or of our collective voice to add more emphasis or urgency in specific areas. For example, religious orders as represented by the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, the Conference of Major Superiors of Men, or the Franciscan Action Network might be able articulate a more prophetic voice about the urgency of climate change than would be comfortable by the Coalition's collective voice.

In addition, the Coalition has the ability to help fund pilot projects or provide resources to assist member organizations and others to help them implement climate change and environmental justice activities within their spheres of influence. As an example, in 2008, we provided grants to 11 national Catholic organizations for the purpose of designing and implementing climate change programs.

Our plan is comprehensive and specific.

1. **Assets:** what are we doing to lower the carbon footprint of our facilities, protect church-owned land?
  - **Facilities:** The Coalition will partner with the U.S. government's Environmental Protection Agency and their "ENERGY STAR" program. This program offers a variety of tools and techniques for individuals and institutions to reduce their energy use. In particular, we will seek their assistance to encourage our thousands of parishes, schools, hospitals, and other facilities to become certified as "ENERGY STAR" congregations or buildings.

Several dioceses are already beginning this process through the diocesan facilities managers.

With nearly 18,000 Catholic churches, 8,000 elementary and secondary schools, countless buildings housing charitable organizations and hospitals and health care facilities, the Catholic community can have a tremendous impact on the amount of energy we can save and reduce our carbon footprint.

- Investments: the Coalition will initiate conversations with treasurers and development officers of Coalition partners and other Catholic institutions and dioceses to discuss ways in which Catholic investment portfolios can be better tailored to encourage renewable energy technology and support companies seeking to systematically reduce their energy use and promoting sustainable energy use.
- Lands and forests: Religious communities of men and women in the United States have made care of creation a top priority on the land and in the facilities they own. For many, this priority has helped them become models for the local communities that surround them.

For example, the primary meeting and meals facility at the retreat center of the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary near San Jose, California, is a LEED-certified (Leadership in Environmental and Educational Design) building. The Coalition will promote such efforts and work with facilities managers to ensure that these best practices are seen as models to be replicated.

- Health Care: we want to particularly highlight the growing work of the Catholic Health Association of the United States (CHA) and its members (they were the recipients of one of our 2008 incentive grants). Health care organizations are among the biggest consumers of energy and largest producers of waste. In seven years, the efforts already begun in many Catholic sponsored health care systems and facilities and with the support and encouragement of CHA will be greatly expanded. Efforts will include decreasing energy usage in operations by auditing energy use, replacing equipment with energy efficient products, and, when possible, using renewable energy sources. Catholic health care will also continue to decrease energy use in the design and conduction of buildings and encourage employees and members of their communities to be environmentally responsible.

2. **Education**: to what degree have we embedded Catholic teaching on the environment into our schools (elementary, secondary, higher education, parish religious education programs, etc.)?

- Youth Programming: The good news for most of us across the globe is that young people understand climate change. This is certainly true in the United States. Key partners include the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry (NFCYM), the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA), the Catholic Campus Ministry Association (CCMA), the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities (ACCU) and others.

Coalition and partner staff will offer workshops and other presentations to the regular regional and national meetings of these organizations and encouraging them to integrate the Covenant and other CCCC projects into their programming.

For example: As part of the launch of the Catholic Climate Covenant: St. Francis Pledge to Care for Creation and the Poor, NCEA encouraged principals of the 6,300 member elementary schools to recite St. Francis' Canticle of the Creatures on Earth Day, April 22, 2009.

- Use of Technology: The Coalition and its partners will commit to using internet-based tools (e.g., “webinars”) to educate Catholic leaders on efforts within our community that get to the core of Catholic teaching on the environment, offer real tools to assist them in sharing this teaching and to encourage bold action on environmental justice consistent with our teaching

As an example, this past October, the Coalition and the Franciscan Action Network hosted a “webinar” on climate change, St. Francis and the spirituality of care of creation. Through our networks and with our advertising efforts, nearly 200 “sites” joined the video/audio conversation via the internet.

- Speakers’ Bureau: By the end of 2010, the Coalition will convene a high level group of Catholic leaders among the Coalition partner organizations and dioceses to develop a speaker’s bureau. This effort will accomplish important goals for the next seven years including: to reduce the Coalition’s carbon footprint (less travel by top leaders and staff) and to more fully spread the word about a Catholic approach to climate change to local dioceses, parishes and others.
  - Adult Religious Education and Formation: The Coalition will build new relationships with associations of catechists, and other faith formation leaders to ensure that Catholic teaching on the care for creation is a regular part of the curriculum.
  - Promotion of JustFaith: The Coalition will continue to work with JustFaith Ministries to improve and keep current the Just Matters climate change model that originated with the Coalition. JustFaith is the premier Catholic social teaching adult education program in the United States.
  - Curricula Development: The Coalition will promote curriculum development on climate change and Catholic teaching for youth by initiating a dialogue with religious education curricula development organizations and Catholic textbook publishers. Furthermore, the Coalition will promote this through the key educational partners to ensure that Catholic teaching on climate change and the environment becomes more central in Catholic elementary, secondary and post-secondary schools.
  - Build on Current Efforts: Many of the partners of the Coalition produce their own educational materials. For example, Catholic Relief Services’ Operation Rice Bowl, a Lenten fundraising effort used primarily in elementary schools, will focus its 2010 materials on climate change. The Coalition will work with CRS and other organizational education campaigns to encourage greater integration of the themes of care for creation and climate change into their outreach and fundraising efforts.
3. **Theology and Pastoral Plans and Programs**: to what degree have our seminaries and formation programs integrated care for Creation as a part of the training of religious men and women? How deeply rooted is the theology of stewardship and creation care in our tradition?

- Seminaries: Working with NCEA's Seminary division, the Coalition will begin discussions about seminary curricula and seek to include more explicit programming about care of creation and environmental justice.
- Pastor Support: The Coalition will work closely with the National Federation of Priests Councils (an umbrella organization of clusters of parishes in the same geographical area) to encourage their support of the Covenant initiative, to share best practices among parishes, and provide resources for liturgy and parish programs.

The Coalition will begin discussions with national organizations that serve the continuing education needs of priests, deacons, and lay ministers.

- Scholars' Conferences: The Coalition will sponsor two high-level scholars conferences within the next seven years to highlight and expand the evolving theology of stewardship and care for creation. Every effort will be made to have media coverage of these events to ensure that key themes and ideas are shared more broadly within the larger Catholic community in the U.S. and abroad.
4. **Lifestyles**: Can we encourage an ethic that simplifies our lifestyles, reduces consumerism, and lowers our energy use? Can we unite to create greater purchasing power for more sustainable energy sources and products?
- The heart of the St. Francis Pledge. By pledging to pray, learn, assess, act and advocate, Catholic individuals, families, parishes, schools and others will be compelled to reduce their energy use, share their resources with others, and understand that a Catholic approach includes both caring for creation and the poor and make the link between lifestyles, poverty and stewardship of finite resources.
  - Catholic Facilities Managers: The Coalition has begun conversations with Catholic facilities managers to encourage a more comprehensive and green approach to renovating older buildings and making new structures as environmentally responsible as possible. Emphasis will be placed on the money saved with such practices but also ensure that even costly retrofitting or materials are consistent with God's injunction to live in harmony with the gifts God has given.

As more Catholic churches and other Catholic facilities reduce their carbon footprint with conservation practices, the Coalition will encourage pastors, principals, and other executives to use this as a "teachable moment" for those who use these facilities.

- Bulk purchasing of renewable energy and green products: the Coalition will explore with facilities managers and others ways to use the collective purchasing power of our institutions (locally, regionally and nationally, where possible) to reduce the costs of such resources and materials.

Again, such practices will become opportunities for users to see the benefits of this approach and implement them in their own lives.

5. **Media and Advocacy:** How effective are we at encouraging Catholics to advocate to their lawmakers about care for creation and the impacts of environmental degradation and climate change on low-income communities? Is the good news of our efforts getting to Catholic and secular media in ways that are positive and motivating for others?
- Regular Pitches: with all that is going on in the religious community, including the Catholic community, there is no end to stories and ideas for the press to cover. The Coalition will highlight such stories to the media each month and demonstrate the breadth and depth of Catholic engagement in environmental stewardship in the U.S.
  - Communications Internships: The Coalition will work with Catholic colleges and universities to hire, on a regular basis, interns who will assist the Coalition in keeping our internet-based social networking efforts current and relevant. The intern will also assist in pitching stories to the media on a regular basis.
  - Advocacy: The Coalition works very closely with the public policy offices of the U.S. Catholic bishops and other partners. The combined advocacy efforts of all of our partner organizations *can reach deeply and broadly* into the Catholic community generating thousands of communications to legislators at the local, state and national levels from ordinary Catholics (i.e., “grassroots”) and Catholic leaders including bishops, priests, heads of men and women religious communities, as well as Catholics who are leaders in business, labor, academia, and other organizations (i.e., “grasstops”).

The Coalition partners bring more than numbers of people to bear on our collective advocacy efforts. They also bring *real-life experience*—and in many cases they bring the people directly impacted by environmental degradation and climate change to press our case to legislators and other government officials. These moving stories and experiences help shape the Catholic approach to public policy and help persuade legislators to do the right thing.

The Coalition will work closely with Catholic conference staff at the *state level* to assist them in making the case for care of creation and the poor to state and local legislators. For example, the Catholic bishops of Texas recently asked the Coalition for advice and language for a public letter raising questions about the efficacy of building new coal-fired power plants.

Through weekly e-mail updates to the 3,000 plus Catholic leaders in our database and, at critical points in the legislative process, with phone calls to Catholic leaders in key states, the Coalition and its partners are in a prime position to deliver timely and clear communications to elected officials. Often, Coalition partners share similar electronic correspondence to their constituents thus increasing our outreach exponentially.

6. **Partnerships, Eco-Twinning:** How effective are we at promoting partnerships among Catholic parishes, dioceses, schools, state or regional networks or among institutions both within the U.S. and internationally?

- Eco-Twinning: At least two of the Coalition members already encourage parish-twinning programs.

At the *domestic level*, the *Catholic Campaign for Human Development*, the largest funder of community-based and church-based organizing in the U.S., promotes a program that urges wealthier Catholic churches to support the efforts of organizing efforts based in lower-income communities and parishes. In turn, many of these organizing efforts work to secure funding for hazardous waste clean-up and job incubators in low-income communities, including green jobs (from weatherizing homes to starting new green businesses).

At the *international level*, many U.S. Catholic churches and dioceses partner with Catholic Relief Services (the U.S. bishops overseas relief and development agency) and engage in parish or diocesan twinning. Typically, these efforts link wealthier parishes/dioceses with struggling parishes/dioceses in some of the poorest countries on Earth. It is not unusual for delegations from both communities to visit each other and form bonds of solidarity.

- Building Partnerships: The Coalition will work with CRS, CCHD, and other organizations and mission offices to understand the link between environment and poverty and to make explicit exchanges that highlight environmental needs.

As climate change forces human service agencies to adjust their plans and programs to address more and more emergencies, the Coalition will convene partners to discuss strategies that help the poorest people in the United States adapt to a change climate. From emergency services necessary to assist communities suffering losses from a hurricane to those experiencing extended heat waves or farmers coping with crop failure due to floods or droughts, many of our agencies will be called upon to assist. The Coalition will help share best practices and encourage greater attention to adaptation among Catholic agencies best positioned to help.

- Building the Base: The Coalition will continue to expand membership and find ways for each partner to better integrate a Catholic approach to climate change into their ongoing activities.

7. **Celebration**: how well are we highlighting the themes of stewardship and care for creation in our liturgies and feast days and what new initiatives might we consider to help the Catholic community better understand a reverence for Creation and the Creator? How can we more effectively draw the link between care for creation and care for poor people in our liturgical life?

- Music: The Coalition has already been approached by one of the top Catholic music talents, John Michael Talbot, to develop songs that lift up the themes of stewardship, creation and care for the poor amidst environmental degradation. The Coalition will seek

funding to commission new works that support these themes with other Catholic musicians.

- Celebrating St. Francis: For the first time this year, the Franciscan Action Network (a Coalition partner) and the Coalition together developed resources for the 800<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of St. Francis of Assisi. These efforts will continue in the coming years and encourage more and more Catholics to honor St. Francis' unique witness to the poor and to Creation.
- Liturgical Commissions and Organizations: the Coalition will encourage national liturgical organizations to become key Coalition members and encourage their full participation in our activities, including the development of prayers, homily suggestions, and specific ways to integrate the themes of stewardship and creation into our liturgical life.
- National Gatherings: the Coalition will explore ways to celebrate our collective work by hosting large gatherings every 3 to 5 years. These celebrations will be an opportunity for the partners to highlight their efforts and to train more Catholic leaders on the many ways to integrate stewardship, care for creation and care for the poor into their ongoing programs and activities.

These are our plans. We believe that they are ambitious but achievable. We look forward to sharing them further with other faith leaders during the celebration at Windsor Castle.

Respectfully submitted,

Daniel J. Misleh  
Executive Director