



# Global Climate Change and our Catholic Response

## What is the Issue?

Climate change is at the center of the environmental challenges facing our nation and the world. Some of the impacts of climate change include increased temperatures, rising sea levels, and changes in rainfall that contribute to more frequent and severe floods and droughts. People living in poverty—both at home and abroad—contribute least to climate change but they are likely to suffer its worst consequences with few resources to adapt and respond. The effects of climate change—increasingly limited access to water, reduced crop yields, more widespread disease, increased frequency and intensity of natural disasters, and conflict over declining resources—are making the lives of the world’s poorest people even more precarious.

## Why Should People of Faith Care?

The Catholic Church brings a distinct perspective to the debate about climate change by lifting up the moral dimensions of this issue and the needs of the most vulnerable among us. As Catholics our faith calls us to care for *all* of God’s creation, especially the ‘least of these’ (Mt 25:40). Of particular concern to the Church is how climate change and the response to it will affect poor and vulnerable people here at home and around the world.

In 2001, the United States bishops adopted a statement on climate change, *Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence and the Common Good*, and declared that, “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.”

Protecting God’s Creation and “the least of these” requires urgent, wise and bold action. Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI have continually emphasized the moral dimensions of climate change and our responsibility to care for creation. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), through its [Environmental Justice Program](#), has been inviting and assisting Catholics to take this challenge to heart. The EJP program was

## How Does Climate Change Affect Real People?

*Teshome, a farmer in Bedossa Betella, Ethiopia, grows carrots to support his family. Drought, one effect of climate change, has affected Teshome’s family and countless others.*



*Photo by Andrew McConnell for CRS*

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, CRS 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. With drought becoming more frequent due to climate change, CRS hopes that growing a variety of crops less dependent on water will allow the farmers to continue to support themselves and their families.

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.



## *Global Climate Change and our Catholic Response*

created in 1993 to motivate Catholics to a deeper reverence and respect for God's creation, and to encourage Catholics to address environmental problems, particularly as they affect poor and vulnerable people.

Through its international humanitarian relief and development programs, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) is helping to strengthen the ability of the most vulnerable communities in the developing world to respond to and prepare for the effects of climate change. CRS provides education and training to poor communities that reduce their vulnerability to climate impacts, such as floods, droughts and storms.

The Catholic Coalition on Climate Change (CCCC), a partnership of national Catholic organizations formed in 2006 that includes the USCCB, CRS and others, encourages a more thoughtful dialogue about ways the Catholic community can respond to climate change. CCCC invites Catholics to participate in a new initiative offering a distinctively Catholic perspective on global climate change. This initiative offers Catholics the opportunity to stand with people living in poverty, in our nation and around the world, who are facing the worst impacts of climate change. To learn more go to [catholicsandclimatechange.org/](http://catholicsandclimatechange.org/).

### **What Response is Needed?**

A central moral measure of our response to climate change is how it touches poor and vulnerable people. Poor people cannot bear an undue burden of the global adjustments needed to address climate change.

As the U.S. Congress considers climate legislation, *Catholics Confront Global Poverty* invites Catholics to advocate for policies that reduce the impact of climate change on people living in poverty. Well-designed climate change policies can help both reduce the severity of climate change and protect the most vulnerable by:

- Creating new and necessary resources to assist poor and adversely affected communities in adapting to and easing the effects of global climate change in the U.S. and in the most vulnerable developing countries;
- Ensuring that the most useful technology is promptly made available to people in the most vulnerable developing countries to help them adapt to the effects of climate change (adaptation) and reduce their own greenhouse gas emissions (mitigation); and
- Promoting the participation of local communities in programs for adapting to climate change and easing its effects.

*Catholics Confront Global Poverty* invites advocates to care for creation and protect those in poverty by joining the new *Catholic Climate Covenant* ([www.catholicclimatecovenant.org](http://www.catholicclimatecovenant.org)).



*Photo by Jim Stipe for CRS*  
A Pakistani girl collects water from a spigot.

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