



Bishops Statement on Climate Change

Embracing Laudato Si'

“Saint Francis, faithful to Scripture, invites us to see nature as a magnificent book in which God speaks to us and grants us a glimpse of his infinite beauty and goodness.”[1] In June 2015, Pope Francis made this observation in his powerful encyclical, *Laudato Si' - On Care for Our Common Home*.

In our home state of Massachusetts, we are blessed with inspiring natural beauty from the seashore on the east coast to the majestic mountain vistas in the west - with rolling hills, vibrant communities and rich farmlands throughout the state. We, the four Roman Catholic Bishops of Massachusetts, call on all Catholics and others of faith in Massachusetts to reflect on this natural beauty – this gift from God. To protect and sustain this gift we must act now within our faith institutions and throughout the state to take substantial, meaningful steps to protect our environmental and provide relief from the impact of toxic pollution and climate change to protect the health and safety of all citizens, particularly the most vulnerable in our society.

Pope Francis “calls for dialogue throughout the world”[2] on how we can be better stewards of the earth and, in so doing, be more responsive to the plight of the poor around the world. His call for an “integral ecology” to be lived out joyfully respects the dignity of each person, identifies a moral obligation to protect the environment, and promotes social justice by supporting responsible economic development with respect for all people and the earth.

Pope Francis stated; “A very solid scientific consensus indicates that we are presently witnessing a disturbing warming of the climatic system. In recent decades this warming has been accompanied by a constant rise in the sea level and, it would appear, by an increase of extreme weather events, even if a scientifically determinable cause cannot be assigned to each particular phenomenon. Humanity is called to recognize the need for changes of lifestyle, production and consumption, in order to combat this warming or at least the human causes which produce or aggravate it.”

For decades reports from highly respected scientific studies also clearly set forth the dangers of climate change in the United States and around the globe. More recently, those studies detail the urgency of this crisis.

- In October 2018, The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel of Climate Change (IPCC) reported we may have as little as **12 years to act on climate change** – to slash global emissions 45 percent – to reach limiting global warming to 1.5°C. This would require rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society with clear benefits to people and natural ecosystems ensuring a more sustainable and equitable society.

- In November 2018, The National Oceanic and Atmosphere Administration (NOAA) found the effects of climate change, including deadly wildfires, increasingly debilitating hurricanes and heat waves, are already battering the United States, and the danger of more such catastrophes is worsening. If not mitigated now, in a worst-case climate-change scenario, the document finds financial impacts over \$400 billion annually to US economy. According to the NOAA, July 2019 was the hottest month ever recorded worldwide. The five hottest July's have occurred in the last five years.

Last month, the United Nations sounded the alarm about food supplies. World food security is increasingly at risk due to 'unprecedented' climate change impact. Today 500 million people live in areas that experience desertification. People living in already degraded or desertified areas are increasingly negatively affected by climate change.

With this immense threat, we may feel inclined to despair, but we are people of faith. Catholic social teaching is built on the principle of subsidiarity, “which grants freedom to develop the capabilities present at every level of society, while also demanding a greater sense of responsibility for the common good from those who wield greater power”.^[8] We are called to act with hope and to respond to this challenge with urgency in all facets of our life: as individuals making an ecological conversion in our personal lives; as members of our parishes, schools and businesses striving for structural changes that reduce environmental impact; and as citizens participating in political discussions and fulfilling our civic responsibilities. We are asking everyone to examine their personal vocations and opportunities to take action to take better care of our common home.

Change is hard and at the outset can seem intimidating. Every person's actions will depend on their life circumstance and their commitment to protect our natural resources. We must each find tangible and substantive actions that are within our grasp. Families should discuss their concerns about the environment and how their lifestyle and consumption is contributing to the climate changes and other environmental degradation. Parishes should integrate Catholic social teaching on the environment in their liturgy and in their religious education program. Action is needed at all levels of government to encourage replacement of fossil fuels with renewable sources of energy while ensuring that the most vulnerable in society are protected from harm during this transition.

We also wish to echo the view of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops who adopted an explicit priority to teach and advocate about integral ecology, emphasizing environmental degradation and its impact on the lives of the most vulnerable.

As a Catholic community we must commit to this effort while Christians around the world celebrate the *Season of Creation* (September 1st- October 4th). We, the Catholic Bishops of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, pledge our support to addressing this global crisis.

*“Start by doing what's necessary; then do what's possible;
and suddenly you are doing the impossible.”*

- Saint Francis of Assisi