



OLSH

Hearts for Others



CLIMATE JUSTICE - A HUMAN RIGHTS EMERGENCY

What is climate justice?

"Climate justice" is a term, and a movement, that acknowledges that climate change can have differing social, economic, public health, and other adverse impacts on underprivileged populations and is therefore an ethical and political issue rather than one that is purely environmental or physical in nature. Climate justice shifts our discourse on greenhouse gases and melting ice caps into a civil rights



movement with the people and communities most vulnerable to climate impacts at its heart. *"Climate change is happening now and to all of us. No country or community is immune and, as is always the case, the poor and vulnerable are the first to suffer and the worst hit."* UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

Evidence for climate change

Today there is extraordinarily robust evidence of global warming and its impact upon ecosystems and communities. The latest report from the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), released in August 2021, signalling "Code Red for Humanity," represents the most complete and authoritative collection of evidence from across relevant disciplines and can be found on their website. It warns that the world has already seen 1 degree C of warming, and that limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees C is a formidable challenge, but solutions are available.

What are the main threats of climate change?

The rising temperature of the earth's atmosphere presents threats from rising sea levels, ecosystem collapse and more frequent and severe weather. Planet-wide systems are affected: warming polar regions and oceans melt ice cover and cause sea level rise; ocean habitats have lower levels of oxygen, which decreases phytoplankton and kills coral reefs (like the 2016 event that resulted in a loss of around one-

third of shallow-water coral in the Great Barrier Reef); wildlife decline from shifting or shrinking local climates means that many mammals, birds, insects, fish and plants may not survive; changing weather patterns bring more frequent and severe storms and droughts, and higher temperatures affect the length of seasons and are already crossing safe levels for ecosystems and humans.

All of these impacts, and many, many others will become more severe if we don't act to stop greenhouse gas emissions.

The IPCC has given the world a clear deadline to avoid catastrophe: greenhouse gas emissions must be halved from their 2010 levels by 2030 to avoid further harmful impacts on human rights: right to life, right to health, right to housing and right to water and sanitation.



The Church and climate change

More than 50 years ago, Pope Saint John XXIII explained in his encyclical that *"we are faced with global environmental deterioration."*

In 1971, Pope Paul VI, in an apostolic letter, wrote of *"the tragic consequences of unchecked human activity."*

In 1990, Pope John Paul II, in his World Day of Peace message, relayed that *"the ecological crisis is a moral issue."* He mentioned the harm being done to the ozone layer and the greenhouse effect.

Pope Benedict XVI was nicknamed "The Green Pope." In 2010 he advised that *"If you want to cultivate peace, protect creation."*

In his 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis urged the world's 1.2 billion Catholics to take action against the injustice of climate change. He called for care of our common home, Earth, and for the protection of the poor and future generations: *"We know that technology based on the use of highly polluting fossil-fuels needs to be progressively replaced without delay."* (Source: Amnesty International)

From *Laudato Si'*

Our goal is not to amass information to satisfy curiosity, but rather to become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it. (#19)

We are not faced with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis...Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature. (#139)

Along with the importance of everyday gestures, social love moves us to devise larger strategies



to halt environmental degradation and to encourage a "culture of care" which permeates all of society. When we feel that God is calling us to intervene with others in these social dynamics, we should realise that this too is part of our spirituality, which is an exercise of charity and, as such, matures and sanctifies us. (#231)

I would like to offer Christians a few suggestions for an ecological spirituality grounded in the convictions of our faith, since the teachings of the Gospel have direct consequences for our way of thinking, feeling and living. More than in ideas or concepts...I am interested in how such a spirituality can motivate us to a more passionate concern for the protection of our world. (#217)



Questions for personal reflection and community discussion:

1. What makes climate change a human rights issue as well as a scientific issue?
2. How can we be more responsible stewards of our environment?
3. *"I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone across the waters to create many ripples."* - St Mother Teresa. What kind of 'ripples' do heart spirituality and our charism call on us to create? How would you connect climate justice to our charism, spirituality and mission?

Additional resources (to view)

- Caritas video (4 min) on Catholic Social Teaching regarding Climate Justice
<https://vimeo.com/455707787>
- "Kiribati: a drowning paradise in the South Pacific"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TZ0j6kr4ZJ0>
- Full length award-winning documentary on Kiribati "Anot's Ark" (if you have one in your community) which features our Sisters.
- The "Hungry Tides" series of short videos on the Edmund Rice website:
https://www.erc.org.au/pcp_videos

