



The Catholic Coalition on Climate Change

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

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

Catholics and Copenhagen: A Primer on Catholic Teaching on Climate Change

As climate negotiations get underway in Copenhagen, as media coverage of this event unfolds, and as new questions arise about climate science, the [Catholic Coalition on Climate Change](#), a [network](#) of 13 national Catholic organizations including the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, offers this review of the approach to climate change as articulated by Pope Benedict XVI and the U.S. bishops.

We do so in an effort to demonstrate that Catholic perspectives are distinct from that of other major stakeholders in this debate. Our contribution is not about the merits of cap and trade vs. a carbon tax; it is not simply about how many polar bears are saved; our contribution is neither to dismiss the reality of climate change nor to overstate what we know of its consequences.

An authentically Catholic response to climate change must be about *both* the care of creation *and* protection of those most vulnerable to climate impacts. As Pope Benedict said in his new [encyclical](#), “The environment is God's gift to everyone, and in our use of it we have a responsibility towards the poor, towards future generations and towards humanity as a whole.” (48) The pope further insists, “The protection of the environment, of resources and of the climate obliges all international leaders to act jointly and to show a readiness to work in good faith, respecting the law and promoting solidarity with the weakest regions of the planet.” (50)

In their statement, [Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence and the Common Good](#), the U.S. bishops wisely asserted that:

In facing climate change, what we already know requires a response; it cannot be easily dismissed. Significant levels of scientific consensus—even in a situation with less than full certainty, where the consequences of not acting are serious—justifies, indeed can obligate, our taking action intended to avert potential dangers. In other words, if enough evidence indicates that the present course of action could jeopardize humankind's well-being, prudence dictates taking mitigating or preventative action.

Catholic organizations—including [Catholic Relief Services](#)—that are working overseas and bishops in the United States in places like [Florida](#) and [Alaska](#) who are already feeling the impacts of climate change add urgency to those meeting in Denmark this month. Pope Benedict's [video message](#) to climate change delegates meeting at United Nations headquarters last September—a meeting to set the stage for Copenhagen—emphasized:

How important it is then, that the international community and individual governments send the right signals to their citizens and succeed in countering harmful ways of treating the environment! The economic and social costs of using up shared resources must be recognized with transparency and borne by those who incur them, and not by other peoples or future generations.

We hope you find this brief review about the uniqueness of a Catholic contribution to the climate change debate helpful.

For more information: [catholicclimatecovenant.org](#) or write to: [info@catholicsandclimatechange.org](#)

[T]oday the great gift of [God's Creation] is exposed to serious dangers and lifestyles which can degrade it. Environmental pollution is making particularly unsustainable the lives of the poor of the world. In dialogue with Christians of various confessions, we must pledge ourselves to take care of creation and to share its resources in solidarity.
--Pope Benedict XVI, August 27, 2006

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

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The National Catholic Rural Life Conference

The National Council of Catholic Women