



## UNITED STATES CATHOLIC MISSION ASSOCIATION

415 MICHIGAN AVE., NE, STE. 102

WASHINGTON, DC 20017-4502

Phone: 202.832-3112 • Fax: 202.832-3688

Email: [uscma@uscatholicmission.org](mailto:uscma@uscatholicmission.org)

Website: [www.uscatholicmission.org](http://www.uscatholicmission.org)

### Redeeming Our Stewardship of the Earth

By Nadia Barnett

Climate change demands radical and compassionate solutions from everyone. It's not an easy topic to address given the vastness of its' causes and effects. It will take a collective effort to accomplish the great task set before us: to care for Creation and be stewards of the Earth. As Catholics, as missionaries, as human beings, we must meet this challenge as a community of saints spread throughout the world.

Pope Francis clearly identifies climate change – often confused with global warming – as a primary concern in Laudato Si', his encyclical published in 2015. “The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change,” he asserts.

According to NASA, scientists “have high confidence that global temperatures will continue to rise for decades to come, largely due to greenhouse gases produced by human activities. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which includes more than 1,300 scientists from the United States and other countries, forecasts a temperature rise of 2.5 to 10 degrees Fahrenheit over the next century.” This is significant because “small changes in temperature correspond to enormous changes in the environment.”

National Climate Assessment provides an overview of their full report on climate change; “precipitation patterns are changing, sea level is rising, the oceans are becoming more acidic, and the frequency and intensity of some extreme weather events are increasing. Many lines of independent evidence demonstrate that the rapid warming of the past half-century is due primarily to human activities.” The report concludes with, “climate change presents a major challenge for society.”

Stewardship is an aspect of mission. Stewardship is the belief that God created the earth, and all that is within it, and has given human beings responsibility for its care. We need to protect the Earth – our common home. Climate change not only impacts the natural environment and state of eco-systems but the quality of air, food production and access to clean water for millions of people around the world. “Human beings too are creatures of this world, enjoying a right to life and happiness, and endowed with unique dignity; we cannot fail to consider the effects on people’s lives of environmental deterioration,” as stated in Laudato Si'. “The human environment and the natural environment deteriorate together; we cannot adequately combat environmental degradation unless we attend to causes related to human and social degradation.” Catholics must protect the dignity of every human life. Fortunately, there are a number of individuals, groups, organizations and movements already working toward stewardship. The urgency is to not only recognize the dire state of our common home but act decisively to reverse this trend.

Addressing climate change, becoming stewards of the Earth, is a multi-layered, multi-faceted issue. There are steps that need to be taken on an individual, community, societal and global level.

Catholic Confront Global Poverty – an initiative by U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops (USCCB) and Catholic Relief Services – makes the candid assertion: “climate change is changing our shared responsibility.”

On March 15, 2019, the Global Catholic Climate Movement (GCCM) held a conference on Catholic Divestment: A Prophetic Stand for Our Common Home in Washington, D.C. where the leadership invited Catholic organizations to engage in a conversation regarding the urgent need for climate justice.

“Climate change is a matter of life and death for many communities around the world. [Therefore] as Catholics, we must have a preferential option for the poor [as stated by Catholic Social Teaching],” states Naderev ‘Yeb’ Madla Saño, a former climate diplomat and current executive director of Greenpeace Southeast Asia. “It is not just an environmental problem.”

As Catholics, caring for Creation cannot be accomplished without addressing climate change. Moreover, this challenge extends far beyond those that seek environmental justice and preservation. Many within the Catholic community view climate change as a quality of life issue due to its’ impact on socioeconomically poor, marginalized people – especially in South America – and children’s health and wellness. This is an intergenerational issue. Pope Francis states in *Laudato Si’* the demand for change stemming from the younger generations is a sign that we cannot build a better future without thinking of the environmental crisis and the sufferings of the excluded. We need to protect “the right to a healthy and green planet,” states Saño.

“We are reaching all 9 planetary boundaries,” says Lorna Gold, the coordinator of the *Laudato Si’* Project at Trocaire and GCCM board member, who mainly works with climate change advocates in Ireland. She stressed the interconnectedness of the issue and believes everyone, but especially Catholics, need to gain an appreciation for fewer things.

Sustainability is quintessential to combating the egregious effects of climate change. One of the solutions offered by GCCM to address climate change is to encourage all organizations to divest from the fossil fuel industry to combat overzealous use of fossil fuels and other harmful industry practices.

Everyone is affected by climate change. Each of us must be willing to act upon this threat to our common home. We have an obligation to protect the natural and human environment. We do not face this challenge alone, but together. Fundamentally, we are the stewards of the Earth.

*Nadia Barnett is currently working at USCMA as the publications and communications associate during her year of service with Franciscan Mission Service, a DC-based program.*

For more information on climate change, here are helpful resources:

- [Laudato Si of the Holy Father Francis On Care For Our Common Home](#) (Pope Francis. 2015. [Encyclical].)
- [Why the faith community holds the climate key?](#) by Catholic Climate Covenant. Additional resources on [climate change](#)
- National Climate Assessment – [Full Report \(PDF available\)](#)
- Global Catholic Climate Movement resources on [climate change](#)
- [The Paris Agreement and Global Solidarity](#) (Bishop Oscar Cantú, National Catholic Reporter, June 1, 2017)