



A Catholic Approach to Climate Change

Catholics are helping lead the charge to solve climate change. Here are answers to 10 frequently asked questions about the Catholic approach to climate change.

1. What is climate change?

The atmosphere is like a blanket. It keeps the heat from the sun close to our planet. When people burn fossil fuels, they add more gases to the atmosphere. That’s like adding bulk to a blanket. More gases mean the atmosphere holds in more heat.

The result is changes in the systems that sustain life. Rain is less predictable, deserts grow, and even the chemical composition of the water in the ocean changes. The changes on our extra-heated Earth are what we call “climate change.”

2. Why should we care about climate change?

We care about climate change because we want to protect families. Here are some of the ways climate change affects us.

RESULT OF CLIMATE CHANGE	HOW THAT AFFECTS US
Warmer air encourages ground-level ozone to form.	We breathe this dirtier air and get more asthma and bronchitis. Asthma is rapidly rising among children younger than 5. Source: NIH
As warmer weather spreads, mosquitos and ticks find homes in places that used to be too cold for them.	Mosquitos and ticks carry malaria and Lyme disease to new places. Two mosquitos that carry malaria are now found on the Mexico-US border. Source: NIH
Rain doesn’t fall as often or as much as it used to in some places. As a result, deserts grow.	People have to move as the desert grows, squeezing resources in their new neighborhood and causing conflict. Sudan’s Darfur conflict was prompted in part by reduced rainfall and desertification. Source: UNEP
Changing ocean and air currents bring more rain to some places, and less rain to other places.	Farmers can’t rely on the rain like they used to, causing families (especially in developing countries) to go hungry. Source: FAO
Extreme weather, such as heat waves, tornadoes, and hurricanes, is more likely.	Heat waves decrease productivity and kill vulnerable people. Our current multi-month heat waves have no equal since record keeping began in 1895. Source: NOAA

These changes and effects aren’t just predicted for the future. They are happening right



now, here at home and around the world.

According to the [World Health Organization](#), 150,000 people now die each year as a result of climate change. Many of these people live in the developing world, but no country is spared the impact. We care about climate change because we care about families.

3. Why is climate change an issue for people of faith?

As people of faith, we are called to love our neighbors. Because climate change harms our neighbors, we must solve climate change if we want to protect the people we love.

We are also called to remember our rightful place within Creation. In reflecting on how we have lost our way within the natural world [Pope Francis](#) said *We have, in a sense, lorded it over nature, over Sister Earth, over Mother Earth.* Our right place in Creation is one that respects it as a vast web of life.

Finally, we are called to care for the poorest and most vulnerable among us. The poorest people are [least responsible for climate change and most affected by it](#), according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. As stated by Pope Benedict XVI, *It is all too evident that large numbers of people in different countries and areas of our planet are experiencing increased hardship because of the negligence or refusal of many others to exercise responsible stewardship over the environment.*

4. Is climate change a pro-life issue?

As Catholics, we embrace a consistent ethic of life. We praise the animating force of the Creator wherever we find it, from the moment life begins to the moment it ends.

Unfortunately, climate change is a threat to life. The [World Health Organization](#) estimates that 150,000 people already die each and every year from the effects of climate change.

Climate change is already destroying lives, and it will destroy more in the future. For that reason, solving climate change is a pro-life issue.

5. Haven't there have always been natural variations and cycles in the climate?

Yes, there have been natural variations in the climate. However, the climate has never changed as quickly as it is changing today. The Earth's life-sustaining systems can't recover their balance in such a short span of time.

The Catholic Church has agreed that climate change is the [result of human activity](#). In 1990, [Saint John Paul II](#) spoke on the issue. In addition, 97% of [scientists](#) say that the climate change happening right now is caused by humans.

The question shouldn't be whether the climate has ever changed at some point in the past. The question is whether we can live with the extreme changes we're causing.



6. I'm concerned that regulations on climate change will affect my freedom.

As Catholics, we value freedom. Religious liberty is essential to our sense of citizenship.

Regulating climate change is like regulating whom we allow to get a driver's license. Both are common-sense protections of the public's wellbeing. Promoting the "common good" has strong roots in the Bible and in Catholic teaching. We are called to protect all God's people.

Climate remedies are a no-nonsense response to the fact of climate change. Solving climate change simply makes sense. By caring for the Earth and for God's people, we aren't limiting our freedom. We're exercising it wisely.

7. Don't other countries have a role to play? What about China?

Other countries certainly do have a role to play. The United States shouldn't be expected to solve climate change by itself. Instead, our approach should rest on the Catholic social teaching principle of solidarity, the belief that we all belong to one human family. As [Pope Francis](#) has said, *The effective struggle against global warming will only be possible with a responsible collective answer.*

Solidarity means more than finding a solution, though. It also means looking to how climate change affects the most vulnerable people. About 1 billion people in the world live on \$1 a day, and very few of them live in the United States. Because we generally have more means, Americans have been able to make the buying decisions that burn more fossil fuels. We are people who stand up and take responsibility for our actions. We take responsibility for the climate change we've caused.

Solving climate change is an opportunity, both to demonstrate our faith and to lead. America produces some of the hardest-working students, engineers, and entrepreneurs in the world. Given freedom and support, they can innovate the next generation of energy products and services.

8. Would solving climate change hurt the US economy?

Climate change itself is the greater threat to the economy. It's easy to forget, but the natural world underpins everything we do. Climate change will disrupt [every sector of the economy](#), with an emphasis on agriculture, transportation, and energy. It's hard to think of bigger slices of daily life than food, roads, and the light switch.

To prevent this disruption, a fossil fuel-based economy will need to gradually transition to a clean energy economy. A clean energy economy will work in the long term. We're not the only ones who think this. Some of the biggest US businesses, businesses like [CitiGroup](#) and [GE](#), are already making major investments in the sustainable economy. This sustainable



economy will require innovative leaders and dedicated, smart workers.

The right to productive work with fair wages is an important part of Catholic social teaching. Training and supporting people in the fossil fuel industry as they make the transition to more sustainable work is essential. The [US Bishops have advocated](#) for directing resources from climate change legislation to assist workers who are affected by a move from fossil fuels to clean energy sources.

9. Clean energy would cost more money. Doesn't this hurt people, not help them?

Climate change is a threat to the essential foundations of our economy and to human life. Both common sense and our faith enjoin us to solve climate change.

Managing the transition to clean energy is important. It is likely that energy prices will increase for a short time and that the job market will shift. The [US bishops recommend](#) policies that would fund training programs and offer assistance to dislocated workers.

10. What can I do?

Join Catholics who are fighting climate change. Reflect, act, and advocate by taking the [St. Francis Pledge](#).