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January 1, 2016

Paris Agreement--A Good Foundation for Meaningful Progress

By Robert Stavins
Huffington Post

[The Paris Agreement](#), a truly landmark climate accord, which was gaveled through today, December 12, 2015, at 7:26 pm (Paris time) at the [Twenty-First Conference of the Parties \(COP-21\)](#), checks all the boxes in my five-point scorecard for a potentially effective Paris Agreement, described in my November 17th blog essay, [Paris Can Be a Key Step](#). The Agreement provides a broad foundation for meaningful progress on climate change, and represents a dramatic departure from the Kyoto Protocol and the past 20 years of climate negotiations.

Essential Background

Anyone who has read this blog over the past several years, or—even more so—my academic writing over the past twenty years on international climate change policy architecture, knows that I have viewed the dichotomous distinction between Annex I and non-Annex I countries as the major stumbling block to progress. That distinction was first introduced in the climate negotiations at COP-1 in Berlin in 1995. That was, in my view, an unfortunate and narrow interpretation of the sound equity principle in the [United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change \(UNFCCC, 1992\)](#)—"common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities." It was codified two years later in the Kyoto Protocol.

The [Kyoto Protocol](#), which has been the primary international agreement to reduce the greenhouse-gas emissions that cause global climate change, included mandatory emissions-reduction obligations only for developed countries. Developing countries had no emissions-reduction commitments. The dichotomous distinction between the developed and developing countries in the Kyoto Protocol has made progress on climate change impossible, because growth in emissions since the Protocol came into force in 2005 is entirely in the large developing

countries—China, India, Brazil, Korea, South Africa, Mexico, and Indonesia. The big break came at the annual UNFCCC negotiating session in Durban, South Africa in 2011, where a decision was adopted by member countries to "develop [by December 2015, in Paris] a protocol, another legal instrument or an agreed outcome with legal force under the Convention *applicable to all Parties*." This "[Durban Platform for Enhanced Action](#)" broke with the Kyoto Protocol and signaled a new opening for innovative thinking (which we, at the [Harvard Project on Climate Agreements](#), took to heart).

The Paris Agreement is a Departure from the Past

Today, in Paris, representatives of 195 countries adopted a new hybrid international climate policy architecture that includes: bottom-up elements in the form of "[Intended Nationally Determined Contributions](#)" (INDCs), which are national targets and actions that arise from national policies; and top-down elements for oversight, guidance, and coordination. Now, all countries will be involved in taking actions to reduce emissions.

Remarkably, 186 of the 195 members of the UNFCCC submitted INDCs by the end of the Paris talks, representing some 96% of global emissions. Contrast that with the Kyoto Protocol, which now covers countries (Europe and New Zealand) accounting for no more than 14% of global emissions (and 0% of global emissions growth).

This broad scope of participation under the new Paris Agreement is a necessary condition for meaningful action, but, of course, it is not a sufficient condition. Also required is adequate ambition of the individual contributions. But this is only the first step with this new approach. The INDCs will be assessed and revised every five years, with their collective ambition ratcheted up over time. That said, even this initial set of contributions could cut anticipated temperature increases this century to about 3.5 degrees Centigrade, more than the frequently-discussed aspirational goal of limiting temperature increases to 2 degrees C (or the new aspirational target from Paris of 1.5 degrees C), but much less than the 5–6 degrees C increase that would be expected without this action. ([An amendment to the Montreal Protocol to address hydrofluorocarbons \(HFCs\)](#) is likely to shave an addition 0.5 C of warming.)

The problem has not been solved, and it will not be for years to come, but the new approach brought about by the Paris Agreement can be a key step toward reducing the threat of global climate change.

The new climate agreement, despite being path-breaking and the result of what Coral Davenport writing in *The New York Times* rightly called "[an extraordinary effort at international diplomacy](#)," is only a foundation for moving forward, but it is a sufficiently broad and sensible foundation to make increased ambition over time feasible for the first time. Whether the Agreement is truly successful, whether this foundation for progress is effectively exploited over the years ahead by the Parties to the Agreement, is something we will know only ten, twenty, or more years from now.

What is key in the Agreement is the following: the centrality of the INDC structure (through which 186 countries representing 96% of global emissions have made submissions); the most

balanced transparency requirements ever promulgated; provision for heterogeneous linkage, including international carbon markets (through "internationally transferred mitigation outcomes" — ITMOs); explicit clarification in a decision that agreement on "loss and damage" does not provide a basis for liability of compensation; and 5-year periods for stocktaking and improvement of the INDCs.

The Key Elements of the Paris Agreement

Here are some of the highlights of what stands out to me in the Paris Agreement.

Article 2 of the Agreement reaffirms the *goal* of limiting the global average temperature increase above the pre-industrial level to 2 degrees C, and adds 1.5 degrees C as something even more aspirational. In my opinion, these aspirational goals — [which come not from science \(although endorsed by most scientists\) nor economics, and may not even be feasible](#) — are much less important than the critical components of the agreement: the scope of participation through the INDC structure, and the mechanisms for implementation (see below).

Article 3 makes it clear that the *INDC structure* is central and universal for all parties, although Article 4 blurs this a bit with references to the circumstances of developing country Parties. But throughout the Agreement, it is abundantly clear that the firewall from the 1995 Berlin Mandate has finally been breached. In addition, *five-year periods for the submission of revised INDCs* (and global stocktaking of the impact of the Paris Agreement) are included in Article 14. The first stocktaking review will be in 2018, with the start date for new INDCs set for 2020.

Article 4 importantly describes *transparency requirements* (domestic monitoring, reporting, and verification). This is crucial, and represents a striking compromise between the U.S. and Europe, on the one hand, and China and India, on the other hand. All countries must eventually face the same monitoring and reporting requirements, regardless of their status as developed or developing.

Article 6 provides for *international policy linkage*, and is thereby exceptionally important for the successful exploitation of the foundation provided by the Paris Agreement. The necessary language for heterogeneous international policy linkage (not only international carbon markets, but international linkage of other national policy instruments) is included. I have written about this key issue many times over the past ten years. It can bring down compliance costs greatly, and thereby facilitate greater ambition over time. (See our paper on this from the Harvard Project on Climate Agreements: "[Facilitating Linkage of Heterogeneous Regional, National, and Sub-National Climate Policies Through a Future International Agreement](#)" By [Daniel Bodansky](#), [Seth Hoedl](#), [Gilbert E. Metcalf](#) and [Robert N. Stavins](#), November 2014.) The Paris Agreement accomplishes this through provision for "internationally transferred mitigation outcomes." With this provision, we have a new climate policy acronym — ITMOs — about which I suspect I will be writing in the future.

There is considerable discussion of "finance" in Article 9, but the numbers do not appear in the Agreement, only in the accompanying Decision, where item 54 states that by 2025, the Parties will revisit the total quantity of funding, using the current \$100 billion target as a "floor."

Finally, the Agreement's Article 8 on Loss and Damage was necessary from the point of view of the most vulnerable countries, but the most contentious issue is settled in Decision 52, where the Parties agree that this "does not involve or provide a basis for any liability of compensation." That decision was absolutely essential from the perspective of the largest emitters.

Anticipated Impacts of the Paris Agreement

Before I turn to my assessment of the Agreement, I should comment briefly on a topic that seems to be of considerable interest to many people (based on the questions I received from the press during my 10 days in Paris), namely what effect will the Agreement have on business, what signals will it send to the private sector?

My answer is that impacts on businesses will come largely not directly from the Paris Agreement, but from the policy actions that the various Parties undertake domestically in their respective jurisdictions to comply with the Paris Agreement. I am again referring to the 186 countries which submitted Intended Nationally Determined Contributions — INDCs — under the Agreement.

So, in the case of the United States, for example, those policies that will enable the country to achieve its submitted INDC are: the Clean Power Plan (which will accelerate the shift in many states from coal to natural gas for electricity generation, as well as provide incentives in some states for renewable electricity generation); CAFE (motor vehicle fuel efficiency) standards increasing over time (as already enacted by Congress); appliance efficiency standards moving up over time (as also already enacted by Congress); California's very aggressive climate policy (AB-32); and the northeast states' Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative.

These various policies are credible, and they will send price signals that affect business decisions (but not across the board nor with ideal efficiency, as would a national carbon tax or a national carbon cap-and-trade system). In terms of impacts on specific companies, impacts will continue to vary greatly. But a useful generalization is that a major effect of most climate policies is to raise energy costs, which tends to be good news for producers of energy-consuming durable goods (for example, the Boeing Company) and bad news for consumers of those same energy-consuming durable goods (for example, United Airlines).

An Assessment with my Paris Scorecard

Lastly, here is my November 17th scorecard and my assessment of the five key elements I said would constitute a successful 21st Conference of the Parties:

1. Include approximately 90% of global emissions in the set of INDCs that are submitted and part of the Paris Agreement (compared with 14% in the current commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol). This was obviously **achieved**, with total coverage reaching 96% of global emissions.

2. Establish credible reporting and transparency requirements. This was **achieved**, through long negotiations between China and India, on the one hand, and Europe and the United States, on the other.

3. Move forward with finance for climate adaptation (and mitigation) B the famous 100 billion commitment. This was **achieved**.

4. Agree to return to negotiations periodically, such as every 5 years, to revisit the ambition and structure of the INDCs. This was **achieved**.

5. Put aside unproductive disagreements, such as on so-called "loss and damage," which appears to rich countries like unlimited liability for bad *weather* events in developing countries, and the insistence by some parties that the INDCs themselves be binding under international law. This would have required Senate ratification of the Agreement in the United States, which would have meant that the United States would *not* be a party to the Agreement. There was **success** on both of these.

Final Words

*So, my fundamental assessment of the Paris climate talks is that they were a great **success**.* Unfortunately, as I have said before, some advocates and some members of the press will likely characterize the outcome as a "failure," because the 2 degree C target has not been achieved immediately.

Let me conclude where I started. The Paris Agreement provides an important new foundation for meaningful progress on climate change, and represents a dramatic departure from the past 20 years of international climate negotiations. Of course, the problem has not been solved, and it will not be for many years to come. But the new approach brought about by the Paris Agreement can be a key step toward reducing the threat of global climate change. In truth, only time will tell.

As many of you know, over a period of ten days, we (the [Harvard Project on Climate Agreements](#)) were hard at work at COP-21 in Paris. I made a dozen presentations and we held bilateral meetings on a daily basis with national negotiating teams and others. You will find videos, photos, and numerous stories about our activities in Paris at [our Tumblr page](#). Thanks are due to the entire team who were with me in Paris — Robert Stowe, executive director, Jason Chapman, program manager, and Doug Gavel, director of media relations — as well as Bryan Galcik, communications coordinator, back in Cambridge.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/robert-stavins/paris-agreement-a-good-foundation_b_8903946.html

January 2, 2016

Time for leaders to make moral choice on climate change

By Russell L. Meyer
Palm Beach Post

During his visit to the United States in September, Pope Francis told the American people that “climate change is a problem which can no longer be left to our future generation. When it comes to the care of our common home, we are living at a critical moment of history.”

Nowhere does this message resonate more than in Florida, where our communities already are experiencing the impacts of climate change in our own backyards. Coastal and tourism-based counties are facing significant future loss of their tax base because of rising sea levels.

That’s why the Florida Council of Churches, where I serve as executive director, is one of the many religious bodies calling on our elected officials and candidates to set and reach bold targets for powering America with clean energy. We are doing so because the principles and traditions of our faiths call on us to make a moral and spiritual stand on climate change. We believe our leaders must make the moral choice to protect the earth and the most vulnerable among us.

A recent report found that Florida has more private property at risk from climate change than any other state. Without urgent action, by 2030, \$69 billion worth of coastal property not currently at risk will be subject to flooding from sea-level rise. These impacts will result in losses to the tourism and agriculture industries, loss of jobs, damage to water supplies and threats to human health.

But much of these impacts can be prevented in Florida — and around the world — if our political leaders take action. Religious bodies representing people of two dozen faiths — including Baptists, Catholics, Jews, Sikhs, Buddhists and many others — have signed an Interfaith Declaration on Climate Change. It recognizes that we are “destabilizing the global climate system, heating the earth, acidifying the oceans, and putting both humanity and all living creatures at unacceptable risk.” It also declares that “strong action on climate change is imperative by the principles and traditions of our faiths and the collective compassion, wisdom and leadership of humanity.”

This is a powerful call to action — and it’s one that Floridians of every faith should embrace. We already have the solutions to help tackle the problem and to meet a goal of powering the country with more than 50 percent clean energy by 2030. We can help vulnerable people and communities survive and thrive. We can create sustainable jobs while cutting pollution and protecting our children’s health. We can establish America’s global leadership on climate and clean energy. But what’s missing is strong political leadership.

Interfaith leaders are grateful for the actions taken to date, including President Barack Obama’s executive leadership and the global climate agreement signed in Paris. But we now have to seize this momentum and solidify America’s leadership on climate action in the weeks and months ahead.

As Pope Francis reminded us, we must make the moral choice on climate to safeguard the most vulnerable and protect our common home. We can indeed do something to protect our communities — we can unite as a global family threatened by a common danger to urge political leaders to take decisive action and pursue the solutions we know already exist.

<http://www.palmbeachpost.com/news/news/opinion/commentary-time-for-leaders-to-make-moral-choice-o/npsyZ/>

January 4, 2016

Religious leaders commit to environmental protection in Vietnam

By Joachim Pham
Global Sisters Report

Religious representatives promised to work to protect the environment and cope with climate change at a national conference that drew 400 participants to this central Vietnam area in early December.

Some 160 religious leaders and social workers from 14 religions attended the national conference called Promoting the Role of Faith-based Organizations in Environment Protection and Climate Change Responses. The Dec. 2-3 conference was co-organized by Norwegian Church Aid, an ecumenical organization for global justice, the National Resources and Environment Ministry, and Vietnam Fatherland Front, an umbrella of the communist party.

Nguyen Thien Nhan, president of Vietnam Fatherland Front, told the conference participants that the environment in Vietnam has been badly damaged by excessive exploitation and overuse, which has seriously affected people's lives. On average annually, the country has 457 injuries or deaths caused by climate change.

He said experts warn that, without adequate attention given to the issue, the country's Gross Domestic Product could lose 3 percent to environmental pollution for every 1 percent it gains.

Nhan urged religions that focus on human development to actively assume their social responsibilities to deal with environmental problems and climate change. The 14 government-approved religions have 22 million followers out of the country's population of 90 million, he added.

NCA General Secretary Anne-Marie Helland said religious groups play a vital role in environmental protection and responding to climate change. She said, although religious people are committed and dedicated, they should be equipped with more capacity, knowledge and experience to be in the forefront of the issue.

Religious leaders agreed. "To protect the environment means to protect ourselves because we are facing serious challenges and crisis of the environment," said Most Venerable Thich Hai An, vice director of the Social and Charitable Committee of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha.

An blamed climate change and environment pollution for people's irresponsible exploitation of natural resources. Drought, flood and outbreaks of SARS and MERS viruses, caused by the environmental impact of pollution and increasing climate change, have led to widespread loss of life in the world, An said.

Participants also watched a 30-minute video of recent environmental damage in the country created by harmful emissions from traffic and industries, waste, polluted water, widespread deforestation, lack of rain, floods and earthquakes throughout the country.

Nguyen Ngoc Tran, a dignitary of the indigenous Hoa Hao Buddhism, who was introduced to the conference participants, said humans and all living things only exist and develop in case they have to rely on one another. "This means we have to maintain the biological diversity of creation so that we can live a peaceful life and pursue sustainable development," he said. "We must save natural resources and keep the living world clean, safe and peaceful for all living things."

He said that safeguarding creation means repaying it.

Nguyen Thanh Son, from an indigenous Buddhist sect founded in 1934, said humans living in harmony with nature means they save energy and avoid the depletion of the environment because "the environment will treat us like the way we treat it."

He said individuals and communities that work together for environmental protection safeguard themselves at present and in the future.

The conference included demonstrations by Catholic and Buddhist nuns, who displayed artwork made of used items and paper waste. They competed in cooking and flower arranging and rehearsed rescue operations together.

Religious representatives and organizers also signed a joint statement on their commitment to protecting the environment and coping with climate change.

After the conference, some participants shared their plans for environmental protection with *GSR*.

Thich Nu Tinh Phuong, a 32-year-old Buddhist nun, said local nuns will organize first aid courses, found rescue teams, have youths grow plants on treeless hills, collect used items from beaches and rivers, and teach people how to grow herbs for medicines.

Sr. Teresa Nguyen Thi Kim Lan of Daughters of Our Lady of the Visitation said her congregation plans to raise awareness of environmental protection among local people at its clinic and catechism classes. They will teach people how to separate organic waste from inorganic waste before throwing them in the garbage, set up groups to collect used items to sell

and help poor people, grow flowers in inundated areas and teach vocational skills to climate change victims.

Lan said local congregations have started to install solar heating at their day nurseries, create areas of new forest, open their facilities for people to shelter from storms, and treat cases of diseases related to weather.

[Joachim Pham is a correspondent for *National Catholic Reporter* and *Global Sisters Report*, based in Vietnam.]

<http://globalsistersreport.org/news/environment/religious-leaders-commit-environmental-protection-vietnam-36091>

January 6, 2016

Eco-Congregation Scotland Newsletter

<http://us9.campaign-archive2.com/?u=a37b4ff760ffcc7fd1c3611b4&id=ecb5f06f11&e=709fe41ec4>

January 7, 2016

Pope Francis was right on climate change

By John Nagle
Washington Post

Climate will have such a profound effect on the earth that we will need to reconsider our relationship with the natural environment. That's why many environmental activists are now being drawn to an evolving philosophical stance on the topic, shifting away from an approach that is simply political, scientific or economic.

“There can be no ecology without an adequate anthropology,” Pope Francis said in *Laudato Si*, the [papal encyclical released last summer](#). Francis rejected both an anthropocentric view that accepts all human desires and a misanthropic view that wishes people would disappear. To find solutions for climate change and other environmental challenges, we need to focus on the morality of our actions, including questions of fairness and obligation.

That understanding was on display during the debates at last month's climate change negotiations in Paris. After failing to come to an accord in previous meetings, diplomats succeeded in Paris because they crafted an agreement that allowed each nation to decide its own response to climate change rather than dictating a prescribed set of regulations.

But the ongoing efforts after the talks face a number of moral challenges, especially the effects of our actions on the poor. [Nearly 80 percent](#) of the people living in the world's least developed countries do not have access to electricity, yet energy production [is the leading contributor](#) to greenhouse gas emissions and other types of pollution. We have a moral obligation both to alleviate such energy poverty and to avoid harming people by our energy production.

Previous international agreements failed to address energy poverty in the least developed parts of the world. The Paris agreement acknowledges “the need to promote universal access to sustainable energy in developing countries, in particular in Africa, through the enhanced deployment of renewable energy.” Renewable energy holds much promise as its non-polluting sources displace reliance on fossil fuels, though even renewable energy [presents harms of its own](#).

Although renewable energy is spreading, it is still difficult — and expensive — to rely on as the only source of energy for large areas. That is why international lending organizations still fund projects that burn coal or oil in the least developed parts of the world, where such fuels offer the only alternative to having no electricity at all. Much of the debate in the United States labels coal in particular as intrinsically immoral, but a better understanding of the environmental trade-offs associated with all means of energy production calls for a more nuanced appreciation of the competing values.

There is also a moral question of who is responsible for climate change. Francis, the first pope from the developing world, insists that the developed world is culpable not just for climate change, but also for a range of environmental ills suffered by developing nations. He described “a true ‘ecological debt’ ” existing between the global north and the global south, one connected to the disproportionate use of natural resources by certain countries over long periods of time, as well as commercial imbalances that have environmental effects. In his encyclical, he states that the developing countries have a debt to pay. They should limit their energy consumption and help poorer countries support sustainable development.

In Paris, [developing countries sought](#) to include a requirement that developed countries accept legal responsibility to compensate the victims of climate change in the developing world, but the United States and other developed nations refused to agree. Instead, the Paris agreement explicitly states that it does not “provide a basis for any liability or compensation.”

The culpability debate is complicated. It is questionable that 21st-century Americans should be held responsible for the actions of their ancestors, who had little reason to think that their activities were endangering future generations. And many of the actions that resulted in climate change today also spread economic, social and cultural benefits throughout the developing world.

Perhaps the better way to envision the problem is to focus on generosity, not blame. Culpability is typically determined by adjudication, and two decades of climate change litigation have failed to make much progress in identifying who is legally obligated to pay for the harm caused. Generosity, on the other hand, needs no court order.

The appeal to love our neighbors who suffer from environmental devastation is already animating the work of faith-based organizations around the world. Such moral claims may not appear in legal documents such as the Paris agreement, but they play an essential role in any understanding of how to respond to climate change where it is most needed.

John Nagle is the John N. Matthews professor of law at the University of Notre Dame, where he teaches and writes about climate change and other environmental issues. He is writing books on the role of humility in environmental law and on the scenic value of our national parks.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/in-theory/wp/2016/01/07/pope-francis-was-right-on-climate-change/>

January 9, 2016

Why climate change is an ethical problem

By Stephen Gardiner
Washington Post

Climate change presents a severe ethical challenge, forcing us to confront difficult questions as individual moral agents, and even more so as members of larger political systems. It is genuinely global and seriously intergenerational, and crosses species boundaries. It also takes place in a setting where existing institutions and theories are weak, providing little ethical guidance.

The critical question as we seek to address climate change will be which moral framework is in play when we make decisions. In many settings, we do not even notice when this question arises, because we assume that the relevant values are so widely shared and similarly interpreted that the answer should be obvious to everyone. Nevertheless, the values question is not trivial, since our answer will shape our whole approach.

If we think something should be done about climate change, it is only because we use our moral frameworks to evaluate climate change events, our role in bringing them about, and the alternatives to our action. This evaluation gives us both an account of the problem and constraints on what would count as relevant solutions.

Suppose, for example, one were deciding where to set a global ceiling on emissions.

At one extreme, we might give absolute priority to the future. It is *technically* feasible for us all to reduce our emissions by 50 to 80 percent tomorrow, or even eliminate them. We could, after all, just turn off our electricity, refuse to drive, and so on. The problem is not that this cannot be done; it is that the implications are bleak. Given our current infrastructure, a very rapid reduction would probably cause social and economic chaos, including humanitarian disaster and severe dislocation for the current generation. If this is correct, we are justified in dismissing such drastic measures. However, that justification is ethical: A policy that demanded those measures would be profoundly unjust, violate important rights and be deeply harmful to human welfare.

Still, the acknowledgement of those limits has its own implications. Even if any emissions cuts would be disruptive to some extent, presumably at some point the risks imposed on future generations are severe enough to outweigh them. Where is this point? That is an ethical question. So far, we do not seem very interested in answering it.

Perhaps this is because up until now we have been acting as if our answer is closer to the other extreme — giving absolute priority to our own short-term interests. Over the past 25 years — since [the first Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report](#) — we have continued to allow high levels of emissions, suggesting that we are giving the future no weight at all. Given the threat of a tyranny of the contemporary (a collective-action problem in which earlier generations exploit the future by taking modest benefits for themselves now while passing on potentially catastrophic costs later), this bias is highly predictable. Yet it also appears grossly unethical.

Of course, acknowledging that moral claim is deeply uncomfortable. Consequently, there is a temptation to prefer framings of the climate problem that obscure the ethical questions. Consider, for instance, those who reject any moral lens, arguing that climate policy should be driven solely by national self-interest, usually understood in terms of domestic economic growth over the next couple of decades.

Their accounts face deep problems. Given the time lags that climate change involves, most climate impacts, [including many of the most serious](#), will take many decades to arise. Moreover, those that may occur in the near term are likely already [in the cards](#), due to either past emissions or those that are by now inevitable. Amoral approaches constructed with a focus exclusively on the next decade or two would confront only a very small set of the relevant impacts of climate change, and would likely miss the most important — and the potentially catastrophic. Climate policy could become yet another venue where narrow interests crowd out longer-term and broader concerns.

The real climate challenge is ethical, and ethical considerations of justice, rights, welfare, virtue, political legitimacy, community and humanity's relationship to nature are at the heart of the policy decisions to be made. We do not “solve” the climate problem if we [inflict catastrophe on future generations](#), or [facilitate genocide against poor nations](#), or rapidly accelerate the pace of [mass extinction](#). If public policy neglects such concerns, its account of the challenge we face is impoverished, and the associated solutions quickly become grossly inadequate. Ongoing political inertia surrounding climate action suggests that so far, we are failing the ethical test.

Stephen M. Gardiner is professor of philosophy, and Ben Rabinowitz is endowed professor of the human dimensions of the environment at the University of Washington, Seattle.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/in-theory/wp/2016/01/09/why-climate-change-is-an-ethical-problem/>

January 9, 2016

Pope inspires clergy to join environmental movement

A papal encyclical aimed at caring for the environment has given clergy a renewed imperative for responsible action

By T.J. Pignataro
The Buffalo News

Look at any environmental gathering in the Buffalo Niagara region, and you'll see the usuals: the bird-watchers, hikers, pollution fighters, neighborhood activists and even the granola-eating tree-huggers. But now others show up in greater numbers, too. You can thank God for that. Or Yahweh. Even Allah or the Great Spirit. Environmentalists are making room for priests, nuns, rabbis, imams and others of faith who care about the environment and want to play a role in protecting our water, air and land.

The Sierra Club's Lynda Schneekloth said the clergy and others with religious backgrounds now account for between a third and a half of those attending local Sierra Club events.

"Two years ago, there wouldn't have been anybody except for the diehards," said Schneekloth, chairwoman of the Sierra Club's Niagara chapter.

Some joined the environmental movement on their own. But others heard the call of Pope Francis, who published his encyclical, "Laudato Si," last May "on care for our common home." Environmental justice, specifically addressing global climate change, has become a calling like feeding and clothing the poor, caring for the ill and housing the homeless as moral imperatives for people of faith.

"The pope, from his religious and political positions, opened up the floodgates this past year," Schneekloth said. "Now that the pope has said it's a moral issue, it's given everybody permission to talk about it."

It's not just their attendance and comments at rallies or public hearings making a difference, but also what the religious are doing and teaching at their places of worship and schools.

Faith-based environmental activism abounds across the region:

- Some 72 churches, schools and other diocesan buildings in the Buffalo Catholic Diocese are "green," with others turning to solar energy for power.
- Sisters at Stella Niagara have launched a full-time outdoor education program for students.
- Jewish families are "repairing the world" with preservation pledges to take action in their synagogues and homes under the Green Faith Initiative.
- Local Muslims are promoting Quranic principles of conservation, moderation and compassionate stewardship of the environment in mosques.

- Eastern Orthodox Christians are teaching the environmental principles espoused by Bartholomew I, their “Green Patriarch.”

The groundswell of support and involvement from people of faith comes as a boon to organizations and activists, according to Schneekloth and others who have lobbied and pressed for environmental causes for decades.

When area environmental groups held a [gathering](#) and potluck dinner Thanksgiving weekend to send off University at Buffalo law students to Paris for the climate talks, the auditorium at Temple Beth Zion was packed with religious.

“I’m more hopeful now than I’ve been in years,” Schneekloth said.

“We need to build a bigger tent, and we welcome the faith-based community,” added Brian Smith of the Citizens Campaign for the Environment. “This can only help.”

A green diocese

Even before the pope’s encyclical, the Buffalo Catholic Diocese was working to become “earth-friendly.”

The Diocesan [Care for Creation Committee](#) was formed 10 years ago as a way to meld religious and science in launching environmentally responsible initiatives throughout the diocese.

“We say it’s about the care of Earth, but it’s really taking care of human beings,” said Sister Sharon Goodremote, the committee’s founder. “The Earth will be here without us.”

The diocese was one of the earliest consumers of solar energy products.

Today, six dozen diocesan buildings have shifted to renewable energy sources and the diocese hired an energy manager, Carol Anne Cornelius.

Cornelius said the transition just makes sense, both environmentally and economically.

“Our poorest parishes have the highest utility costs,” Cornelius said. “This helps take the pressure off the parish and the parishioners.”

Environmental stewardship varies at the parish level, but examples are rife.

St. Christopher’s in the Town of Tonawanda runs successful recycling initiatives.

Care for Creation committees are springing up at the parish level at places like SS. Peter and Paul in Hamburg, Nativity of Our Lord in Orchard Park and St. Joseph’s University Parish in Buffalo.

Parishes like Blessed Sacrament Church on Delaware Avenue hold meetings to read and study Francis' encyclical.

Although each pope since John XXIII has called attention to the need for worldwide environmental justice, Francis "is the first pope who's elevated it to an official church teaching," Goodremote said.

She considers it "a call for action."

"This isn't a document where you said, 'I read it and put it on the shelf,'" said Sister Karen Allen, who's championed the environment at Stella Niagara for more than 30 years. "This is a document that makes you think, 'What can I do? What groups or organizations can I join?'"

Packing people of faith into the tent "changes the entire picture going forward," said the Sierra Club's Schneekloth.

Sisters of the earth

More than 12,250.

That's how many plastic water bottles were estimated to have been saved between last spring and Tuesday at the [Stella Niagara Education Park](#).

The you-fill water station on the first floor of the prekindergarten through eighth grade Montessori school keeps count.

The water station is a necessity on the Lewiston campus because the nuns have forbidden bottled water.

The widespread proliferation of plastic pollution worried them.

"We studied it, and we took a stand," said Sister Margaret Sullivan, the school's principal. "We don't purchase bottled water, and we don't allow it at our functions."

Disposable lunch wrappings and food containers will also earn you a black dot at Stella.

"Trash-free lunches," said Kristen deGuehery, Stella's director of institutional advancement. "Lunches need to be in reusable containers. No foil packaging. Nothing to throw away."

Styrofoam or paper packaging also is banned in the cafeteria – real dishes only.

Recycling bins are found in every classroom and there's also a campus composter.

"If they get in the habit, they'll continue it when they're older," said teacher Coleen Edwards.

Added Sullivan: “Everybody can recycle and we all should, but we try to aim for something bigger. From the age of 3, we try and instill in them they’re part of nature.”

With the New Year, Stella also launched a full-time Outdoor Education Program for its 160 students on the 100-acre campus.

As part of a pilot project, students scavenged decayed tiger lily stems and used them in class to make paper. They planted a vegetable garden. They started “nature appreciation” journals. They documented the environmental changes to a vernal pond on campus.

The pope’s encyclical validated the school’s environmental movement that began in the Franciscan tradition decades ago. Signs of that are everywhere from the framed poster announcing Robert F. Kennedy Jr.’s 2008 appearance at Stella to talk about the environment to Sister Karen Allen’s “Environmental Concerns” bulletin board.

‘Repairing the world’

“Green Shabbat” started three years ago at Temple Beth Tzedek in Amherst.

The temple upgraded to LED lighting, replaced disposable foam cups with china mugs or paper, held a bottle recycling fundraiser, bought a rain barrel for its Getzville Road site and reuses compostable paper products in its organic community garden.

“Caring for the earth is a religious value, and environmental stewardship is a moral responsibility,” said Rachel Anderson, the synagogue’s social action chair.

Guardianship of the earth is ingrained in Jewish tradition through the Torah, because Genesis states that humans are inherently of the earth, formed “of the dust of the ground.”

That provides the impetus for the synagogue’s Green Faith Initiative in pursuit of the Jewish theme of “[tikkun olam](#),” which translates to “repairing the world.”

The synagogue asks its members to make planet-preservation pledges to make environmentally friendly changes at its house of worship and in their homes.

“We will be planning several events around the green theme, bringing awareness of the myriad things that help to destroy (the environment) and to show alternate things to use that are invariably cheaper and less toxic,” Anderson said.

Saving Allah’s creation

Conservation and preservation are constants for local Muslims.

The Quran explicitly prohibits waste of any kind – water, food or the bounties the earth provides.

That may have been behind the thinking to collect and repurpose stormwater on the grounds of Masjid An-Noor on Heim Road.

When the Islamic Society of the Niagara Frontier designed Masjid An-Noor, the mosque on Heim Road, stormwater was diverted into a fountain instead of running off into creeks.

“The entire universe of creation is God’s, and we need to make sure we use it in the best way we can and the most appropriate way we can,” said Dr. Khalid Qazi, who is on the society’s board of trustees and president of the Muslim Public Affairs Council of Western New York.

Qazi said he would like to see an even more concentrated effort toward stewardship, including green energy initiatives addressed at last August’s [International Islamic Climate Change Symposium](#) in Turkey. Muslim leaders from nearly two dozen countries issued a declaration, which aligned with Francis’ encyclical. The declaration was based on moral principles fundamental to Islamic law and designed to energize the Muslim community as environmental stewards.

“The whole earth belongs to God. Nothing belongs to us,” said Imam Yahye Yusuf Omar of Buffalo. “Compassion to creation is part of Islam.”

At Mussallah Salaam on Potomac Avenue, the youth hold an annual neighborhood cleanup day and grow a community garden.

“It is noble work to protect the environment,” said Dr. Othman Shibly, an Islamic Society board member.

The ‘Green Patriarch’

Environmental protection was at the heart of an ecumenical statement inked last September in Buffalo between the Anglican and Eastern Orthodox churches.

In the 30-page binding document, dubbed “the Buffalo Statement,” the two churches agreed on fundamental matters of faith governing “dominion” and “stewardship” of the universe.

The Eastern Orthodox Church knows a little something about environmental activism.

Its Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I has been championing the cause for more than two decades.

Nicknamed “[the Green Patriarch](#),” Bartholomew has gained international attention while leading spiritual and political leaders, media and other dignitaries on excursions to the furthest reaches of the planet from the glaciers in the Arctic to the rainforests of the Amazon River in South America.

“For us, it has a spiritual basis,” said the Rev. Christos B. Christakis, the presiding priest at Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church on West Utica Street.

Besides significantly investing in sustainable energy sources with the upcoming multimillion-dollar development of its Family Life Center in Lancaster, Christakis said earth stewardship is a frequent Sunday school theme at Annunciation.

Christakis will officiate the church's annual Outdoor Blessing of the Waters Sunday at the Erie Basin Marina.

"The earth is given to us not for exploitation, not for domination, but for the care of," Christakis said. "We are part of creation."

<http://www.buffalonews.com/city-region/pope-inspires-clergy-to-join-environmental-movement-20160109>

January 13, 2016

9 New Year's resolutions for the Earth

Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute

<http://us6.campaign-archive1.com/?u=887c3de8b0&id=0014d87998&e=a758405790>

January 13, 2016

Religion and Climate Change

By Lloyd Steffen, Professor, Religion Studies; University Chaplain; Director, Dialogue Center and Lehigh Prison Project, Lehigh University, Bethlehem, PA
Huffington Post

At the [2015 UN Climate Change Conference](#), delegates from 196 countries signed the Paris Agreement aimed at reducing carbon emissions and thus halting the destructive effects of global warming. The agreement awaits ratification by signatories and takes effect only if [55 of the nations that account for 55% of global greenhouse gas](#) emissions take action and endorse the agreement--the U. S. is not expected to ratify. The Paris agreement is significant in terms of politics and economics, but [religious leaders](#) have also voiced support of the agreement, and clearly a move is underway to make climate change and environmental responsibility an integral part of contemporary religious life and practice.

Religious involvement on this issue is not new. Environmental activism today is truly global and involves countless people in organizing efforts that are aimed at improving the health of the planet and assuring a safe environment for future generations. Environmental protection has been for decades an issue of science, global politics and international economics, but some voices speaking to the issue remind us that motivation for such activism can spring from deep moral concerns and religious sensibilities. Religious thought has long attended to the natural world and

the environment, whether in the Western traditions affirming the earth as a glorious product of God's creative activity or in Native American and Asian religions that emphasize the interconnectedness of human beings and nature. Religious faith and spiritual commitments are today providing the energizing fuel to sustain involvement with issues like climate change and environmental responsibility.

Last May, Pope Francis published a remarkable document that calls on all people of good will to care for a creation entrusted to them by God. The document, [Laudato Si'](#), takes its title from the hymns of praise written by the Pope's namesake, St. Francis of Assisi, whose love of the natural world was central to a vision of life with God and whose [canticles to the sun and moon](#) began with the words "Praise to You O Lord" or in Latin, "Laudato Si'". In this document, the first papal encyclical ever dedicated exclusively to the environment, Pope Francis states that the environmental crisis is not only a scientific, political and economic problem but a moral and spiritual challenge as well.

The papal encyclical addresses a concern voiced in the 1970s by Wisconsin [Senator Gaylord Nelson](#), whose worry that not enough attention was being focused on the environment led to the first Earth Day action-celebration. Although every major ecological disaster draws headlines, the news cycle changes daily, and the environment continues to be subject to cultural attention deficit disorder. When the environment drops off the front page in the wake of disaster, NGOs, international organizations and lobbyists take on the chore of keeping policy makers focused on the issue, and this is hard work. The unique contribution of *Laudato Si'* is that it is a big and bold statement that is seeking to make the environment a focal point of religious and theological reflection, a dramatic move that may keep the world's attention focused on climate change and environmental responsibility in a more long-term, sustainable way.

When the encyclical was released last May, the Pope, representing the priorities of the world's [1.2 billion Roman Catholics](#), was certainly aware that his moral and spiritual authority would capture the world's attention. And so it did. The encyclical addressed the complexity of the environmental problem, offering criticisms and hope that faith can play a significant role in helping to address environment-related problems. The pope attended to the ways in which environmental degradation and pollution disproportionately affect the poor and reflect a false "techno-scientific progress" that must not be mistaken for "human progress." He criticized a "throw away" consumer culture in the privileged countries of the world and advocated changes in lifestyle (even criticizing air conditioning at one point), calling on wealthy countries to reduce consumption of non-renewable energy resources while helping poorer nations develop in sustainable ways. He confronted the self-centeredness and greed that so mark modern life and advocated help for the poor based on an economic model of fair distribution of wealth. The Pope concluded that when distributive justice is violated and a privileged few have too much while too many have too little, "it always leads to violence."

The encyclical has come under criticism. The economic justice concerns have been attacked by [free market capitalists](#); questions have been asked whether the Pope's love for the poor translates into concrete policy concerning the immediate problem of climate change; and the fact that global warming gas emissions have increased as the global population has increased calls into question the carrying capacity of planet earth and also the [church's teaching on birth control](#) as it

affects human population growth.

Any document speaking from such a place of authority and on behalf of so many is bound to raise controversy. The pope has said he is not a scientist, economist or a politician, but a person of faith speaking from a spiritual center to a spiritual problem. The pope has called on people to acknowledge the interconnectedness of human beings with nature; and he criticizes wealthy nations for their excessive use of natural resources. He argues that the economy of excess has created an economy of exclusion--it is the poor who lack access to clean water and air and who then lose out as well in employment, housing and economic opportunity.

Pope Francis was not talking just about climate change but the need for a change of heart. And he may be right in where he puts the emphasis--on questions of spirit and faith. Spiritual change, the Pope says, by making the world more humane will make the environment a "common good" for which all people must accept responsibility. As the Paris Agreement occasions reflection on motivation for environmental action and as it envisions global policy changes, Pope Francis' bold message placing the environment at the center of faith and spiritual commitment is worth serious attention by both environmental activists and persons of faith.

(Portions of this blog were previously published in *The Morning Call* and are used here with permission.)

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/lloyd-steffen/religion-and-climate-change_b_8900316.html

January 14, 2016

Donations stream into Catholic Charities amid Michigan water crisis

By Traci Badalucco
National Catholic Reporter

The Catholic community in Michigan is ramping up its efforts to support Flint residents affected by the recent crisis that left thousands of households with lead-contaminated tap water.

Health authorities in Genesee County have advised residents to not consume water without using a water filter, [according to the City of Flint's website](#).

Flint has a population of just under 100,000 residents.

The local Catholic Charities is collecting bottled water for residents in need. A spokesperson said the organization had received around 200 five-gallon containers and 40 to 50 cases of bottled water since Monday, but they are still urging community members to drop off water as the crisis continues.

Locations for dropping off donations of water are listed on the [Catholic Charities website](#).

The Lansing diocese and Catholic Charities has set up an online PayPal account where people can make donations for the water crisis. Money would be used to buy more bottled water once the Flint facility runs out. Catholic Charities has raised more than \$2,000 since Thursday.

“The diocese wants to support the people of Flint,” said Deacon Jim Kasprzak, director of Catholic Charities for the Lansing diocese, adding that doing so is a community initiative with an “emphasis in strengthening the Catholic presence in the city of Flint.”

[According to NBC News](#), Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder declared a state of emergency last week. The water crisis dates back to April 2014 “when Flint switched from using Detroit's water supply to water from the Flint River to save money.” NBC News reported that “the river water was saltier and began corroding the old pipes and leaching lead into the system.”

On Tuesday, Snyder ordered the Michigan National Guard to distribute bottled water to residents, [according to CBS News](#), and “were expected to arrive as soon as Wednesday to assist state authorities and volunteers in the distribution effort that was already underway.”

Snyder tweeted Wednesday that the National Guard would be on site passing out bottled water and filters at local fire stations.

Vicky Schultz, director of the local Catholic Charities and 17-year employee at the organization, says they are clearing space at their Flint location to make room for anticipated donations amid the continuing crisis.

“With the amount of calls and the attention, it’s finally treating it like we have a crisis,” Schultz said. “I’m worried now about the long-term of what is going to happen and what are we going to do for the kids that have already been damaged by the water.”

[According to the Detroit News](#), medical professionals also urged residents to limit bath time for children.

“The problem is with small children, you really don’t want them to swallow the shower or bath water,” Dr. Cynthia Aaron, medical director of the Michigan Regional Poison Control Center at DMC Children’s Hospital of Michigan, said.

Dr. Sharon Swindell shared similar concerns. Swindell, a pediatrician and lead poisoning expert at the University of Michigan’s C.S. Mott’s Children’s Hospital, told the *Detroit News* that “Any lead exposure in childhood is of great concern, especially in younger children during important stages of brain development.”

Residents should continue using water filters until long term solutions are resolved, according to the City of Flint website. Boiling water does not remove lead from the water.

<http://ncronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/donations-stream-catholic-charities-amid-michigan-water-crisis>

January 14, 2016

Pope Francis' Call for Action – One Key to Global Climate Agreement

By Oscar Cantú
Morning Consult

In the wake of the historic Paris climate agreement, many commentators have focused on the extraordinary work of the negotiators, the terms that have been agreed upon and the global outlook going forward. While these important topics merit extended analysis, I believe that we should also reflect on the key role that morality and ethics played in brokering a successful deal in Paris.

Pope Francis provided invaluable moral leadership before and during the COP21 conference. I believe his leadership was a key factor and helped provide the momentum necessary to complete the successful agreement in Paris. Inspired by him, people of many faiths, as well as those of no particular faith, engaged energetically. In *Laudato Sí*, the Pope articulated a moral framework, specifically addressing every person living on the planet. Many responded and came together to protect our common home and its most vulnerable people from the threats posed by climate change.

As with previous negotiations, COP21 was marked by technical discussions in the areas of climate science, economics, technology and diplomacy. At the same time, however, the understanding of climate change as a pressing moral issue permeated the dialogue of commentators and negotiators before, during, and after COP21 to a higher degree than in previous U.N. climate talks. For example, U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon explicitly cited climate change as a “moral issue” in reference to COP21. Diplomats, academics, activists and ordinary citizens who support an international climate agreement made moral appeals in reference to COP21 than was the case previously.

We should not be surprised that increased attention to climate change as a moral issue helped pave the way for the historic agreement reached in Paris. Moral and ethical concerns have the power to transcend political ideologies, neutralize special interests, and unite persons of goodwill in cooperating for the common good.

The dialogue and negotiations associated with COP21 were rich with moral insights and appeals: the poor and vulnerable are disproportionately and unjustly harmed by the adverse effects of climate change; ecological degradation compromises the right to life, the dignity of the human person and the protection of vulnerable communities; the human family has a responsibility to protect the global common good for future generations.

This is not to say that ethical considerations were entirely absent from previous international negotiations. The U.N. and many countries in the Global South consistently raised moral concerns about the disproportionate effects of climate change and the need for common, but

differentiated, responsibilities. But I would argue that moral discourse played a much larger role this time around thanks to Pope Francis and other faith leaders.

Since his election, Pope Francis has used his unique office and humble personality to place the ethics of ecology at the center of public debate. The release in June of *Laudato Si'*, the first papal encyclical on ecology, was timed, as Pope Francis himself acknowledged, to encourage a positive outcome at COP21. The ethics of ecology were part of his September addresses to the U.S. Congress and the U.N. General Assembly. He awakened our consciences to one of the defining moral issues of our time. As Dr. Alison Doig, senior advisor on Climate Change and Sustainable Development at Christian Aid, told Vatican Radio, “The whole mode that the Holy Father has brought to these talks [in Paris] has really transformed [COP21].”

The success of COP21 was undoubtedly due to the incredible hard work and persistence of many people, organizations and communities. At the same time, however, it is appropriate to recognize Pope Francis’s moral leadership. The ethical concerns he raised about ecology and climate change – which echoed those of Saint John Paul II and Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI – helped chart the path to a successful international agreement to address climate change. As it turns out, morality matters when the goal is to protect our common home.

Reverend Oscar Cantú is the Bishop of Las Cruces, New Mexico and Chairman of the Committee on International Justice and Peace, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

<http://morningconsult.com/opinions/pope-francis-call-for-action-one-key-to-global-climate-agreement/>

January 15, 2016

Cardinal Turkson: *Laudato si'* continues to be relevant

Vatican Radio

(Vatican Radio) The President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Cardinal Peter Turkson, on Friday spoke during a special event in Geneva discussing Pope Francis’ Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'*.

“Pope Francis puts forward the concept of integral ecology, which clearly respects the human and social dimensions of the crisis,” Cardinal Turkson said. “This is an inclusive, dynamic paradigm to articulate the fundamental relationships of each person with God, with other human beings including him- or her-self, and with creation.”

The Cardinal said in its relationship with the environment, humanity is faced with a crucial challenge that requires the development of adequate policies that continue to be discussed on the global agenda.

“The challenges of true commitment and real implementation are even greater, as all of you know,” said Cardinal Turkson. “Is *Laudato si*’ relevant to that agenda? Yes.”

The Cardinal spoke about the lead-up to COP21 climate talks in Paris, and said the world community needed to hear that we inhabit a common home, that every decision in that home carries an ethical dimension, and that our hope lies in profound conversion.

“At Paris, solidarity needed to pervade COP21, and thanks be to God we have an agreement which provides a framework for action at every level,” Cardinal Turkson said. “Henceforth, the vision of *Laudato si*’ continues to be relevant, because the next, more difficult stages of continuous, concerted and effective action require true ecological conversion.”

The full text of Cardinal Turkson's speech is below

Caring for Our Common Home - the Encyclical Letter *Laudato si*
International Conference Centre Geneva, 15 January 2016

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

First of all, I greet you all warmly on behalf of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, which is honoured to have been called to assist the Holy Father in his teaching ministry by helping to prepare the Encyclical Letter *Laudato si*’.

Coming from every corner of the globe, your presence reminds us that, from the very beginning, the Encyclical *Laudato si*’ brings into dialogue all persons and peoples, all institutions and organizations that share this same concern for our common home as the title of today’s Special Event emphasizes. The world situation compels us to discover that different yet equally important perspectives are ever more intertwined and complementary: the riches of faith and of spiritual tradition, the seriousness of business and of scientific research, the concrete efforts at various levels of both government and civil society, all for an equitable and sustainable development.

This type of dialogue can be seen in the Encyclical itself, which relies on a wide range of contributions, many of them acknowledged in the text and the footnotes.

As is well known, the Encyclical takes its name from the invocation of St Francis of Assisi: “*Laudato si*’ mi’ Signore – Praise be to you, my Lord!” The Canticle of the Creatures calls to mind that the earth, our common home, “is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us” (§ 1). The voice of St Francis also expresses the attitude which the entire Encyclical conveys. Contemplation is the posture of spirit that disposes us to listen to the message. Prayerful contemplation invites us to look towards the “poor one of Assisi” as a source of inspiration. As the Encyclical affirms, St Francis is “the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically... He shows us just how inseparable is the bond between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace” (§ 10).

Midway through *Laudato si'*, talking about justice between the generations, the Pope invites us to ask this question: what kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up? (§ 160). The Holy Father continues, “This question does not have to do with the environment alone and in isolation; the issue cannot be approached piecemeal.” This leads us to ask ourselves about the meaning of existence and its values that are the basis of social life: “What is the purpose of our life in this world? Why are we here? What is the goal of our work and all our efforts? What need does the earth have of us?” Such questions are dealt with in Chapter 3 as consequences of the mis-directed anthropocentrism of today. “If we do not ask these basic questions” – says the Pope – “it is no longer enough, then, simply to state that we should be concerned for future generations” (§ 160).

The Holy Father’s deep questions arise from an observation: today, the earth, our sister, is mistreated, abused, and lamenting. Its groans join those of all the world’s forsaken and “discarded”. Pope Francis invites us to listen to them. One might thus discover the real sense of the anthropogenesis of ecological problems. Listening to them means He urges each and every one – individuals, families, local communities, nations and the international community – to an “ecological conversion” according to the expression of St John Paul II. Such a change of heart means to “change direction” by taking on the beauty and responsibility of the task of “caring for our common home”. Here are the words of Bartholomew, Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople: “For human beings ... to destroy the biological diversity ... by causing changes in its climate,” by contaminating “the earth’s waters, its land, its air, and its life – these are sins” (§ 8).

At the same time, Pope Francis welcomes the environmental awareness growing world-wide, along with concern for the damage that is being done. And in spite of the enormous threat, the Pope keeps a hopeful outlook on the possibility of reversing the trend: “Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home” (§ 13). “Men and women are still capable of intervening positively” (§ 58). “All is not lost. Human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start” (§ 205). Hopefully COP21 represents such a choice and new start.

So with hope for a renewed future, Pope Francis puts forward the concept of integral ecology, which clearly respects the human and social dimensions of the crisis (cf. § 137). This is an inclusive, dynamic paradigm to articulate the fundamental relationships of each person with God, with other human beings including him- or her-self, and with creation:

“When we speak of the “environment”, what we really mean is a relationship existing between nature and the society which lives in it. Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live. We are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it. Getting to the reasons why a given area is polluted requires a study of the workings of society, its economy, its behaviour patterns, the ways it grasps reality, and so forth. Given the scale of change, it is no longer possible to find a specific, discrete answer for each part of the problem. It is essential to seek comprehensive solutions that consider the interactions within natural systems themselves and with social systems. We are not faced with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather one complex crisis that is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to

combating poverty, restoring dignity to the underprivileged, and at the same time protecting nature” (§ 139).

In the Encyclical, Pope Francis places the various issues within this framework and approached them in three steps: challenge (§ 13), appeal (§ 14), and hope (§ 15). In the different chapters, they are picked up and continuously enriched starting from different perspectives (cf. § 16):

- * the intimate relationship between the poor and the fragility of the planet;
- * the conviction that everything in the world is intimately connected;
- * the critique of the unrestrained alliance between finance and technology and, arising from it, the dominant “technocracy”;
- * the value proper to each creature;
- * the human meaning of ecology;
- * the need for forthright and honest dialogue;
- * the serious responsibility of international and local policy;
- * the throwaway culture;
- * the proposal for a new style of life; and
- * the invitation to search for other ways of understanding economy and progress.

The encyclical is divided into six chapters.

Chapter I (§ 17-61) asks “What is happening to our common home?” It provides a spiritual listening to the best scientific conclusions on environmental matters available today. “Our goal is not to amass information or 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). Extremely complex and urgent issues are addressed. Some of them – such as climate changes and especially their causes – are the subject of heated debate. The aim of the Encyclical is not to intervene in what is the responsibility of scientists, and even less to establish exactly in which ways the deteriorating climate is a consequence of human action. In the perspective of the Encyclical – and of the Church – it is sufficient to say that human activity is one of the factors that explain climate change. With that, we have a serious moral responsibility to do everything in our power to reduce our “footprint” and reverse the deterioration of the natural and social environment.

The second step in the Encyclical (ch. II, § 62-100) is a review of the riches of Judaeo-Christian tradition, above all in biblical texts and theological reflection. This expresses the “tremendous responsibility” of human beings for creation, the intimate link between all creatures, and the fact

that “the natural environment is a collective good, the patrimony of all humanity and the responsibility of everyone” (§ 95).

The analysis then deals in ch. III (§ 101-136) with the human roots of the ecological crisis (chapter title) “so as to consider not only its symptoms but also its deepest causes” (§ 15). One cause is the technocratic mentality which perceives all of reality as an object that can be manipulated limitlessly and which the economy globalizes. Other roots include modern anthropocentrism, relativism, and disrespect for life, all of which dehumanize human beings. Instead, we need to conceive of “another type of progress, one which is healthier, more human, more social, more integral” (§ 112).

Ch. IV (§ 137-62) goes on to lay out integral ecology. It properly integrates concerns for human life and for the natural environment. It comprehends “our unique place as human beings in this world and our relationship to our surroundings”, in the varied aspects of our life, in economy and politics, in various cultures, in particular those which are most threatened, and in every moment of our daily lives.

On this basis, ch. V (§ 163-201) addresses what we can and must do. Practical proposals should not be developed in ideological, superficial or narrow (reductionist) ways. Instead, dialogue is essential, a term present in the title of every section of this chapter. Pope Francis expresses his concern “to encourage an honest and open debate, so that particular interests or ideologies will not prejudice the common good” (§ 188). Thus, dialogue must go on for the renewal of international, national and local politics, of decision-making processes in the public and business sectors, of the relationship between politics and economy and of the relationship between religion and science. I think that this is what we are doing in today’s Special Event.

Finally, based on the conviction that “change is impossible without motivation and a process of education, ch. VI (§ 202-46) proposes “some inspired guidelines for human development to be found in the treasure of Christian spiritual experience” (§ 15). Pope Francis offers two prayers, the first to be prayed with believers of other religions and the second among Christians. The Encyclical concludes, as it opened, in a spirit of prayerful contemplation.

In its relationship with the environment, humanity is faced with a crucial challenge that requires the development of adequate policies that continue to be discussed on the global agenda. The challenges of true commitment and real implementation are even greater, as all of you know. Is *Laudato si’* relevant to that agenda? Yes. In the lead-up to COP21, the world community needed to hear that we inhabit a common home, that every decision in that home carries an ethical dimension, and that our hope lies in profound conversion. At Paris, solidarity needed to pervade COP21, and thanks be to God we have an agreement which provides a framework for action at every level. Henceforth, the vision of *Laudato si’* continues to be relevant, because the next, more difficult stages of continuous, concerted and effective action require true ecological conversion. May all joyfully learn to care for all.

I very much look forward to our two panels on the content, impact and call-to-action of *Laudato si’*.

Thank you!

Cardinal Peter K.A. Turkson

President

http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2016/01/15/cardinal_turkson_laudato_si_continues_to_be_relevant/1201212

January 15, 2016

The moral dimension of climate change—and of courage to address it

World Council of Churches

Implementation of the Paris Agreement on climate change sharpened discussion of the 2015 papal encyclical *Laudato Si'* at a UN conference initiated by the Holy See and several permanent missions to the UN on 15 January in Geneva.

Among the presenters at the conference were keynoter Cardinal Peter Turkson, president of the Pontifical Council of Justice and Peace; Archbishop Silvano M. Tomasi, apostolic nuncio at the Holy See's permanent mission to the United Nations; and World Council of Churches (WCC) general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit.

The encyclical, issued six months before the historic COP21 meeting in Paris last fall, was credited by participants with energizing discussion of the underlying moral imperative of addressing climate change in advance of the negotiations of 195 nations there.

"Laudato si' catalyzes what churches in various parts of the world and the WCC have been saying about the intimate relationship between the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor. Presented explicitly by Pope Francis as part of the social doctrine of the church, it marks a turning point by including creation as a key concern and integral ecology as part of the teaching of the church" said Guillermo Kerber, WCC programme executive for Care for Creation and Climate Justice.

Its breadth, said French ambassador María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés, makes the encyclical the best example of comprehensive reflection on the deeper philosophical, ethical and broadly social dimensions posed by the contemporary crisis. In fact, said Tomasi, it regards not climate change only but "one complex crisis that is both social and environmental."

Pointing to a distorted notion of the person as the root cause of the crisis, Pope Francis "urges each of us to an ecological conversion," said Cardinal Turkson. COP21 "can enable all of us to make a new start," a radical turn toward comprehensive solutions for the environmental and social aspects of our collective crisis. "Every decision carries a profound moral dimension," said Turkson, and we need to engage with the world's poor as well as with nature.

“We received the earth as a garden,” he said. “We cannot pass it on as a wilderness.”

Roots of moral change

“Quick and effective action” is needed to implement the Paris accord, said UN chief Michael Møller, director general of the UN in Geneva. “The moral leadership of religious communities is crucial.”

The Paris Agreement, which committed nations to limiting climate change to 2 degrees Celsius, will necessitate extensive and substantial economic, political, and lifestyle changes. “The problem is courage and imagination,” said Moy Hitchen, a Christian Brother representing Edmund Rice International at the meeting. “What has been missing is the will to implement” the policies and practices that we already know of, he said.

How does one nurture and stimulate the courage among all actors to make the radical changes needed? Tveit pointed to the quality of hope.

“Confronted with a global crisis of life that has political, economic, ecological, social, cultural and religious dimensions, we begin to see the deep need for change and transformation to sustain life on our planet,” he said. Yet “there are reasons to hope,” he said, pointing to the widespread engagement of churches and individuals in the lead-up to Paris.

“To nurture hope is a fundamental ethical principle in any human relation. It is not a matter of being purely optimistic, or even unrealistic or ignoring risks and problems. It is rather a matter of identifying those realities that are authentic signs of hope.”

Continuing, he observed, “All human beings have a right to hope. Faith in God, who desires fullness of life for all of humanity, is a way to relate to the world as it is with the conviction and the commitment that something more and better is possible than what we can observe immediately. This is one contribution to hope. Therefore we also need to renew a theology of hope. A relevant question in the critique of religion is: are religions and religious leaders conveying hope for all?”

Concluding, he remarked, “It is time for those who shape the moral discourse about sustainable values for the earth as our common home and the human family to point more to the *possibilities* existing presently to do what serves the future of our planet.”

[Read the presentation by Olav Fykse Tveit](#)

[See the WCC’s programme on climate justice](#)

<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/the-moral-dimension-of-climate-change2014and-of-courage-to-address-it>

January 18, 2016

Thou Shalt Not Toss Food: Enlisting Religious Groups To Fight Waste

By Maria Godoy
NPR

Separation of church and state? When it comes to fighting food waste, the U.S. government is looking to partner up with the faithful.

The Environmental Protection Agency on Monday launched the [Food Steward's Pledge](#), an initiative to engage religious groups of all faiths to help redirect the food that ends up in landfills to hungry mouths. It's one piece of the agency's [larger plan](#) to reduce food waste by 50 percent by 2030.

"We can make leaps and bounds in this process if we tackle this problem more systemically and bring a broader number of stakeholders to the table," EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy tells us. By engaging religious communities, she says, "we are tapping into incredibly motivated and dedicated people."

Food waste connects to the core values of many faith communities, particularly helping the poor and feeding the hungry, McCarthy notes.

As we've [reported](#), more than 1,200 calories per American per day are wasted, according to U.S. government figures. Loss occurs on the farm, at the retail level and in homes. We consumers often toss out foods because they've [passed their sell-by date](#) — but are still just fine to eat — or because we buy more than we can eat before it goes bad.

As McCarthy notes, a lot of that is discarded but still edible and wholesome and could be used to feed some of the 48 million American who struggle to get enough to eat.

At the consumer level, changing behavior is key, says EPA Assistant Administrator Mathy Stanislaus, and faith-based groups can help make that happen in a variety of ways. For instance, when these organizations hold potlucks, the leftovers can go to the local food bank.

EPA says groups can also work with local grocers, schools and restaurants to direct food to food banks and shelters that would otherwise be wasted. They can hold seminars for the faithful and the broader local community to teach them how to menu plan and shop their own refrigerators first to avoid buying excess food, and how to compost the leftover scraps. EPA has developed a toolkit with lots more suggestions for groups that sign its "Food Steward's Pledge."

"Getting out the message — particular what individual families can do ... local community leaders are critical in doing that," Stanislaus tells us. And because faith-based leaders are often trusted advisers in their communities, "we thought they were a natural ally."

Food waste is closely tied to another growing concern for many faith-based organizations: climate change, a problem that disproportionately affects the world's poor. Food waste is the single biggest material in U.S. landfills, according to the U.S. Agricultural Department. As this waste decomposes, it releases methane, a powerful greenhouse gas.

Last summer, Pope Francis made headlines around the globe when he issued a [papal encyclical](#) urging action on climate change. That call helped energize new conversations throughout the Catholic church on environmental issues — including food waste, says Cecilia Calvo, who coordinates the environmental justice program for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. She says more Catholics are asking, "Rather than contributing to a culture of waste, how can we be conscious of our choices?"

Many other faith-based groups already have programs targeting food waste.

For example, in the past year, the [Evangelical Environmental Network](#), a policy and advocacy group, launched its own "Joseph's Pledge" program: It teaches churches how to minimize food waste through actions like donating to food banks, planting community gardens and composting. (The program's name refers to the biblical Joseph, who helped guide ancient Egypt through seven years of famine.) About 200 churches have signed up so far, EEN President Mitch Hescocox tells us. The goal is to reach 1,000.

"Evangelicals are primarily conservative politically," Hescocox notes. "They want to take action by themselves. And this is one step they can do themselves to help people to address the problem. And it's a win-win. "

Shantha Ready Alonso, executive director of [Creation Justice Ministries](#), an environmental justice group spun out of the National Council of Churches, says the 100,000 congregations in her organization's network, representing 45 million people, have a variety of programs to address food waste.

She points to the [Ferncliff Camp and Conference Center](#) in Little Rock, Ark. Run by the Presbyterian Church, she says it's a model program where 100 percent of food scraps get composted. She says some churches grow food in on-site gardens and direct it to the needy. And she notes that churches and individuals with gardens are also encouraged to donate to [Ample Harvest](#), a nonprofit that connects gardeners to local food pantries.

"Good stewardship is part of our DNA," she tells us. "And the idea that 1 in [7] people in America are going hungry and yet we are wasting [so much] food is awful."

[Hazon](#), a Jewish environmental organization, already has several programs focused on food and sustainability, says Becca Linden, the group's associate program director. But "this will be the year we make food waste a priority," she says.

Among other actions, she says Hazon will screen the food waste documentary [Just Eat It](#), publish a compost guide and raise awareness that expiration dates don't necessarily mean food is no longer fit to eat.

Meanwhile, Muslims around the world have been calling attention to the food [waste that occurs during Ramadan](#), a period when fasting is followed by feasting that can result in over-purchasing of food. The Quran says Muslims should "eat and drink: but waste not by excess, for Allah loveth not the wasters." In the U.S., the group [Green Muslims](#) is trying to spread awareness of Islam's environmental teachings. For instance, the group offers a [guide](#) to hosting a zero-waste *iftar*.

Of course, action on food waste transcends Abrahamic religions. One example: [White Pony Express](#), a program in Contra Costa County, Calif., that rescues food from farms and farmers markets, grocers, restaurants and caterers. It was founded by the leader of Sufism Reoriented, an American spiritual order.

Cecilia Calvo of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops says there's a growing recognition that protecting the environment is everyone's moral duty. As Calvo notes, the question for many has become: "What does it mean to care for our common home?"

<http://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2016/01/18/463109192/thou-shalt-not-toss-food-enlisting-religious-groups-to-fight-waste>

January 20, 2016

Church groups respond to water emergency in Flint, Michigan

By Barb Powell and Lauren Markoe
Christian Century

The Michigan bodies of the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) launched The Gospel in Action—Flint in January as President Obama declared a state of emergency in the city over its poisoned water.

Two congregations in Flint are central in that effort: Vermont Christian Church is a designated water distribution point, and Woodside Church UCC is providing water filters and replacement cartridges.

More than 50,000 households in Flint, which is predominantly African American, have not had clean water for almost two years.

“The powerful disenfranchised minority citizens and then made decisions without citizen input,” said S. C. Campbell Lovett, UCC conference minister in Michigan. “And nobody is being held accountable. This is . . . environmental racism.”

The water problems began in 2014 when the emergency manager of the city, who had been designated by the governor, approved drawing water from the Flint River instead of purchasing water from Lake Huron via Detroit in an effort to save the city money.

According to Kathleen Reid, a member of Woodside Church UCC's water accessibility committee, Flint's filtration plant was not equipped to treat the warmer, highly corrosive river water. It caused lead from aging pipes to leach into the city's water supply, according to a report released by Marc Edwards, an engineering professor at Virginia Tech and an expert on municipal water quality, who studied the water supply.

Mona Hanna-Attisha, a pediatrician at Flint's Hurley Medical Center, did additional research on blood lead levels in area children. Lead poisoning causes neurologic damage and affects every organ system in the body, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. It can cause lowered IQs, behavior difficulties, and even death in extreme cases.

Although the water sourcing was switched back to Lake Huron in October 2015, lead levels are still high.

"The water issue will be there a long time, because the infrastructure itself has been significantly damaged," said Muzammil Ahmed, chairman of the Michigan Muslim Community Council, which has distributed more than 120,000 bottles of clean water.

Bringing in bottled water creates a new challenge: recycling plastic bottles. The UCC and Disciples are discussing ways they can assist in recycling.

The faith-based organizations involved in the response—including Catholic Charities and the Flint Jewish Federation—are also focused on a longer-term goal: to make sure the impoverished city will not be neglected again.

"Charity can only take one so far," said Deb Conrad, pastor of Woodside Church UCC. "Justice is needed." —UCNews; Religion News Service

<https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2016-01/religious-groups-step-flints-water-crisis>

January 21, 2016

In North Dakota's Booming Oil Patch, One Tribe Beat Back Fracking

The Turtle Mountain Band was among the first tribes to ban the drilling process. Here's the difference it made.

By Sarah van Gelder
Yes! Magazine

Drive the long, straight roads of north-central North Dakota, and you pass lake after lake amid hayfields and forests. Migratory birds, attracted by the abundance of water and grain, pause here. Farmers, boaters, and fishermen orient their lives around the pure water.

The water, more than anything, explains why members of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians acted so quickly when they learned their region was next in line for fracking. Within just a few weeks of tribal women meeting on the topic in late 2011, the council banned fracking on the 77,000-acre reservation.

Their ban was one of the first in North America.

The process started in November 2011 when a tribal elder, Carol Davis, called the women of the tribe together. Fracking was booming on the Fort Berthold reservation just 190 miles away in the heart of the Bakken oil fields. Davis had heard that the Turtle Mountain reservation could be next. In the tribe's tradition, women are responsible for protecting the water, so she invited the women to discuss fracking over a meal.

When she first heard about fracking in Fort Berthold, Christa Monnette, a member of the Turtle Mountain Tribe, thought that an oil and gas boom on her remote reservation would be a good thing. "I remember thinking, 'Wow, how lucky they are! How come we can't strike oil here?'"

After Davis explained her concerns to the group of women, Monette and her half-sister, Cedar Gillette, decided they needed to learn more about the process behind hydraulic fracturing or fracking.

At a second meeting, Davis offered each of the women a tobacco leaf, telling them to accept it only if they were committed to work on the issue.

Monette took the tobacco reluctantly: She was a single mother of three and worked full time. But the more the women—and the men who joined them—learned about fracking, the more worried they became.

They learned that the frackers would drill right through their precious aquifer, risking contamination of their drinking water and lakes, and that the process produces large volumes of wastewater and contaminated materials.

They learned about Dimock, Pennsylvania, where a well had exploded and groundwater contamination was linked to fracking. The Cabot Oil and Gas company had been ordered to provide alternative water supplies for those affected.

Gillette and Monette were especially concerned about what was happening on the Fort Berthold reservation, where three affiliated tribes, the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Tribes (also collectively called the MHA Nation), are in the midst of the fracking boom.

Gillette had worked as a domestic violence advocate in Fort Berthold. There, corruption, crime, drug addiction, and human trafficking had accompanied the massive influx of oil workers with money to spend.

“People are fearful,” Gillette said.

And for good reason. According to the FBI, the area’s violent crime rate rose 121 percent from 2005 to 2011. “These dramatic increases have overwhelmed state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies,” reported the 2014 [National Drug Control Strategy](#).

And contaminated material, including radioactive material concentrated during fracking, has been found dumped on the reservation. The MHA Nation lacks the resources to oversee the many drilling sites and waste facilities.

In addition to this pollution, expenses associated with the boom—from damaged roads to social services for the flood of new workers and their families—have eaten up the cash windfall that was supposed to support the tribe for years once the boom ended, according to a report by the [Property and Environment Research Center](#).

“We knew what was happening to other areas,” Gillette said. “If we didn’t protect our water, what would tribal members have seven generations from now?”

It was with this knowledge that Gillette, Monette, and others in the Turtle Mountain group presented their findings to their tribal council on November 2, 2011.

“People were stunned when we presented the facts,” Gillette said. The council called a second meeting and invited the entire community. At that meeting, the council unanimously voted to ban fracking.

Still, the meeting was tense for Gillette. “I didn’t believe it would pass until they all said yes,” she said. After all, an impoverished tribe was leaving millions of dollars on the table. Chairman Richard McCloud supported the ban: “What is sacred to our tribe is water. We all know that in the very near future, water will be more valuable than oil or gold or anything else. This area is where our ancestors did their farming; the springs run through here, and this is how generations survived. The fracking ban will protect our water so future generations can continue to survive.”

What the sisters didn’t know when the fracking ban passed was that the Bureau of Indian Affairs had been on the brink of opening Turtle Mountain land for oil and gas leasing. The tribe’s action put a halt to that plan.

Fast forward to the present, and the Turtle Mountain Tribe is moving forward: Last year, the tribal council adopted a new water code that solidifies the tribe’s stance on fracking, and with the help of a Department of Energy grant, the tribe is moving into developing the abundant solar and wind energy resources of the reservation.

Gillette is now attending law school with a focus on environmental law. Monette is still on the Turtle Mountain reservation, still a busy working mom, except she’s now the main administrator of the “No Fracking Way Turtle Mountain Tribe” Facebook page, where she posts not only about

her reservation, but about other people around the world resisting the devastation of fossil fuel extraction.

Sarah van Gelder wrote this article for [YES! Magazine](#). Sarah is Editor at Large of YES! She visited Fort Berthold and the Turtle Mountain reservation as part of her [Edge of Change](#) roadtrip. Christa Hillstrom, YES! senior editor, contributed reporting to this article.

<http://www.yesmagazine.org/planet/in-north-dakotas-booming-oil-patch-one-tribe-beat-back-fracking-20160121>

January 22, 2016

On Moral Grounds

By Maya Chandra
Yale Daily News

2015's best advocate for the rights of the environment may very well be the Pope. And if other religious leaders follow his example, the U.S. just might be on its way to successfully combating climate change.

Climate change has been acknowledged as an environmental and politically divisive issue for years, but a new report published this month by Yale and George Mason universities suggests that redefining it as a moral issue may lead to more widespread support for action on behalf of Mother Earth.

The report, entitled "Faith, Morality and the Environment," explores the wide range of American attitudes on climate change. Dividing these attitudes into six distinct categories, the report analyzes the traits and beliefs that each grouping holds. Its analysis suggests that large sectors of the American public who do not currently feel that climate change is a dangerous and very present threat can be convinced of the necessity of action if the issue's presented as a moral one.

* * *

Senior research scientist and Yale Program on Climate Change Communication director Anthony Leiserowitz is part of the team working on "Climate Change in the American Mind," a long-term project in the YPCCC. Since 2008, the team has written two national surveys on climate change each year. Over the course of their research, they've used statistical analysis methods to identify the aforementioned six groupings of Americans who respond uniquely to the issue of climate change; Leiserowitz calls these the "Six Americas." According to Leiserowitz, understanding the Six Americas is key to understanding how to reframe climate change as a moral issue for all Americans.

“It is impossible to address America as a single group with a single mindset, and we know that one of the first rules of effective communication is ‘know thy audience,’” Leiserowitz said. “Otherwise, it’s kind of like trying to play darts in the dark with a blindfold on.”

The group that the YPCCC refers to as the “Alarmed” consists of the 12 percent of Americans most engaged in acknowledging and combating global warming. According to the report, the Alarmed are the most likely to view global warming as a moral issue — and therefore the most likely to support strong action against climate change.

On the opposite side of the spectrum is the “Dismissive,” who neither believe in global warming nor see it as a threat. In fact, they tend to view it as a largely political issue. Dismissive individuals are oftentimes “conspiracy theorists,” Leiserowitz said with a wry laugh.

It’s the four groups in the center of the spectrum — the “Concerned,” “Cautious,” “Disengaged,” and “Doubtful” — who are most likely to be reached if climate change is reframed as a moral issue, Leiserowitz explained. And in order to convince people that it’s a moral ill to stand idly by while global warming threatens to destroy the world as we know it, the discussion needs to be led by moral authorities, many of whom may be religious in nature.

* * *

As the team’s research suggests, it’s important to gain the support of religious and community leaders: It may even be necessary for opening up discussions on climate change and its consequences in American homes. A report the YPCCC published in November discussed the effects of Pope Francis’s support for sustainability and environmental activism. The Pope — who made his stance clear when he declared in front of the United Nations in September 2015, “Any harm done to the environment therefore is harm done to humanity” — had the potential to significantly impact the way Americans view climate change, co-author Edward Maibach said.

“Although relatively few Americans were seeing climate change as a moral issue last year before the release of the Pope’s encyclical on climate change, our research showed that many Americans [now] have the potential to see climate change as a moral issue,” Maibach said.

Connie Roser-Renouf, lead author of the report, suggested that because the news typically frames global warming as a scientific and political issue, the topic may alienate many Americans who aren’t particularly interested in either science or politics. If activists could make clear that global warming is a moral issue, Americans would likely express significantly more interest in working against it, Roser-Renouf said.

She added that while Americans across the board feel that it’s important to help the poor and future generations, many do not yet recognize that global warming poses a real and significant threat to those groups. In fact, there is a high level of religiosity in the USA along with a perceived conflict between religion and science, she said. But that doesn’t necessarily have to be the case.

Some politicians seek to exploit that apparent conflict, but many religious leaders, like Pope Francis, recognize climate change as an important moral issue. In fact, according to Roser-Renouf, many of the religious Americans who are on the fence about the legitimacy of climate change believe that humans are meant to be “stewards” of nature: At the same time, they do not recognize the potential damage to nature that climate change can cause. And the voices of scientists and political leaders alike have not been enough to bridge that disconnect.

“It’s likely that more people will listen when religious leaders speak up about climate change,” Roser-Renouf said. “The moral authority of figures like Pope Francis may reach segments of the public who have not yet recognized the issue as having any personal significance.”

And other researchers share that expectation. Matthew Riley DIV ’08, a lecturer at the Yale Divinity School and the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies, studies how individuals interact with the environment based on their values and beliefs, primarily looking at those who follow one of the world’s major religions. Riley agrees that there is more to environmental issues than just science and politics. Rather, there’s a larger spiritual value, which he describes as a connection with nature, that some Americans may have lost sight of. Riley has studied the way religion intersects with nature, and he has noticed that many of the world’s major religions are increasingly supporting environmental activism. When asked if he felt climate change was a moral issue, Riley responded, “absolutely.”

“Each of the world’s religions is going back and re-examining and reinterpreting their sacred texts to seek for guidance on how, in the 21st century, to use our deepest values and convictions to guide us in this very different world. Because none of those ancient leaders — Jesus, Moses, Muhammad, etc. — had any inkling of climate change,” said Leiserowitz.

* * *

On a smaller scale, Yale undergraduate students have been working to improve sustainability practices on campus. While changing student behavior is a less demanding task than changing the views of the entire American populace, the issues that Yale’s Sustainability Coordinators identified in convincing their classmates of the importance of a sustainable lifestyle were highly similar to those discussed in the YPCCC report.

When it comes to encouraging students to make changes in order to live more sustainable lives, there doesn’t seem to be a single approach that works across the board. According to former Trumbull College Sustainability Coordinator Alexandra Golden ’17, many people will only make necessary changes if they are convenient, and the conversation can vary widely depending on whom you’re talking to.

Ezra Stiles College Sustainability Coordinator Sophie Freeman ’18 expressed a similar sentiment. The efficacy of change depends on your audience — you need to reach people based on their values, Freeman said. And oftentimes, according to Pierson College Sustainability Coordinator Pratik Gandhi ’18, people are simply unaware of the ways in which their lifestyles affect the environment.

These sentiments reflect what the YPCCC report explores: In order to change people's views and, more importantly, behaviors regarding sustainability, those people must be addressed according to their individual systems of belief. All three sustainability coordinators stressed that while students may feel that climate change is a real threat, they tend not to see it as a moral concern and consequently do not change how they conduct themselves.

"I see [climate change] as both a scientific and moral issue," Gandhi said. "Sustainability is not just about one person on a crusade to save the world. It is about communities committing to leading better lives, not just for the sake of the environment, but for their own health and that of future generations."

<http://yaledailynews.com/blog/2016/01/22/on-moral-grounds/>

January 23, 2016

Religious Groups Lend Helping Hand in Flint Water Crisis

By Derek Welch
World Religion News

Interfaith effort responds to Michigan's Contaminated water supply. The Flint water crisis has pushed state and federal officials to respond with urgent help. Residents of Flint, Michigan have been exposed to dangerous lead levels due to the faulty water system. In response, musicians, religious groups and even ex-prisoners formed to participate in the grassroots effort of offering bottled water the residents of the city. Flint is located nearly 70 miles from Detroit.

An interfaith coalition is functioning to offer much needed drinking water to Flint residents as the metropolis continues to suffer the effects of lead contamination in its water supply. The participants include Flint Jewish Federation, Michigan Muslim Community Council, InterFaith Leadership Council of Metropolitan Detroit and Catholic Charities. The city residents are presently accepting donations of money, time and water. The faith organizations, apart from handling out food and water are also concentrating on longer term aims. They want to ensure that the economically poor city, the place where President Obama declared an emergency crisis concerning its poisoned water, will never be neglected again. Bob Bruttell of the InterFaith Leadership Council of Metropolitan Detroit said that a vital role the church can play is to be an ethical watchdog so that the community benefits. The response to the crisis was unprecedented. Large numbers of religious people -from in Flint black congregations to evangelicals based quite at a far distance, have responded with money and time. The majorly African-American populated city has announced that its discolored water is not safe for drinking. Bruttell has words of caution: the building of a new water system in the city is such a herculean task that the problem cannot be solved even if all the religious groups worked together.

Engineers and scientists who went through the enormous problem has opined that supplying good water free from pollutants and lead will not be either easy or quick. Public health officials

seek to test the large numbers of children who have bathed and drunk the water supplied by the city. There is a fear that these children could suffer emotional and developmental difficulties linked with more than average lead levels within the bloodstream. Flint has seen deployment of soldiers belonging to the Michigan National Guard. About 70 National Guardsman are handing out water. A state of emergency has been declared by federal officials, thus bringing in \$5 million more into efforts made in the city.

<http://www.worldreligionnews.com/issues/religious-groups-lend-helping-hand-in-flint-water-crisis>

January 26, 2016

EPA recruits faith groups to help end food waste

By Brian Roewe
National Catholic Reporter

The Gospel story of the feast of the multiplication of loaves and fish ends with Jesus instructing his disciples to gather the leftovers, "so that nothing will be wasted." That's a message the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency hopes to tap into with Christian and other faith communities through a new initiative.

Earlier this month, EPA launched its [Food Steward's Pledge](#), a campaign aimed at raising faith communities as leaders and leading advocates in reducing food waste, and along with it, hunger.

By signing on as Food Stewards, faith organizations receive a toolkit and other resources to learn about food waste and help them audit their current waste levels, beginning by assessing shopping habits as well as what's already in the fridge.

The food stewardship resources offers how-to's on reducing food waste as well as donating and composting. A Food Waste Management Calculator allows congregations to track cost savings with other ways of disposal beyond the dumpster. Other tips address how to better organize a kitchen so older food is used first, to prepare meals with extras, and to properly prep and store fruits and vegetables to stay fresh longer.

The [Food Recovery Challenge](#), another EPA program, encourages faith groups and other organizations to redirect food from landfills and toward food pantries and kitchens.

"Faith communities exemplify caring for the well-being of all people and are leaders in being responsible stewards of our resources for current and future generations," said EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy at a launch event for the program Jan. 18 at the D.C.-based Miriam's Kitchen, a non-profit food kitchen seeking to end chronic homelessness.

McCarthy called the goals of reducing, donating and composting excess food "a triple win that protects the environment, cares for the global human family, and saves organizations and Americans money."

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, a third of produced food is lost or wasted globally, the equivalent of 1.3 billion tons annually at a cost of \$750 billion. At the same time, roughly 800 million people, primarily located in developing countries, are undernourished. The World Health Organization estimated in 2014 that 1 in 7 children in developing regions were underweight, most of them located in southern Asia.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates the nation's food waste [represents 30-40 percent](#) of the food supply. EPA reported that Americans wasted 37 million tons of food in 2013 ([a total that has sharply risen in recent years](#)) and that food waste averages \$1,600 of sunk cost annually for a family of four. More than throwing money away, food waste represents an environmental threat. Food, the largest component in landfills ([21 percent in 2013](#)), as it decomposes releases into the atmosphere methane, a greenhouse gas more potent than carbon dioxide.

The Food Steward program is an extension of a larger EPA program that targets reducing wasted food by 50 percent by 2030.

Two of the [17 U.N. Sustainable Development Goals](#), adopted in September shortly after Pope Francis addressed its general assembly, address food issues. Goal 2 seeks to end hunger by 2030 and provide all people access to sufficient, nutritious food year-round. Goal 12 tackles food waste directly, placing a target by 2030 of halving per capita food waste at the retail and consumer levels; it also aims to increase awareness of sustainable consumption and production practices.

The issue of food waste has been a persistent focus of Francis' papacy, referring often to a "culture of waste" in consumption beyond food. On the occasion of World Environment Day (June 5) in 2013, he [lamented the culture of waste where](#) "men and women are sacrificed to the idols of profit and consumption. Such a culture, Francis said, makes us insensitive to wasting and throwing away excess food, which is especially condemnable when, in every part of the world, unfortunately, many people and families suffer hunger and malnutrition."

He continued: "There was a time when our grandparents were very careful not to throw away any leftover food. Consumerism has induced us to be accustomed to excess and to the daily waste of food, whose value, which goes far beyond mere financial parameters, we are no longer able to judge correctly.

"Let us remember well, however, that whenever food is thrown out it is as if it were stolen from the table of the poor, from the hungry!" he said, asking people to reflect on the problem of food waste and to identify ways to address it while also "convey solidarity and sharing with the underprivileged."

Francis drove that point home in his encyclical "*Laudato Si'*", on Care for Our Common Home," in discussing waste in another arena: water. The pope described water access as "a basic and

universal human right," and said its continued waste -- in developed countries as well as developing nations with abundant supplies -- shows the problem "is partly an educational and cultural issue, since there is little awareness of the seriousness of such behavior within the context of great inequality."

During that [general audience on World Environment Day 2013](#), Francis connected food waste with the biblical story of the multiplication of the loaves. He noted Jesus had his disciples gather the leftovers in 12 baskets.

"Why 12? What does it mean?" Francis asked. "Twelve is the number of the tribes of Israel, it represents symbolically the whole people. And this tells us that when the food was shared fairly, with solidarity, no one was deprived of what he needed, every community could meet the needs of its poorest members. Human and environmental ecology go hand in hand."

<http://ncronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/epa-recruits-faith-groups-help-end-food-waste>

January 28, 2016

Flint water crisis draws Southern Baptist response

By Tobin Perry, Baptist Press
Christian Telegraph

Charnisha Brown could describe in one word her feeling when she first realized that the water coming out of her pipes was contaminated -- devastated.

"It was devastating to me because of the kids -- especially my kids," said Brown, a Flint, Mich., resident. "We don't want the kids going through that. We don't want anyone going through that. It's not a good thing that you can't drink your water."

So when Southern Baptists provided Brown, a mother of two, with multiple cases of water, she appreciated it, saying it took stress off of her.

Michigan Southern Baptists distributed a truckload of bottled water last week to Flint residents whose contaminated water supply had led to the city being declared a disaster by the state and national governments. The truckload, sent from the North American Mission Board (NAMB), was the second Southern Baptist Disaster Relief (SBDR) truck full of water sent to the beleaguered city in the past three months.

The water's contamination had become a problem since the city decided to save money three years ago by switching its water supply from Detroit to a new water authority that would get water from Lake Huron. During the transition time the city received water from the Flint River. The contaminated water had elevated lead exposure, and the dangers from that exposure remain

today. According to a recent USA Today article, there is no safe level of lead in water. Children, the article says, face the most danger when exposed to lead.

Working out of Westside Baptist Church, just a couple of miles outside of Flint, volunteers have given three to four cases of water to each resident they've helped.

According to Westside Baptist's pastor Ed Emmerling, most Flint residents were only able to get one case of water per day through other sources. Many families needed more water than that because of both drinking and cooking needs.

Emmerling appreciated that his church got a chance to be missionaries on the ground during the water distribution.

"My church got to see the real tangible value of the Cooperative Program in working with churches all across the country," Emmerling said of Southern Baptists' channel for giving to missions and ministry. "My church could never have afforded all of that water. But together churches from all across the country pooled their money. It was an honor for us to hand out. I'm glad our church could see the value of working together. It was a tremendous object lesson."

As volunteers handed out water, they also had the opportunity to pray with residents, invite them to church and tell them about Jesus.

"We had many opportunities to tell people that we were doing this as a way to show our love for them, because Christ loves us and He loves them, too -- and we'd love to tell them more about that love," Emmerling said.

Win Williams, the state disaster relief director in Michigan, says he is looking into other potential ways of helping Flint residents through water purification units from other state conventions and providing 1-gallon and 5-gallon water containers, which can be particularly helpful for cooking and cleaning needs. Both of those possibilities will require further evaluation.

Williams says efforts like this help show people in Michigan that Southern Baptists care about them. He noted that Michigan Baptists' disaster relief works through local churches, like Westside Baptist, because they will remain in the community once many disaster relief volunteers leave.

"We want people to remember the local church, not disaster relief, when we leave," Williams said. "We're just a tool that God has given the church to show the community that our churches care."

Mickey Caison, NAMB's interim executive director for SBDR, echoed Williams' hope for more SBDR responses in the state.

"Especially in Michigan where we're still small and we don't have a lot of churches, this begins to show that Southern Baptists are people who care and are willing to minister in the context of great tragedy in their lives," Caison said.

NAMB coordinates and manages Southern Baptist responses to major disasters through partnerships with 42 state Baptist conventions, most of which have their own state disaster relief ministries.

Southern Baptists have 65,000 trained volunteers -- including chaplains -- and 1,550 mobile units for feeding, chainsaw, mud-out, command, communication, child care, shower, laundry, water purification, repair/rebuild and power generation. SBDR is one of the three largest mobilizers of trained disaster relief volunteers in the United States, along with the American Red Cross and The Salvation Army.

<http://www.christiantelegraph.com/issue27277.html>

January 31, 2016

Laudato Si and Renewing Creation at the Earth Summit

By Kristen Hannum
Catholic Sentinel

The well-spoken man spoke out a bit too late; most of the attendees at the session, "Catholic Farmers Reflect on Pope Francis' Encyclical" had already stood up, chatting about what they'd heard.

Some were on their way out the door, ready to leave the workshop, one of a dozen at the Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO) and Oregon Interfaith Power & Light's seventh annual Earth Summit, on Jan. 31 at the University of Portland. It was time to go to Bauccio Commons, where there would be dinner and Portland Mayor Charlie Hales speaking.

Others in the audience were at the front of the room, congratulating — and in one case challenging — the presenters.

"I just wanted to say," said the late speaker to the chaotic room, "that Laudato Si is a gift to the entire world, not just Christians."

The man's name was Gulzar Ahmed. He's Muslim, and has presented on Laudato Si to his faith community. "All faiths should be proud to of what Pope Francis did with Laudato Si," he said. "It is something that brings people and different faiths together."

Although few heard Ahmed at that moment, he voiced the spirit of the conference.

“We’re all called to participate,” said Jan Elfers, EMO’s new executive director. “We all need to be awakened to the miracle of creation, and to see our relationship to the earth and to each other with new eyes.”

Nearly 300 people attended the event, which this year focused on the primacy of soil, farming and food.

Three young people led another breakout session on food, climate and the future. Summer Grandy, a University of Portland environmental science student, shared that she sees her future revolving around climate change. “My generation doesn’t have a choice about caring about climate change,” she said.

Tyler Wagner, the food justice coordinator for EMO’s Interfaith Food and Farms Partnership, agreed, saying that while for many years the discussion was couched in terms of what would be happening in 2050 or 2080, there’s more recently been a realization that climate change is already with us. “Climate change is our new reality,” he said.

Wagner said that his Catholic faith gives him an anchor of hope.

In the question segment, Debra Baker, a sophomore at Benson High School, asked the group how she could speak out for change “without being that weird, annoying hippy girl.”

Young Woodley, an intern at the Native American Youth and Family Center and the third youth panelist, had a ready answer. “I don’t know how you make change without being different,” he counseled.

The conference was a family affair for the Woodleys, as the keynote speaker was Dr. Randy Woodley, a Keetoowah Cherokee who is an author, Baptist preacher, farmer and professor at George Fox University in Newberg.

Dr. Woodley offered stories, history and philosophy, challenging his audience to consider how the world works in a new way — a non-hierarchical, non-Western way.

The summit ended with a different challenge from Mayor Hales. He too offered a story — that of traveling to Rome, to sit in a room with 60 other mayors and Pope Francis. “It was a life-changing experience,” he said.

Mayor Hales’ office had at first thought that the invitation to the Vatican was a prank. Once they determined it was real, he did his homework and read *Laudato Si*.

Pope Francis told the mayors that they were his instruments for change. Pope Francis inspired the mayor of Paris to ask the group to get together 500 mayors to come to the climate summit there last autumn, to drive more change. The mayors did that, and they, in turn, inspired a virtuous competition to limit greenhouse gasses and limit climate change. “Five hundred mayors made a difference,” he said.

In the same way, Mayor Hales said the people at the Earth Summit were also making a difference. "I'm here to tell you it works," he said. "Bless you all."

<http://www.catholicsentinel.org/main.asp?SectionID=2&SubSectionID=35&ArticleID=30912>

February 2016

Green the Church Newsletter

http://egliseverte-greenchurch.ca/green/index.php?option=com_acymailing&ctrl=archive&task=view&mailid=72&key=0ea6d8581c63f84c4e97f4b36d6f1ba6&subid=189-dbe0c9b642707e4c37fc810b1cf1134f

February 2016

Eco-Congregation Scotland Newsletter

<http://us9.campaign-archive1.com/?u=a37b4ff760ffcc7fd1c3611b4&id=3dee6d84c7&e=709fe41ec4>

February 2016

Earth Keeper Newsletter

Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute

<http://us6.campaign-archive1.com/?u=887c3de8b0&id=acadead47b&e=a758405790>

February 1, 2016

Faith communities unite for action on climate change

By Russell L. Meyer
Orlando Sentinel

No matter our own personal faith or spiritual beliefs, one universal truth is that climate change threatens everyone. The climate agreement reached in Paris in December is a ray of hope in the international response to climate change. However, a lasting solution requires strong grass-roots action from concerned citizens and aggressive efforts on the part of political leaders.

Religious institutions and citizens of all faiths know that we have a moral duty to be stewards of the Earth, and to protect it from the disastrous effects of climate change. That's why the Florida

Council of Churches has joined with many other Florida religious organizations to demand bold action from our officials and candidates on building a clean alternative economy, in pursuit of a nationwide goal of powering America with more than 50 percent clean energy by 2030.

Nowhere in the country do we feel the implications of climate change more than in Florida. A 2015 report shows that we have more private property at risk because of climate change than any other state. We need to begin taking action today to address the \$69 billion worth of coastal property in Florida in danger of flooding and water damage. Rising seas will flood homes and erode our world-famous coastline — endangering lives, damaging property and threatening our tourism-reliant economy.

Some of our most vulnerable communities are also the most threatened by climate change — and it is our moral duty to help protect them. To that end, representatives of two dozen faiths, from Baptists to Buddhists (and everywhere in between), have signed an Interfaith Declaration on Climate Change. It's a message we can all stand behind: "Strong action on climate change is imperative by the principles and traditions of our faiths and the collective compassion, wisdom and leadership of humanity."

Across Florida, faith leaders are uniting to turn this message into action. This past weekend, we gathered at the Florida Interfaith Climate Action Network National Assembly in Longwood. The event provided people of faith and goodwill the opportunity to collaborate on climate-related efforts here in Florida, which has been called "ground zero" for climate change.

We have come a long way as a nation and as a planet from where we were decades ago. We honor and applaud the great strides we have made, but our journey is far from over.

We must build on the Paris agreement and solidify America's leadership on climate action in the coming weeks and months. As Pope Francis reminded us on his recent visit to America, we must make sure our leaders stand up and make the moral choice to safeguard the most vulnerable and protect our common home from climate change.

The Rev. Russell L. Meyer is the executive director of the Florida Council of Churches.

<http://www.orlandosentinel.com/opinion/os-ed-church-climate-change-myword-020216-20160201-story.html>

February 2, 2016

US Catholics allergic to reality of environmental racism, theologian says at St. John's University

By Peter Feuerherd
National Catholic Reporter

Queens, NY -- Catholic environmentalists need to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor, Fr. Bryan Massingale, theology professor at Marquette University, told a conference at St. John's University here on Saturday.

"We all live on the same planet but we don't breathe in the same air. Some environments are more equal than others," said Massingale, who cited how minority communities have been used as dumping grounds for decades. "The poor and communities of color bear risks that would be unacceptable" for white and more affluent areas. These communities, he said, have long been "sacrifice zones" of environmental degradation, places where unwanted waste is disposed.

Titled "Care for Our Common Home: The Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor," the conference was the ninth such biennial gathering that St. John's, a Vincentian university, has held on social justice matters. Speakers included theologian Erin Lothes of the College of St. Elizabeth and several experts in sustainable development. Massingale delivered the keynote address.

"We are not faced with two separate crises," said the priest, citing what he described as an environmental and racism disaster inflicted upon the people of Flint, Mich. -- a city that is largely African American and poor.

"Environmental racism is a reality in this country," Massingale said, faulting elements in the Catholic green community for being concerned about the earth with much less concern about some of the people who inhabit it.

He praised Pope Francis, who, in his encyclical "*Laudato Si'* on Care for Our Common Home," links the two crises, frequently citing shortcomings in the "human ecology" of lack of access to basic needs such as clean water and housing.

Even with the pope's insights, Massingale said, Catholic environmentalists often fail to see the links between racism and the environment. He noted how some Catholic environmentalists complained on a website in last June that the papal encyclical launch was being overshadowed by media coverage of the killings in a church by a white supremacist in Charleston, S.C.

He said that American Catholics in general have "an allergy" to talking about racial issues, even when race is evident.

The situation, for example, in Flint -- where residents, despite frequent complaints to governing authorities, have been drinking and bathing in contaminated water for more than a year -- is a stark example of environmental racism in action. He said that such a crisis would never have been allowed to continue in more affluent cities.

Flint, governed by a state-appointed manager, no longer has democratic rule for its largely minority and poor population. That undemocratic system allowed an intolerable situation to continue, he said.

Massingale said that racism "enables people to not care for people who are not like them" and is the root cause of many environmental crises.

That racism is not only evident in the wider culture, it is also part of American Catholic life as well.

In Catholic circles, he said, racism is often defined as individual acts of rudeness and discrimination, remedied by appeals to overcome personal sin. It is, however, Massingale said, a more systemic issue.

And, even while immigrants, many of them black and brown, continue to redefine what it means to be a Catholic American, leadership still sees European Catholic culture as normative. He described participating in the writing of a bishops' pastoral on racism, a document which was never completed. "Our people will get mad," said one consulting bishop about the concerns raised. Another commented, "Our people will not understand."

Who were "our people" that they mentioned? Both bishops, said Massingale, defined themselves, their people and the church in the United States as white.

Other speakers at the conference -- held at the third largest and most ethnically-diverse U.S. Catholic university in the country -- agreed with Massingale. The speakers at the meeting, sponsored by St. John's Vincentian Center for Church and Society, argued that the crisis articulated in *Laudato Si'* is increasingly urgent.

"Environmental pillage has been catastrophic," said Anthony Annett, climate change and sustainable development advisor at the Earth Institute of Columbia University. He described the encyclical as a social document, not merely an environmental manifesto, concerned with people's relationship to God, the earth and humanity.

Elham Seyedsayamdost, researcher and developmental specialist and visiting scholar at the University of Massachusetts in Boston, noted that the 21st century has witnessed three times as many natural disasters documented per decade as the previous century. Most of the impact of those disasters were felt by poor people who are least responsible for growing carbon fuel pollution, which many experts see as contributing to global climate change.

John C. Mutter of the Earth Institute at Columbia University, and author of *The Disaster Profiteers: How Natural Disasters Make the Rich Richer and the Poor Poorer*, said the Hurricane Katrina disaster, as one vivid example, fell most heavily on the poor of New Orleans. For decades those with means had established themselves in flood-free areas, he said, away from the industrial canal system that enveloped the poor neighborhoods of New Orleans with water, bringing death and destruction to thousands.

[Peter Feuerherd is a journalism professor at St. John's University and frequent *NCR* contributor.]

<http://ncronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/us-catholics-allergic-reality-environmental-racism-theologian-says-st-johns>

February 2, 2016

Heeding Pope Francis's Call, SJU Hosts Conference to Tackle Worldwide Crisis

St. John's University

His Holiness Pope Francis's deep concern for the global ecological crisis and its impact on the poor was the topic of the [Ninth Biennial Vincentian Chair of Social Justice Conference](#), held on January 30 at the [Queens](#), NY, campus.

The [Vincentian Center for Church and Society](#) at St. John's—along with the faculty [Vincentian Research Fellows](#)—hosted the daylong event, entitled “Care for Our Common Home: The Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor.” Approximately 240 participants, attendees, faculty, and students took part in panels, break-out meetings, and question-and-answer sessions.

“Pope Francis's goal of uniting people to address the care for our common home has special meaning to St. John's University and the entire Vincentian community,” said [Rev. Bernard M. Tracey, C.M.](#), Executive Vice President for Mission. “Our faculty members from across the disciplines are leaders in the field in terms of Catholic education, teaching, conducting research, and promoting social justice. This event is a natural extension of their commitment to this critical issue.”

The gathering, known as “the poverty conference,” brought together theologians, economists, scientists, and other experts whose charge was to develop specific action plans in response to the encyclical *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*—the Pope's document on combating the ecological crisis. In it, the Holy Father urgently appeals for “a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet.” A Vigil Mass followed in [St. Thomas More Church](#).

[Rev. Bryan N. Massingale, S.T.D.](#) '01HON, Professor of Systematics/Ethics at Marquette University, received a standing ovation for his keynote address, entitled “The Evidence of Things Unsaid: The Silence About Racism in the Care for Creation.” In his 40-minute talk, he framed the issue of environmental racism through the lens of the yearlong water contamination situation in Flint, MI.

“The events unfolding in Flint provide a tragic illustration of the nexus between caring for creation and care of the poor, of the deep connection between racism and environmental neglect, and of the confluence of social neglect and ecological harm,” said Fr. Massingale.

“Environmental racism is a reality in this country, where communities of color have long borne the brunt of degraded neighborhoods and a higher prevalence of environmentally-linked diseases. There is one interwoven story here—care for the Earth is impossible in the absence of a proactive concern about racism.”

Panel presenters and dialogue session participants included Anthony Annett, Ph.D., Columbia University; Erin Lothes, Ph.D., College of Saint Elizabeth; John C. Mutter, Ph.D., Columbia University; Juan Elias Chebly '08TCB, '09MBA, a lead advisor to the UN Environment Programme (UNEP); Elham Seyedsayamdost, Ph.D., University of Massachusetts Boston; [Joanne Carroll, Ph.D.](#), College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences, St. John's University; and [Basilio Monteiro, Ph.D.](#), College of Professional Studies, St. John's University.

“Our faith and hope is to provide a vision of a just, peaceful, and sustainable world,” Lothes said. “The challenge to this vision is the ecocidal scale of environmental injustice.” She added, “To solve it, we need to address both sides of the crisis—the environment needs to be stabilized for all of us experiencing the impacts of climate change, and justice needs to be created for those suffering energy poverty.”

Christine Hammill-Cregan, Associate Director, Vincentian Center for Church and Society, characterized the encyclical as being about people, at its core. “It isn't just for Catholics. It's a 92-page letter to everyone, a call to action on all levels,” she said. “That's a very strong message—caring for the planet is about people.”

“When most people hear the phrase ‘social justice,’ their first instinct is a desire to help,” said Mitchell Petit-Frere '16G. “However, you need to be informed in order to lend a hand and this conference equipped me with the tools to do so,” he said. “The event fostered new thoughts and perspectives within the minds of others—which may end up leading to social progress outside the University's gates.”

[Rev. Patrick J. Griffin, C.M.](#), Executive Director of the Vincentian Center for Church and Society, delivered the homily at the Mass that culminated the day's events. “We are here on this day to give special attention to the document *Laudato Si' and the message of Pope Francis on behalf of our environment—which can place him as a prophet among us*,” he said. “Pope Francis takes up the role of a prophet in this effort and he must do so. These experts who have gathered among us today legitimize his voice.”

<http://www.stjohns.edu/about/news/2016-02-02/heeding-pope-francis-s-call-sju-hosts-conference-tackle-worldwide-crisis>

February 3, 2016

NGT questions Hindus' cremation procedure, says it causes air, water pollution

India TV News Desk

New Delhi: The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has questioned the centuries-old tradition practised by Hindus to cremate dead bodies at the river banks, saying the method of burning wood leads to air pollution and also effects natural water resources.

Keeping in mind the growing level of pollution, the NGT said that there was a need to adopt environment-friendly methods like electric crematoriums and use of CNG and change the 'mindset of the people'.

The NGT bench headed by Justice UD Salvi also directed the Union Environment Ministry and the Delhi government to initiate programmes to provide alternative modes of cremation of human remains, saying the traditional emitted hazardous pollutants in the environment.

"The issue involves question of faith and circumstances in which the people live, it is, therefore, the responsibility of the men who lead, particularly religious leaders, to steer the faith in a direction so as to change the mindset of people practising their faith and make them adopt practices which are environment-friendly," the bench observed while directing authorities, including civic bodies, to educate the public in this regard.

"It is also the responsibility of the government to facilitate the making of the mindset of the citizens as well as to provide environment-friendly alternatives for cremation to its citizenry," the bench further said.

The green panel said the traditional means of cremation caused adverse impact on environment and dispersal of ashes in the river led to water pollution.

"Religions of the world, therefore, conceived of different methods for disposal of the dead on the basis of their theology and the circumstances in which the believers lived. Where there was plenty of wood, the individuals thought of disposal of their dead by burning with wood, but where there was scarcity of wood the individuals buried their dead," it said.

In Hinduism, the cremation ground (shmathana ghat) is located near a river, if not on the river bank itself. According to tradition, a dead body is washed by family members in the river water before being put on wood pyre with feet facing south. It is said that Hindus believe that soul of a dead person must be completely detached from the body to attain 'moksha'. And for this, an open cremation is needed so that the soul can be released easily as soon as the body is set on fire. The ashes are later immersed in the river completing the rite.

The NGT was hearing a plea by advocate DM Bhalla who had said that cremation of humans by conventional methods added to air pollution, therefore, alternative modes of cremation needed to be used.

Bhalla contended that cremation of human remains by traditional method involving wood has serious impact on the environment as 'the forest cover is sacrificed and obnoxious gases emanated from the burning of human mortal remains pollute the air'.

<http://m.indiatvnews.com/news/india/national-green-tribunal-hindus-cremation-air-water-pollution-57385.html>

February 3, 2016

Center for Spirituality in Nature blends ecology and theology

By Mark Jenkins
Washington Post

Beth Norcross likes to take walks in the woods. But when she does, she's looking for more than scenery and solitude.

The Arlington resident is the founding director of the [Center for Spirituality in Nature](#), which combines ecological and theological objectives. She will encourage the hikers she leads through D.C.'s Fletcher's Cove on Saturday to look outside and inside.

"We'll walk along the canal and see what's happening on that particular day that we might get some spiritual insight from," Norcross said. "For example, we'll take a look at the frozen canal, and we'll wonder together what's happening underneath the surface. And we'll compare that with what might be happening to us spiritually. Where it might seem cold and frozen and dormant on the surface, what riches lie underneath?"

"There are frogs that are probably hibernating, turtles that are hibernating underneath," she added. "And we'll talk about times in our lives that have felt dormant spiritually, where in fact things have been happening with us that we're unaware of."

Patience is a theme, she said. "Trees set their buds in fall, and everything it needs to blossom and grow in the spring is being held in that bud in the winter. What does that tell us, spiritually? Does it tell us to hold our faith during the course of the cold, hard winter?"

After working as a staff member for the U.S. Senate National Parks and Forests Subcommittee and as vice president of Conservation for American Rivers, Norcross sought another sort of insight into nature. She studied at Wesley Theological Seminary, a United Methodist school near Ward Circle, and got her master's degree in theological studies and a doctorate in ministry. She's now an adjunct professor at Wesley, but did not become ordained.

"I self-identify with the Christian story," she said. "I use those words carefully because I think there are many stories out there — religious stories, spiritual stories.

"I find that when I teach from my own story, I can teach with depth and substance," Norcross added. "But we encourage other stories and interaction with other faiths, as well."

In October, one of Norcross's walks was co-sponsored by the Potomac Conservancy, which is also promoting the upcoming one.

"We thought that this was a great opportunity to explore a different side of the Potomac River that we at the conservancy don't always take the time to look at, and give people the space to experience," said Katie Blackman, director of community conservation for the Silver Spring-based group.

“Even for people who aren’t part of a particular faith or cultural tradition, there’s that moment where the trail opens up and you’re standing at the edge of the river and it’s just this kind of deep breath, and you suddenly feel free of stress and worry,” Blackman said. “We think that the deeper the connection that people form with the river, the more likely they’ll be to stand up and take action to protect it.”

Norcross has similar goals, even if she approaches them from another direction. “I started the center a year and a half ago because I began to realize that, if we were going to make behavioral change, we really needed to reintroduce people to the natural world. And to having a kind of relationship with the natural world.”

Fletcher’s Cove doesn’t offer the most dramatic vistas in the Potomac watershed. It was chosen partially for a practical reason: In wintertime, it’s easier to reach than some wilder locations.

Still, Norcross said, “It has the canal, and it has the river. We can talk a lot about the river and the significance of water, spiritually.”

She has led winter hikes there before, she said. “It’s actually one of our favorite walks. Once you get the participants bundled up and out there, they so enjoy it. It’s clear, it’s cold, the sun is shining, the sycamores are beaming in contrast to the great blue sky.”

Norcross laughed when asked whether she can guarantee sunshine. “I’ve done programs in storms. There’s always something that nature has to offer. No matter what the weather.”

Jenkins is a freelance writer.

The three-hour hike begins at 10 a.m. Saturday. The cost is \$20. For information, visit centerforspiritualityinnature.org.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/center-for-spirituality-in-nature-blends-ecology-and-theology/2016/02/02/3dcc89f6-c92e-11e5-88ff-e2d1b4289c2f_story.html

February 3, 2016

Exxon Stiff-Arms a Request to Take Moral Responsibility for Climate Change

Opposing a shareholder resolution, Exxon says the call to accept responsibility for global warming and support the 2 degrees Celsius goal is 'vague.'

By David Hasemyer
InsideClimate News

Oil giant ExxonMobil moved to reject a shareholder proposal calling for the company to assert moral leadership on climate change and pledge to work toward limiting global warming to 2 degrees Celsius or less.

In a letter to securities regulators, the company said the resolution filed by a faith-based organization is "vague and indefinite." Exxon also said it's unnecessary for shareholders to consider the proposal at the annual stockholders meeting on May 25 because the company has already taken steps to tamp down global warming. The resolution was filed by the New Jersey-based Tri-State Coalition for Responsible Investment.

While social responsibility groups have been demanding action on climate change from Exxon for decades, the Tri-State resolution is the first to call on the company to acknowledge moral responsibility. Over the past 25 years, shareholders have submitted 62 climate change-related proposals to Exxon, according to an [InsideClimate News review of shareholder resolutions](#). Of those, 22 were either withdrawn or blocked by the company. None of the remaining 40 got enough votes to pass.

Management often urges the Securities and Exchange Commission to bar shareholder proposals from the proxy statements they publish for annual investor meetings.

Sister Patricia Daly of the Sisters of St. Dominic of Caldwell, N.J., one of the sponsors of the resolution, called Exxon's move "arrogant and dangerous."

"This challenge demonstrates that ExxonMobil plans to continue to cling to an unsustainable paradigm that severely harms our planet, without reflecting on the moral dimensions of a 'business as usual' scenario," she said. "I wonder what management fears will be revealed if they allow this resolution to go to a vote.

"They don't see the moral imperative," she said. "They are dodging the 2 degrees."

[The resolution](#) declares, "We believe that ExxonMobil should assert moral leadership with respect to climate change." It also calls on Exxon to adopt policies consistent with limiting the average global temperature increase to 2 degrees since the beginning of the Industrial Age and to acknowledge urgency in meeting that goal. The Tri-State Coalition represents nearly 40 Roman Catholic groups with pension funds that hold shares of Exxon.

A spokesman for Exxon declined to comment. The Tri-State proposal was [among the first of seven 2016 shareholder resolutions](#) to be filed with Exxon addressing climate change.

Exxon asked the SEC to allow the company to dismiss the resolution because it does not spell out exactly what actions Exxon would have to take to comply.

"The Proposal's request that the company commit to 'support the goal' of limiting warming to less than '2° C' is vague and misleading," according to [Exxon's letter to the SEC](#).

"The meaning and implications of this reference to '2° C' are not defined or explained in the proposal and are likely only understood and appreciated by shareholders with a significant level of knowledge and expertise regarding climate change science and policy," Exxon said in the letter.

The company argued that there is disagreement in the scientific community over how to define or reach a 2-degree target, so it would be impossible for the company to do so.

The goal of holding global warming to 2 degrees or less was embraced by 196 countries during the Paris climate talks last year. The resulting agreement aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, which are the largest contributor to global warming.

Exxon also said it has taken numerous steps to reduce the risk of climate change.

"The Company's past and current actions and initiatives compare favorably with the shareholder proposal's essential objective of having the Company publicly support the goal of addressing climate change risk," according to the Exxon letter.

It cited steps to improve energy efficiency and reduce greenhouse gas emissions at its own operations and to conduct and support research on new technologies. Exxon said it also has urged governments, private companies and consumers to embrace climate policy solutions.

The sponsors of the proposal said Exxon's objections show that it is out of step with the rest of the industry and the world. Daly said the moral dimensions of climate change are clear and have been articulated in statements from world leaders and faith leaders, including Pope Francis in his environmental encyclical, *Laudato Si'*.

Robert Brulle, a professor of sociology and environmental science at Drexel University, said he understands Exxon's argument that the resolution is vague. He said the resolution's sponsors could have specified how Exxon should contribute to the 2-degree limit, or how much in greenhouse gas emissions Exxon should curtail.

"Without the specificity, you end up with all the varying interpretations," said Brulle, who has studied the funding behind climate change denial campaigns mounted by the fossil fuel industry, including Exxon. "What Exxon is doing is using that discussion to muddle the issues."

As for Exxon's contention that it has already met its responsibility, Brulle called it "laughable."

"They say 'Oh yeah, we've met that goal,'" he said. "But what have they really done?"

<http://insideclimatenews.org/news/02022016/exxon-stiff-arms-request-take-moral-responsibility-climate-change>

February 5, 2016

Why climate change is really, really unfair

By Chris Mooney
Washington Post

With his 2015 encyclical “[Laudato Si](#),” Pope Frances went further than perhaps anyone has before to reframe the entire debate around climate change by [focusing on the world’s poor](#) and the duty to protect them from environmental harms that they did not cause themselves.

Now, [new research](#) in the journal Scientific Reports has underscored the pope’s message by showing that when it comes to climate change, it is indeed the countries with the most to lose that tend to contribute to the problem least — and also the other way round. The countries that contribute most to the problem — such as China and the United States, the current top two emitters — tend to show less relative vulnerability to the impact compared with nations that have quite low levels of emissions, the research finds.

“The general rule is, at a global scale, if you’re a nation that is going to suffer from climate change, you’re very likely not contributing to the problem,” says James Watson, a professor in the school of geography at the University of Queensland in Australia who also works with the Wildlife Conservation Society on climate change. Watson conducted the study with two colleagues from the University of Queensland.

“That’s the general rule that we found,” Watson continues. “But it’s completely inequitable.”

Many have observed this — including [small island nations](#), which successfully lobbied to have the extra-protective climate target of 1.5 degrees Celsius included in the Paris climate agreement in December — but the new research has done something else: quantified it.

To do so, Watson and his colleagues compared two datasets. The first is a [dataset](#) kept by the World Resources Institute of the present-day emissions of countries around the world. Clearly, the relative contributions to the problem are quite unbalanced. The study notes that just 10 countries currently contribute more than 60 percent of all emissions, and a single one, China, contributes more than 20 percent (or did in 2010, which was the year used for the study).

The second dataset is a “[Climate Vulnerability Monitor](#)” kept by the humanitarian group DARA, which ranks countries according to vulnerability based on measures such as exposure to sea-level rise and drought, health hazards, risks of extremes or disasters, and more. Here, 17 countries were rated as “acutely vulnerable,” and they tended to be either island nations such as Vanuatu or African nations such as Gambia.

And the result? Sure enough, the research found — based on 2010 emissions and 2010 vulnerability levels — widespread inequity. The study noted, “20 of the 36 highest emitting countries are among the least vulnerable to negative impacts of future climate change. ... Conversely, 11 of the 17 countries with low or moderate GHG emissions, are acutely vulnerable to negative impacts of climate change.”

The research also looked toward the future, when the number of climate-vulnerable countries grows as climate change itself becomes worse. In 2030, there are expected to be 62 “acutely” vulnerable countries, rather than 17. Again, small island nations and African nations lead the way. And inequity, the study found, is expected to be even worse.

Climate equity concerns were a key factor in the decision in Paris late last year to include the 1.5 degrees Celsius temperature target in a historic climate accord. The idea of limiting warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels has long been championed by small island nations, as well as a growing body of climate-vulnerable nations, and for understandable reasons; it limits their impacts.

However, it is generally agreed upon that the world is well off course if we want to hold warming below 1.5 degrees Celsius. (We are currently at about 1 degree warmer than the late 19th century.) Indeed, many scientists say it won't be possible without overshooting the goal and then coming back down again thanks to future technologies that will be capable of removing carbon dioxide from the air on a vast scale.

Granted, although the effects of climate change may be very disproportionate, it's also becoming clear that the major emitters are also going to see their share of problems. Recent research, for instance, points to a [major warming](#) of waters off the U.S. East Coast that could have large implications for fisheries, storms, and sea-level rise.

So it's not that the major emitters won't suffer any impacts — but that those impacts aren't likely to be distributed across the globe in proportion to emissions. Watson likens the current research on climate inequity to prior findings about secondhand smoke: “The people suffering from the impacts of smoking aren't the smokers themselves, it's the people next door,” he says.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/energy-environment/wp/2016/02/05/why-climate-change-is-really-really-unfair/>

February 5, 2016

In February prayer video, Pope Francis pleads for creation care, 'a new way of living'

By Brian Roewe
National Catholic Reporter

Pope Francis reinforced core messages of his major encyclical on the environment in his video prayer intention for February, asking people across the globe to do their part in "caring for our common home," and to discover "a new way of living."

The video, the new medium for the monthly prayer intentions, opens with dawn breaking through a forest. Images of majestic mountains follow, along with a school of fish and budding plants.

"Believers and unbelievers agree that the earth is our common heritage, the fruits of which should benefit everyone," he said.

"However, what is happening in the world we live in?" Francis asked.

A beach scene with children playing in the sand and water quickly transitions to the tide receding and revealing plastic cups, bottles and other trash in its wake.

The scene brings to life a much-cited line from Francis' social encyclical "[Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home](#)" regarding the state of the planet: "The earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth. In many parts of the planet, the elderly lament that once beautiful landscapes are now covered with rubbish."

"The relationship between poverty and the fragility of the planet requires another way of managing the economy and measuring progress, conceiving a new way of living," the pope said in the video, to the backdrop of a bicyclist riding through a smog-filled city in traffic wearing a gas mask.

"This month I make a special request: that we take good care of creation -- a gift freely given -- cultivating and protecting it for future generations," Francis said. "Caring for our common home."

The video closes with scenes of people outdoors enjoying nature, another cyclist recycling a cup, and even the sharing of a four-leaf clover for good measure.

In a press release from the Global Catholic Climate Movement Jesuit Fr. Frédéric Fornos, international director of the Apostleship of Prayer, said the February prayer intention "comes at a crucial time for humanity, addressing an area where we urgently need to make changes."

"We need a conversation that brings us together, because we are all affected by environmental challenges, especially the poor and displaced," Fornos said.

The video is the second released since the Vatican announced it as the new prayer intention format, which it produces with the Apostleship of Prayer international organization. The [first video](#) asked for peaceful, loving dialogue among people of different faiths. Also on Friday, news broke that Francis [will meet with Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill](#) in Cuba -- the first ever meeting between leaders of the two Christian churches -- as part of his upcoming trip to Mexico.

In April 2015, Francis made his [universal prayer intention for the month](#), "That people may learn to respect creation and care for it as a gift from God." Two months later, he released *Laudato Si'*, the first papal encyclical to focus primarily on issues of ecology and the environment.

Watch the video here:

<http://nronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/february-prayer-video-pope-francis-pleads-creation-care-new-way-living>

February 8, 2016

Poet Wendell Berry bequeaths farming legacy to small Catholic college

By Judith Valente, Religion News Service
National Catholic Reporter

St. Catharine, K.Y. -- The tobacco farms, hay fields and rolling knobs of central Kentucky mark the landscape that inspires much of the work of award-winning poet, fiction writer and essayist Wendell Berry.

Berry describes the solace he derives from this land in one of his most famous poems, "The Peace of Wild Things":

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things ...

The Berry family has lived in these parts for nine generations. While pursuing a prolific writing career, Berry never stopped caring for the land of his ancestors. Now, the 81-year-old writer wants to pass on his family's farming legacy to a new generation. He decided against teaming up with a large university agricultural program, and instead selected a small Catholic liberal arts college, St. Catharine College, about an hour's drive from Louisville, run by the Dominican Sisters of Peace.

"It's probably the most unlikely place that the Berry Farming Program could have ended up," says Sr. Claire McGowan, an environmental activist and member of the Dominican Sisters of Peace. "We're so small, so rural. We're not famous, but those are the characteristics the Berry family appreciates and promotes."

The sisters have been part of this community since 1822, teaching -- and farming -- on their own 550-acre stretch of land. That impressed Berry's daughter, Mary.

"When I went to St. Catharine's, their first question to me was not about my father's reputation and how it might serve their desire to raise funds for whatever," Mary Berry says. "The first question at St. Catharine's to me was how does your work fit with the four pillars of the Dominican life?"

Those four pillars include prayer, study, ministry and community. "The Berry Farming Program really maximizes each of those," McGowan says.

Berry, whose writings often explore the connection between the natural world and the human spirit, proved a good fit for the sisters too.

"Wendell Berry is a deeply soulful man," McGowan says. "He lives his life out of deep spiritual convictions and always has, and has a simplicity and a love for everything that's wild, everything

that's natural, and at the same time for people, particularly simple people who are trying to build a relationship with the natural world."

The Berry Farming Program offers an interdisciplinary approach to agriculture, combining fieldwork with philosophy and studies in agricultural science and agribusiness with classes on literature, history and culture.

"In our thinking we often have silos," says the program's coordinator, Leah Bayens. "Agricultural economics (is) one area. Agricultural production is another area, another silo. Community leadership, that's another silo. So when Wendell says things like, 'You can't take the culture out of agriculture,' ultimately what I think he means is you can't take the heart out of agriculture, you can't minimize it into an equation or minimize it into one particular scientific study."

For Berry, the heart of agriculture springs from a spiritual kinship with the land.

"I believe the world and our life in it are conditional gifts. You have to take good care of it. You have to love it," he told Bill Moyers [in a rare interview](#) he gave three years ago at the opening of the Berry Center.

Bayens says, "That kind of reframing of agricultural production and the human place in that system is radical, because what it does is make an ethical and spiritual relationship to land stewardship the center point, not something on the periphery."

It's a belief Berry laid out in a 2012 essay he wrote called "It All Turns on Affection" when he received a medal from the National Endowment for the Humanities for his lifetime of work.

"Wendell has written that the care of the earth is our most ancient and most worthy, and most pleasing responsibility. To have a sense of affection for one another and nonliving beings, that's what we're trying to instill as a goal for our students," Bayens says.

Instruction on soil stewardship is a major part of the Berry program, as are classes like the one in eco-spirituality, taught by religious studies professor Matt Branstetter.

"Wendell is also a poet, so he's really great at bringing out the spirituality of what would otherwise seem like very simple, mundane tasks, but looked upon with the right attitude, they're kind of living mysticism," Branstetter says.

"I consider myself a person who takes the gospels seriously," Berry told Moyers in the interview. "A lot of my writing, when it hasn't been in defense of precious things, it's been giving thanks for precious things."

Mary Berry says she hopes the program will help curb the trend over the past century toward ever-bigger industrial farms.

“I can’t think of much that’s right about farming in America right now. If anything was working very well we’d have more people farming. We have three-quarters of 1 percent of the population farming now,” she says.

The Berrys hope to encourage young farmers to grow products for local markets on mid-sized parcels of land that don’t depend heavily on chemical fertilizers and herbicides.

“I heard Daddy say recently that big agriculture, industrial agriculture is in its death throes. It’s brain-dead and it’s just thrashing around now. I think he’s right,” Mary Berry says.

In a part of the country where farming income once depended on tobacco -- a crop in severe decline -- Berry program students are researching ways farmers can diversify and still practice soil conservation. On a 15-acre research farm near the college, the students are participating in a government-sponsored program that grows a type of hemp used in making clothing fiber.

“I want the students to realize that soil is part of the whole. It’s an eco-system,” says Shawn Lucas, who teaches soil science. “I mean, the soil is not just dirt; it’s minerals, organic materials, living roots, living micro-organisms, and the more diversity you can get into that system the healthier it’s going to be.”

The farming program has grown from just one student two years ago to 25 now. The students come from urban and farm areas, and from as far off as India and Nepal.

Student Sie Tioye plans to return eventually to his family’s grain farm in Burkina Faso, in West Africa. “I think the most attractive thing about the farming program is that it teaches you how to make a productive farming system using very basic techniques. I think that’s something that’s very practical for my country,” he says.

Rachel Mendoza, another of the students, is interested in urban farming. “I was raised with a very sustainable lifestyle as far as growing our own food and I was very interested in how I could do this in an urban setting. I’m particularly attracted to meeting the needs of underserved people in our urban communities.”

Before enrolling in the program, many of the students had never read Berry’s poems, stories and essays on farming, but they can now quote chapter and verse.

“I always love this one quote (of Berry’s): ‘What I stand for is what I stand on,’” says Winnie Chevront. “We all walk on this earth. Why are we not taking care of it? And that’s something he tries to convey in his writings, so that we all can get a passion for the earth and for what we do in everyday life.”

“He writes in a way that you’re sitting on the front porch at the farm with him,” adds student Shelby Floyd. “He stresses the fact that it is humans that this earth is feeding. It is our responsibility to take care of it. We have to take care of our mother that is the ultimate source of life.”

Mary Berry says she's thrilled that many of the students want to farm in communities where they were raised. She half-jokingly says the farming center offers degrees in "homecoming."

"It doesn't mean people have to go to the place that they were born," she says. "The concept of homecoming, I think, is simply to take root someplace, and care about a place, not just for a short amount of time, but forever."

It's a point her father often makes. "The important thing is to learn everything you can about a place, then make common cause with that place, set a good example," he told Moyers.

Mary Berry says the family wants to re-create the kind of supportive agricultural community that it benefited from through generations of farming.

"We were surrounded by neighbors and friends and family who had known the farm we bought, so they understood, they knew the mistakes we might make. They'd seen them made. They could advise us. They could give us what no college program could give us," she says.

The St. Catharine's program, she says, is the next best thing for passing on "what we just had handed to us."

<http://ncronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/poet-wendell-berry-bequeaths-farming-legacy-small-catholic-college>

February 10, 2016

Coal Money Divides Oakland's Churches

The company behind the plan to ship coal through Oakland has promised millions of dollars to Oakland churches for their support.

By Darwin BondGraham
East Bary Express

Reverend Ken Chambers' Westside Missionary Baptist Church is located on Willow Street in West Oakland, just half a mile from the bustling railroad yard where dozens of trains pass each day. The locomotives pull mostly sealed shipping containers filled with furniture, fruits and nuts, and electronics to and from the city's busy seaport. But soon these tracks could become the busiest corridor for shipping coal on the West Coast.

Terminal Logistics Solutions (TLS), a company headed by former Port of Oakland Executive Director Jerry Bridges, is proposing to ship millions of tons of coal through a marine terminal that will be built on the old Army Base. If the coal plan moves forward, Chambers fears that members of his congregation would be poisoned by toxic dust blowing from train cars, silos, and conveyors. Chambers is also concerned about the effects of burning coal in the global climate.

But Chambers isn't just fighting the developer TLS to stop the project. He is also pushing back against a group of politically influential Oakland clergy who have lined up behind TLS and coal.

Oakland's Black clergy members are split on the question of coal, and part of the reason is the money that Bridges has promised to churches that support the plan, according to numerous sources.

Last December, Chambers attended a meeting of Oakland pastors at the Greater St. Paul Church in Uptown to discuss the issue of coal. Bridges of TLS spoke to the pastors, promising jobs at the marine terminal, and stating that there would be no negative health and safety impacts. Then Bridges thanked Bishop Bob Jackson, leader of Acts Full Gospel Church for supporting coal. And according to Chambers and other sources, Jackson thanked Bridges for the financial contribution that Bridges had made to the Acts Full Gospel Church's youth program.

"Jerry said he'd already given money to Bishop Bob Jackson's church youth program," said Chambers in an interview. "And Bishop Jackson thanked him for the donation. He's been bought off."

Jackson did not return multiple phone calls and emails seeking comment for this story. But numerous sources confirmed that Bridges told the group of pastors that he gave money to Jackson's church. Furthermore, sources say Bridges has been in talks with Jackson and other pastors about setting up a fund to channel cash from coal shipments to their churches and nonprofits — if the pastors can convince the Oakland City Council to approve coal shipments through the city.

Pro-coal church leaders have organized themselves into a group called the Ecumenical Economic Empowerment Council. Members of the group appeared at a December 8 council meeting to urge the councilmembers to approve the coal plan. "We would like to see this project moving forward as soon as possible," said Pastor Joseph Simmons of the Greater St. Paul Missionary Baptist Church, to the council. "And we would like to see that there's not any more information going into the public that scares the public."

Simmons wrote in an email to the *Express* that the Ecumenical Economic Empowerment Council is pro-coal because of the jobs it will generate for Oakland residents. "With the very high level of gentrification that has been occurring in Oakland (West Oakland, specifically), people need quality jobs and careers to live where the rents are escalating to be the highest in the country," wrote Simmons. Simmons also denied that Bridges has contributed money to any churches, or made any promises to fund churches with coal money. "There are no promises to any of our churches or us as individuals in any way," Simmons wrote. "The community benefits program has not been discussed with us. How this will be done should be discussed with TLS officials."

Bridges did not respond to multiple phone calls and emails seeking comment for this story. TLS's official website states that the company will "grow strategic partnerships with community and faith-based organizations to make a positive and meaningful impact by committing funds," and that "TLS will commit funds based upon the annual throughput of the terminal[.]"

As the *Express* reported last fall, members of the West Oakland Environmental Indicators Project (WOEIP), a West Oakland nonprofit, said Bridges offered the organization money on the condition that the group help line up support for coal shipments through the city (See "Buying Support for Coal," 9/21). Margaret Gordon, co-founder of WOEIP, said at the time that her organization rejected the offer because coal would pollute Oakland and other communities along the rail line, and would also drive climate change when it is burned in foreign countries.

Gordon said in a recent interview that there are multiple problems with the money Bridges is offering to churches and possibly other organizations. "These dollars that Bridges is offering to these ministers, is this separate from what the city and Oakland Global Trade and Logistics have already implemented, or is this a separate deal?" asked Gordon.

Gordon said that the original community benefits package with Prologis CCIG Oakland Global, the master developer of the former Army Base, was negotiated between the city and the developer in order to ensure transparency and to provide benefits to the most impacted communities and to the city as a whole. Gordon said Bridges, whose company has a separate, private business agreement with Oakland Global, appears to be negotiating side deals in secret to gain political support for his project. "Who gave the authority to Jerry Bridges to do such a thing?" Gordon asked. "How do they choose who they give dollars to? And is this money dependent on coal?"

Reverend George Cummings of Imani Community Church, who also opposes the plan to ship coal through the city, said the coal plan has divided the city's Black clergy. Cummings said he attended some of the earlier meetings between the pastors and Bridges, and said the meetings only took place once the coal plan was made public. "They weren't talking to clergy until they ran into trouble at the city council, and then all of sudden they wanted to engage the faith community in a conversation," said Cummings. "They are interested in making money. That's okay. I'm not mad at them — but not at the expense of the community and people's health."

Chambers, who is a cancer survivor, said his children grew up struggling with asthma. "I'm very sensitive to any unhealthy air quality that I would breathe, or that my family and my parishioners would have to breathe," he said. Chambers has been organizing meetings of other Oakland clergy and community members against coal.

The council isn't expected to make a decision on coal any time soon. City staffers are in the process of hiring Environmental Science Associates, a San Francisco-based consulting company, to analyze potential health and safety impacts of shipping coal through Oakland. A draft report will not be ready until June, according to city records. If the report shows that shipping coal through the TLS marine terminal would harm the health and safety of workers or city residents, the council could exercise a clause in its contract with Prologis CCIG Oakland Global to block the coal plan.

<http://www.eastbayexpress.com/oakland/coal-money-divides-oaklands-churches/Content?oid=4673334>

February 10, 2016

What these Christians are giving up for Lent: Fossil fuels

By Chelsea Harvey
Washington Post

A new initiative in the United Kingdom is not only calling for Christian communities to band together in support of clean energy, but actually helping them get their own electricity that way. The [Big Church Switch](#), which launched Wednesday, aims to inspire both individuals and churches to make the switch to renewable energy sources — and they're already gaining support from church leaders in the country.

The project is a collaborative initiative spearheaded by UK-based international development charities [Christian Aid](#) and [Tearfund](#), both of which concern themselves largely with addressing issues related to global poverty. The project's goal is to convince Christian communities in the UK to register for renewable energy by switching their energy suppliers. The project's organizers will negotiate with suppliers on behalf of interested individuals or churches and provide quotes on the best deal.

It also reflects the growing interest of faith communities around the world in promoting clean energy and combating climate change, and similar organizations and initiatives have cropped up in other places. San Francisco-based [Interfaith Power and Light](#), for example, refers to itself as a "religious response to global warming" and also helps congregations reduce their carbon footprints and adopt renewable energy sources. And on a broader note, many Catholics around the world have embraced Pope Francis' call last year to reduce the use of fossil fuels. But the Big Church Switch may be one of the first initiatives that actually facilitates the transition to renewables by making an organized call for a switch and working out group deals for participants.

"Part of what we're interested in is tackling the root causes of poverty, one of which is climate change," said Tim Gee, campaign strategy lead at Christian Aid. As he pointed out, the effects of climate change have been shown to have a disproportionate impact on the poor. So tackling the problem of climate change is not only an environmental issue, but also a social one.

"Ultimately, the reason [for the project] is that climate change is hitting the world's poorest people hardest," said Ben Niblett, a senior campaigner at Tearfund. "These are the people who did the least to cause it, but they're the people who are feeling it already."

In the United Kingdom, as in many other developed nations, energy supply remains the biggest national source of greenhouse gas emissions, accounting for [more than 30 percent](#) of all the country's emissions in 2014. Making personal changes in their consumption of electricity is one of the biggest ways citizens in the UK can start to tackle the issue of global climate change, Niblett said.

And Gee noted that the climate negotiations at the UN's climate conference in December were another major catalyst for the project. While world leaders hope to keep global temperatures from rising more than 1.5 degrees above their pre-industrial levels, Gee acknowledged that there's still "a significant gap between what governments have acknowledged to be the need of a 1.5-degree world and what has been pledged so far. So what we want to do is to show what needs to happen."

The organizers deliberately chose to launch the campaign on Wednesday, which is an important date for many Christian denominations. Known as Ash Wednesday, the Christian holy day marks the beginning of Lent, the season in the church calendar leading up to Easter. Traditionally, it's a season of self-reflection and self-sacrifice.

"Lent is a time people are looking to give something up, take stock, thinking how do I want to live my life better," Niblett said. "We want to encourage people to think, 'How can I do good with my energy?'"

According to Gee, the project's organizers hope to make an announcement some time around Easter, at the conclusion of Lent, about how many individuals and churches have made the switch so far. But he noted that the project is also about celebrating those who have made the commitment already. Both offices of the Lutheran Church and Quakers in Britain have switched to renewable energy ahead of the campaign's launch. Additionally, the initiative has been endorsed by several notable church leaders, including the Church of England's Bishop of Salisbury, Bishop of Guildford and Bishop of Manchester, among others.

One of the initiative's selling points is that it negotiates an easier and cheaper transition to clean energy than might otherwise be possible for individuals looking to make the switch alone, Niblett said. The initiative has partnered with [The Big Deal](#), a switching site that helps individuals in the UK get better deals on changing their energy provider, and buying groups [2buy2](#) and [Parish Buying](#), to negotiate the best group deal for people who make their energy transition through the Big Church Switch campaign.

"If you live in the UK you can get a better tariff [through Big Church Switch] than you could get for yourself, and that's the power of buying together," Niblett said. There are a number of renewable energy suppliers that participants can use to make the switch, and the energy may come from a variety of renewable sources — mostly wind and solar, according to Niblett.

The initiative may represent a growing national movement toward the adoption of clean energy. Between 2013 and 2014, greenhouse gas emissions from the UK's energy sector dropped by 14 percent, and between 2014 and 2015 the share of renewables in energy generation jumped from 17.6 percent to 23.5 percent.

The organizers of Big Church Switch also hope that their initiative will continue to encourage other communities — not just faith communities — to join the movement.

"We want to show government and businesses that the church is doing this and we want that change," Niblett said. And he later added, "We hope in the U.S. and the UK and all around the

world people will make the switch to renewables. Tearfund can only do that in the UK, but we hope people will find their own ways to do it in every country that they're in."

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/energy-environment/wp/2016/02/10/what-these-christians-are-giving-up-for-lent-fossil-fuels/>

February 11, 2016

The forest is crying

Fighting deforestation in the Congo Basin by giving voice to indigenous people

By Angela K. Evans
Boulder Weekly

"One does not sell the earth upon which the people walk."

The quote is attributed to Crazy Horse in the late 19th century, as he fought to keep the federal government off the land his Sioux ancestors had been living in for generations. A war that centuries of indigenous populations across the globe before and after him have fought, both violently and more often peacefully, from myriad Native American tribes to the people of the Amazon rainforest to the hill tribes in South-East Asia to hunter-gatherer tribes in Africa. Yes, Africa.

Although many consider everyone in Africa to be indigenous with the same ethnicity as their pre-colonial ancestors, there are groups of hunter-gatherers deep in the rainforests of the Congo Basin who are marginalized and underrepresented because of their way of life.

"In Africa, you'll find pygmies, as they are called in the literature, and these are the original inhabitants of the forest," says Samuel Nnah Ndobe, an environmentalist working with the hunter-gatherer Baka populations in his native Cameroon and throughout Central Africa. "They have stayed strong to their culture for ages. They've remained attached to the forest for ages."

And it's these people that are largely feeling the effects of environmental degradation that is a result of international companies' operations in the Congo Basin. With a degree in agriculture engineering, Ndobe collaborates with community and grassroots organizations to document what's happening in the region, i.e., deforestation, mining and wildlife poaching, while also working with local governments and international NGOs on forest issues, specifically "ensuring there is forest governance," he says via Skype from Yaounde. "Ensuring the rights of the people who live in the forest are respected."

As part of that work, Ndobe has been a volunteer advisor for the Boulder-based nonprofit [Global Greengrants Fund](#) for the last decade, helping to connect grassroots organizations and activists on the ground in Central Africa with small grants to fund their efforts.

“He’s an extremely passionate environmentalist and at the same time a really dedicated scholar,” says Terry Odendahl, the executive director at Global Greengrants Fund. “We really value local knowledge... and we know that he knows what’s going on in Central Africa. There’s no way that from Boulder we can have the depth of understanding of environmental and human rights in the region.”

Assuredly, the situation of the Baka people is complicated. Indigenous people make up an estimated 1 percent of the population in Cameroon, but it’s difficult to obtain precise numbers as the groups are largely nomadic and they have never been adequately represented during censuses. Needless to say, they don’t hold much sway when it comes to setting both conservation and economic policy.

As with most colonized countries, the current governmental and legal structures in Cameroon and elsewhere in Africa are adapted from European culture and don’t recognize the rights of indigenous people, nor do they require or even leave room for adequate consultation with the communities still living in the forest. “The pygmies are not recognized. Their whole mode of life is not recognized by the bureaucrats, by central government. Their land rights aren’t recognized,” Ndobe says. “All the land belongs to the state, but who is the state? The state are people sitting in Yaounde, in the capitals, who don’t know the issues that are happening on the ground.”

Furthermore, the indigenous people don’t see the land as something to own but rather a partner in survival, a resource to be used symbiotically but not abused.

“They don’t want to possess [the land],” Ndobe says, “but they want to have access. I was talking to [an older pygmy man] and he said, ‘The forest is crying because of the number of ancient souls that you find there. It is no longer our forest, it has become the forest of orders because we don’t have access.’”

Ndobe first became interested in the indigenous people while working on his final paper for a degree in agricultural economy. “This took me deep into the forests where I was so disappointed by the level of discrimination these people were going through,” he says. “I’ve been very passionate about the issue because of the injustice — the social, the environmental injustices — that I experienced.”

Ndobe is no stranger to discrimination. Present day Cameroon was colonized by both the French and the British, with roughly 20 percent of the population identifying as Anglophone compared to the majority francophone population. Although the two populations remained more or less autonomous for the first decade after independence, the 1972 constitution united the two populations and Ndobe says the Anglophones, like himself, were widely discriminated against.

After spending time with the hunter-gatherers, he started working on forest issues with the Center for Environment and Development and quickly realized that perhaps the largest threat to the Baka people is the ongoing deforestation across the Congo Basin that threatens the very existence of these tribes who depend on biodiversity for their survival.

Ndobe says the level of deforestation in the Congo Basin is low when compared to the larger Amazon rainforest, but his country is the most deforested in the region, and Ndobe expects it to escalate in the near future. Industrial logging is the historic cause of deforestation. As the industry searches out rare wood, forest is fragmented, which makes way for poachers and others to come by road and hunt wildlife, limiting the availability of food for the indigenous people due to national hunting quotas.

Plus, as the area is further fragmented and degraded, the government allows agriculture and other industrial uses on the land. But as the indigenous people are given more of a voice, the deforestation can be curbed. Recently, activists saw a huge victory as the government of Cameroon significantly reduced the size of proposed oil palm operation by New York-based Herakles Farms. The company had plans to turn 170,000 acres into the country's largest oil palm plantation when it began operations in Cameroon in 2009. With funding from the Global Greengrants Fund and help from Ndobe, local activist Nasako Besingi and his grassroots organization, the Struggle to Economize Future Environment, was able to draw the attention of large environmental players.

"The small grant that we could give made his voice heard to the big environment groups like Greenpeace..." Ndobe says. Greenpeace then launched a huge investigation into Herakles Farms, which drew the attention of the president of Cameroon, who in turn reduced Herakles' lease to 20,000 acres while increasing rent 1,400 percent.

Ndobe has also been very active in documenting the Chad-Cameroon Pipeline Project, which was funded by International Finance Group and the World Bank as a new paradigm for sustainable development with environmental and social regulations attached. Although Ndobe fundamentally disagrees with the pipeline model of development and has been outspoken about the project from the very beginning, he is using the international regulations to push for national reform.

"We are building capacity for communities and groups to understand how the international financial institutions function and how they can use their compliance mechanisms to make their voices heard," Ndobe says.

"International policies, in principle, inform the national policies," he continues. "And the national policies should reflect what is happening on the ground. So, if people don't raise their voices, if we don't document what is happening, then it becomes very, very difficult for national policies to shift international policies."

And this is where the situation in Cameroon adds to the global environmental conversation. The issues surrounding the indigenous people in the Congo Basin rainforest are similar to problems happening in other countries, and through his work with Global Greengrants, Ndobe is able to share the challenges and successes of his work with others outside his region.

"The governments [in Central Africa] aren't doing any thing to understand their culture and propose development scenarios that are adapted to these people's culture," he says. "Which I think this is a problem happening all over the world."

February 15, 2016

A Crime Against the People of Flint

By Rev. Dr. Nancy Wilson Global Leader, Metropolitan Community Churches (MCC)
Huffington Post

Last week, a colleague said, "The Flint water crisis is a crime against humanity." I was taken aback. This is a serious charge, but when the [Rev. Jesse Jackson](#) declared that the entire city of Flint was a "crime scene," I thought again. Then, when I learned that officials gave bottled [water to government employees](#) in Flint, more than a year before they admitted that Flint River water was dissolving lead pipes into tap water, how else can it be understood except as a premeditated crime?

I was a pastor in Los Angeles in the 1980s and 1990s when government officials dragged their feet on AIDS medicines and research. I know what it is to lose loved ones due to official foot dragging and the bureaucratic blame game.

Michigan was also once my home. Early in my ministry, I served the Metropolitan Community Church in Detroit, and I helped a small group of people to start their own MCC church in Flint. Today, both MCC congregations in Flint and Detroit are impacted by this catastrophe. We care about what happens to our members, everyone's children, and everybody!

People who live in Flint do not deserve to be poisoned.

Flint is a city that is burdened with a decimated industrial economy, a diminishing tax base, failing schools, and the usual systemic poverty profile for a city with a 60% Black and Hispanic population.

"In 2013, the Flint city council voted [for] ... a new system that would pump water from Lake Huron. But Flint couldn't connect until 2016, so the city, operating under the control of emergency managers appointed by Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder (R), opted to save money by using the Flint River in the meantime," said [Huffington Post](#) senior reporter, Arthur Delaney.

Poor people, people of color and their children, were literally "sold down the river," by those whose greed and callousness made their lives cheap and dispensable. As a minister of the Gospel, I am reminded that Jesus said, "Inasmuch as you did it to the least of these, you did it to me." In effect, they poisoned Jesus, and the children, the little ones, whom Jesus loves, in Flint.

This betrayal of humankind didn't happen overnight.

The [New York Times](#) noted that, by April of 2014, complaints were coming from residents about dirty water, rashes, and illness. The city then issued a press statement saying, "Flint water is safe

to drink." In fact, the acidic polluted river water was dissolving lead pipes, and the lead level in children was surging. Simultaneously, more than once during the summer, city officials urged residents to boil their water due to high bacteria count.

CNN reported that EPA staff tested tap water in homes over a 6-month period. They were supposed to take 100 samples but only took 71; only 69 made it to the report. The other two samples were apparently so high that they would have tipped the whole study into the bracket of actionable levels of lead--and there was no money to take action.

What happened was immoral, criminal, and a human rights violation.

In September of 2015, Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha and other Flint doctors went public with the high levels of lead in the blood of children, but state officials still said the water was safe, and accused the doctors of using lead levels as a "political football" in a blame game against the state.

Days later, the governor was briefed on lead levels, city officials told residents not to drink unfiltered water, and by October 1, the city was hooked back up to Detroit water. By this time, the lead pipe linings were deteriorated, so they still were leaching lead. Finally, the Department of Environmental Quality reported that staff used "inappropriate protocols" for corrosion control.

Besides the water in the lead pipes, the most corrosive element was the profound betrayal of the public trust. These actions and inactions reveal the meanness of our times, meanness towards the poor and vulnerable with callous and, too often, cold calculations.

The mayor who oversaw this was voted out of office in November and replaced by Mayor Karen Weaver. In a few short months, she and others laid out the real extent of the poisoning. In January 2016, Mayor Weaver worked with President Obama to have Flint declared a disaster area, which allowed FEMA to pour in \$15 million to a city that has been a dumping ground for generations.

The situation in Flint is just one of the many tragedies of environmental injustice--and specifically environmental racism, where communities of poor people and people of color are the preferred sites for industrial dumping.

Back In 1992, Flint citizens protested emissions from power plants, cement plants, asphalt plants and other industries. This pollution was only possible after centuries of slavery, Jim Crow, White flight, and Black ghettos dehumanized whole swaths of people. Industry dumped lead-based paints, chemicals, and industrial toxins, and then abandoned their waste sites for the government to clean up. Concentrated pollution has a deeply racial geography.

"[The single greatest determinant](#) of where certain kinds of toxic sources are located, like hazardous waste facilities, is race, and yet [the EPA has] never once made a finding of discrimination, and they very rarely use any of the other tools at their disposal to push states or localities or private actors to change their behavior," said Marianne Engelman Lado, an Earthjustice attorney who is [suing](#) the EPA on behalf of Flint and four other communities whose civil rights complaints have been ignored.

This is an old festering boil on our collective body. The situation in Flint ripped off a putrefying bandage to reveal corruption that is far more than skin deep. Can we save the patient? We are all in toxic shock!

In my tradition, there are many stories of Jesus healing people from lifelong illnesses and even raising people from the dead. I am not arguing that everyone should turn to Jesus, but how about we start with everyone repenting from the sin of polluting our garden, poisoning our own children, and pouring acid into our rivers, streams, lakes and oceans?

Is it too late? Can we stop? I believe the planet can heal, even if the children of Flint do not ever fully recover. From this harm, even Jesus cannot save us.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rev-dr-nancy-wilson/flint-and-lead-poisoning-_b_9221178.html

February 16, 2016

Mexican Farmers Praise Pope Francis for Continued Advocacy of Environmental Protection and Climate Change Reform

As small farmers in Mexico fight to protect biodiversity and resist pesticides, they have found support in a higher power

By Karen Lo
The Daily Meal

‘We thank you for your courage and your commitment to the world’s poorest,’ the farming commission wrote, ‘and we accept your challenge to approach these complex crises by seeking solutions that not only protect nature, but also combat poverty and restore dignity to the excluded.’

In an open letter to Pope Francis, 50 farming and environmental groups thanked the Pontiff for his [ongoing support for sustainable agriculture and biodiversity](#) in the face of powerful special interest groups that have downplayed agricultural concerns, like the need to promote greater understanding of climate change.

In the bold style for which the Pope has come to be known, the Catholic leader has said previously that the Earth’s inhabitants, [particularly the wealthy, would one day be judged by God](#) on whether or not “they really tried to provide for Him in every person, and if they did what they could to preserve the environment so that it could produce this food.”

In his encyclical letter “On Care for Our Common Home,” Pope Francis addressed the urgency of climate change, telling Catholics, “This sister [the Earth] now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her.” In a message given on World Environment Day in 2013, the Pope also compared food waste to [“stealing from the table of the poor and the hungry.”](#)

Once again, Pope Francis has been asked to speak out on behalf of the powerless, with the coalition of farmers asking him for his “continued support in protecting regenerative organic food systems like the milpa, and the rights of ‘Every campesino...to possess a reasonable allotment of land where he can establish his home, work for subsistence of his family and a secure life.’”

[The letter continues](#), “We share your conviction that everything in the world is connected, and that to seek ‘only a technical remedy to each environmental problem which comes up is to separate what is in reality interconnected and to mask the true and deepest problems of the global system.’

“As world leaders prepare to gather here in Mexico for the COP13 Convention On Biodiversity in December, we ask you to continue to speak out about the role that industrial agriculture has played in destroying our soil, health and biodiversity, even as it has failed to alleviate world hunger.

“There is a solution to food insecurity, climate change and biodiversity loss. We must opt for regenerative organic agriculture. The urgency of this problem demands that we join forces and work together to achieve change. We thank you for your courage and your commitment to the world’s poorest, and we accept your challenge to approach these complex crises by seeking solutions that not only protect nature, but also combat poverty and restore dignity to the excluded.”

<http://www.thedailymeal.com/eat/mexican-farmers-praise-pope-francis-continued-advocacy-environmental-protection-and-climate/021616>

February 16, 2016

Climate Change And Environmental Justice

By Charlie Shelton & Frank Stasio
WUNC – North Carolina Public Radio

A conversation with Wake Forest University School of Divinity professor Elizabeth O’Donnell Gandolfo, and Miles Silman, professor of biology at Wake Forest University about climate change

Listen here:

<http://wunc.org/post/climate-change-and-environmental-justice#stream/0>

Climate change was a prominent global topic in 2015, with both the Paris climate talks and the Pope’s encyclical stirring up conversation about the future of the planet.

But questions remain about what role businesses and community institutions should play in the ongoing effort. Some say that the Pope's encyclical speaks to a need for religious leaders to step up in the movement, while others say that the business community needs to take the lead.

The Wake Forest University School of Divinity hosts a panel discussion at the Wake Forest University Charlotte Center in Charlotte at 7 p.m. tonight called "[Our Common Home: the Pope's Encyclical, Climate Science, and Our Clean Energy Future](#)." Entrepreneurs, biologists and scholars will examine many aspects of climate change.

Host Frank Stasio previews the conversation with two of the panelists: Wake Forest University School of Divinity professor [Elizabeth O'Donnell Gandolfo](#), and [Miles Silman](#), professor of biology at Wake Forest University.

The music in this segment was provided by [Kelcey Ledbetter](#). When she isn't leading Afro punk band [Dalton Village](#), her music takes a turn toward a stripped-down, pop R&B aesthetic. Her acoustic guitar provides the rhythm while her versatile voice drives her song's melodies.

<http://wunc.org/post/climate-change-and-environmental-justice#stream/0>

February 17, 2016

Cardinal Turkson speaks on environment, Laudato Si'

Vatican Radio

Mankind is called to participate in "ongoing creation and ongoing incarnation" rather than in the "domination and devastation" of our planet. That's the message at the heart of a talk given Wednesday in the U.S. by Cardinal Peter Turkson, President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace.

Cardinal Turkson was addressing a conference entitled "Catholics, Capitalism and Climate" at Molloy College on Long Island, New York focusing on Pope Francis' historic encyclical letter, "Laudato Si': On Care for our Common Home."

The Cardinal did not shy away from topics concerning the United States like capitalism and legal challenges to the implementation of the Clean Power Plan to reduce emissions from power plants: "Let me only comment that greenhouse gas pollution already affects every man, woman, and child on the planet now, and more so in future generations. Law, as Thomas Aquinas said long ago, must always be oriented to the common good."

"Today, irresponsible financial and commercial practices are the offenses that we now tolerate, because of the interests in the profits and lifestyle of excessive consumerism that they promote." By contrast, "a healthy economy with free and fair markets climaxes in the role of business as a vocation to care for our common home." Cardinal Turkson ends with a note of hope: the

Encyclical affirms that “All is not lost. Human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start”

Below, please find the full text of Cardinal Turkson’s remarks:

Your Excellency Bishop William Murphy, President Drew Bogner, Vice President Edward Thompson, dear Faculty, Staff, Students and Friends:

Introduction

Warm greetings to you from the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, where we miss our former under-secretary (1980–1987) who is now your Bishop. The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace contributed significantly to the writing and launch of *Laudato si’*. Thank you for the invitation to introduce the Encyclical, and then to reflect on “Catholics, Capitalism and Climate” with the help of Fr James Martin as moderator and three distinguished panellists Meghan Clark, R.R. Reno, and Erin Lothes.

It is gratifying to address faculty, staff, students and friends of Molloy College. It is fitting that this audience show a diversity of ages and situations in the world, for regarding today’s topic, everyone is involved. This very important encyclical touches on the timely issue of climate, as well as fundamental issues of faith, economy, development, progress and lifestyle.

Pope Francis himself offers us a quick review of the core message. Let us watch his short video now – it takes just a minute and a half!

Let me please suggest the take-aways, to keep in mind throughout today’s discussions:

Our nature is created by God and surrounded by the gifts of creation

Our failures are that we over-consume and that we do not share the gifts of creation

This has dire consequences for the poor and the planet

And so it is urgent that we change our sense of progress, our management of the economy, and our style of life.

Such change is going to require major shifts in our thinking and commitments – indeed, a conversion of groups and institutions at every level, from local communities to global humanity.

So join me, please, in appreciating the inspiration of *Laudato si’*. I. As Catholics, how should we understand our common heritage, this freely given gift of creation? II. What should care mean? After that, III. under climate, we can turn our attention to the United States and, more specifically, to Long Island and the New York City area. Then, IV, we can raise some questions about capitalism. And we conclude, as does the Pope’s video, with caring for our common home.

I. Catholics and Creation

The Catholic doctrine of creation does not regard the world as an accident. Our planet, indeed the universe, is an intentional act of God that is provided to human beings as a gift. Creation is not just passing from nothing to many things, a lot of “stuff” getting made. Rather, creation is the first step in the great vocation of man: creation, incarnation, redemption.

Humanity is not an afterthought. God did not have two agendas: first, the world and then, humanity. Man and woman are made in the image and likeness of God, they are an intrinsic part of the universe, and their vocation is “to till and to keep” it all. But tilling and keeping cannot include domination and devastation -- these make a mockery of dignity and respect. We are called to participate in ongoing creation and ongoing incarnation.

In this light, we should find it easy to understand the concerns of Pope Francis for the poor and for nature. He is not offering worldly advice on how to be prudent and practical, although his message has immense practical consequences. Rather, he is reminding us of the demands of our vocation to participate in the divine – in the work of God who does not hide his face from any aspect of creation, poor or rich, nature or human.

Here is how *Laudato si'* presents these ideas.

Laudato si' recounts the creation story and moves directly to its moral dimension. The second chapter of the encyclical offers a comprehensive view of the gift of creation, based on the Judeo-Christian tradition. With this Pope Francis articulates the “tremendous responsibility” (§90) of humankind for creation, the intimate connection among all creatures and the fact that “the natural environment is a collective good, the patrimony of all humanity and the responsibility of everyone” (§95). The collective good and the responsibility of all underpin the insistent message about the moral dimension of how we treat nature.

But the relationship with nature does not stand alone; it is intertwined with other dimensions. In the Bible, “the God who liberates and saves is the same God who created the universe, and these two divine ways of acting are intimately and inseparably connected” (§73). The story of creation is central for reflecting on the relationship between human beings and other creatures. “These accounts suggest that human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself. According to the Bible, these three vital relationships have been broken, both outwardly and within us. This rupture is sin” (§66). Sin breaks the equilibrium of all creation.

These are strong words. The Holy Father is explicit that the human relationship with nature can be regarded at times as sinful. He wishes to put an end to that. Thus, even if “we Christians have at times incorrectly interpreted the Scriptures, nowadays we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God’s image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures” (§67). Human beings have the responsibility to “‘till and keep’ the garden of the world (cf. Gen 2:15)” (§67), knowing that “the ultimate purpose of other creatures is not to be found in us. Rather, all creatures are moving forward, with us and through us, towards a common point of arrival, which is God” (§83).

Where does this leave us? Dominion must not be absolute domination. Other creatures have their own dignity and purpose. As we search for the right balance, we must avoid two pitfalls. One would be to regard everything as fundamentally the same and “deprive human beings of their unique worth and the tremendous responsibility it entails”. The other would be to fall prey to “a divinization of the earth which would prevent us from working on it and protecting it in its fragility” (§90).

This brings Pope Francis to certain virtues and attitudes that are most appropriate to our relationship with creation. Being so connected to all living things, we must accept that “every act of cruelty towards any creature is ‘contrary to human dignity’” (§92). Moreover, “a sense of deep communion with the rest of nature cannot be real if our hearts lack tenderness, compassion and concern for our fellow human beings” (§91). What is needed is the awareness of a universal communion: “[All are] called into being by the one Father. All of us are linked by unseen bonds and together form a kind of universal family, a sublime communion which fills us with a sacred, affectionate and humble respect” (§89).

II. Catholics and Care

Let us turn now from creation to care for creation, and care for our common home.

A great innovation of Pope Francis is that he advocates something more than stewardship. In *Laudato si'* he uses the word “steward” only twice, and instead speaks about care. It is in the title, “Care for our Common Home,” and is repeated dozens of times.

Care goes further than “stewardship”. Good stewards take responsibility and fulfil their obligations to manage and to render an account. But one can be a good steward without feeling connected. If one cares, however, one is connected. To care is to allow oneself to be affected by another, so much so that one’s path and priorities change. Good parents know this. They care about their children; they care for their children, so much so that parents will sacrifice enormously—even their lives—to ensure the safety and flourishing of their children. With caring, the hard line between self and other softens, blurs, even disappears.

Pope Francis proposes that we think of our relationship with the world and with all people in terms of caring. As Jesus does when he calls himself the Good Shepherd (Jn 10:11-15). Caring for our common home requires, as Pope Francis says, not just an economic and technological revolution, but also a cultural and spiritual revolution—a profoundly different way of living the relationship between people and the environment, a new way of ordering the global economy.

To speak in this way locates *Laudato si'* in the great tradition of Catholic Social Teaching. Pope Leo XIII responded to the *res novae* or “new things” of his time, when the industrial economy was only a century old and posed many dilemmas, especially for workers and families. So too, Pope Francis is responding to the “new things” of our day, when a post-industrial, globalized economy is posing many dilemmas for humanity and for the planet.

The key principles of our Catholic Social Teaching ground the messages of *Laudato si'*:

- The world’s economy must meet the true needs of people for their survival and integral human flourishing. This is a matter of human dignity and of the common good. We must make objective moral judgments in this regard: “Since the market tends to promote extreme consumerism in an effort to sell its products,” he says, “people can easily get caught up in a whirlwind of needless buying and spending... When people become self-centred and self-enclosed, their greed increases. The emptier a person’s heart is, the more he or she needs things to buy, own and consume.” (§§203, 204)

- How do technologies contribute to the common good? The Encyclical gratefully acknowledges the tremendous contribution of technologies to the improvement of living conditions. Yet it also warns about the misuse of technology, especially when it gives “those with the knowledge, and especially the economic resources to use them, an impressive dominance over the whole of humanity and the entire world” (§104). Moreover, markets alone “cannot guarantee integral human development and social inclusion” (§109).
- Solidarity with all, especially the marginalized and the poor, is a hallmark of our Holy Father’s papacy, and it marks the Encyclical as well. The text speaks with great compassion of dispossession and devastation suffered disproportionately by the poor, vulnerable and unable to protect themselves or escape. Pope Francis embraces all people. “Let us not only keep the poor of the future in mind, but also today’s poor, whose life on this earth is brief and who cannot keep on waiting” (§162).
- Solidarity must also apply between generations: “we can no longer speak of sustainable development apart from intergenerational solidarity” (§159). The Pope’s key question for humanity is put in those very terms: “What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?” (§160).
- Human dignity underpins the extensive treatment of “The need to protect employment” (§124-29). Work is a noble and necessary vocation: “Work is a necessity, part of the meaning of life on this earth, a path to growth, human development and personal fulfilment” (§128). Work is how human dignity unfolds while earning one’s daily bread, feeding one’s family, and accessing the basic material conditions needed for flourishing every day. Further, it should be the setting for rich personal growth, where many aspects of life enter into play: creativity, planning for the future, developing our talents, living out our values, relating to others, giving glory to God.

In the reality of today’s global society, it is essential that “we continue to prioritize the goal of access to steady employment for everyone,” no matter the limited interests of business and economic reasoning that excludes the human and social costs (§127). It is wrong when some businesses simply replace workers with machines on the basis of efficiency and utility, viewing human beings as interchangeable with machines as mere factors of production. Clearly, the obsession is to gain still more profit, but at the cost of less and less decent work. Do individuals thrive from being unemployed or precariously hired? Of course not. Does society benefit from unemployment? Of course not. In fact, we everywhere witness far too many people who cannot find worthwhile and fulfilling work. We should not be surprised when unscrupulous people with demented fantasies recruit such idle individuals into criminality and violence.

- God has exercised subsidiarity by entrusting the earth to humans to keep, till and care for it; this makes human beings co-creators with God. Work should be inspired by the same attitude. If work is organized properly and if workers are given proper resources and training, their activity can contribute to their fulfilment as human beings, not just meet their material needs. It can uphold the full human dignity, the integral human development, of workers. The principle of subsidiarity is a mirror of God’s relationship to humanity.

- Proper practices of stewardship keep the natural environment and of human systems sustainable. The problem, Pope Francis notes clearly, is that the logic of competition promotes short-termism, which leads to financial failure and devastation of the environment. “We need to reject a magical conception of the market, which would suggest that problems can be solved simply by an increase in the profits of companies or individuals” (§190).

The Holy Father is not anti-business. But what he decries is an obsession with profit and the deification of the market. Profit has its role in sustaining an enterprise and allowing it to improve and innovate. Pope Francis calls upon business to lead by harnessing its creativity to solve pressing human needs. “More diversified and innovative forms of production which impact less on the environment can prove very profitable (§191) as well as sustainable.

- God is the Creator of all—the entirety of creation, all people, all goods. Justice requires that the goods of creation be distributed fairly. This has the status of a moral obligation, even a commandment, for Pope Francis. “Working for a just distribution of the fruits of the earth and human labour is not mere philanthropy,” he said last July in Bolivia. “It is a moral obligation. For Christians, the responsibility is even greater: it is a commandment. It is about giving to the poor and to peoples what is theirs by right. The universal destination of goods is not a figure of speech found in the Church’s social teaching. It is a reality prior to private property. Property, especially when it affects natural resources, must always serve the needs of peoples.”

- Justice must also reign when the burden of environmental rehabilitation is taken up. Those who have contributed most to greenhouse gas emissions and have benefitted most from the industrial period, should now take the lead and contribute more to the solution than those whose standard of living is just beginning to rise. As a first step, they must be ever more honest about so-called externalities or spillover effects, since finally nothing falls outside of the accounts of our one shared common household.

In the light of Creation and our care for it, in the light of Catholic social teaching, let us now consider how the United States is responding to the great challenge of climate.

III. Climate and the U.S.A.

On 31 March 2015, the United States submitted its intended nationally determined contribution (INDC) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). It expressed its strong commitment “to reducing greenhouse gas pollution.” It set “an economy-wide target of reducing its greenhouse gas emissions by 26-28 per cent below its 2005 level in 2025, and [it intends] to make best efforts to reduce its emissions by 28%.” It called the target “fair and ambitious”.

When Pope Francis arrived in the United States on 23 September 2015, his first public words – delivered at the White House – included the following: “Mr. President, I find it encouraging that you are proposing an initiative for reducing air pollution. Accepting the urgency, it seems clear to me also that climate change is a problem which can no longer be left to our future generation. When it comes to the care of our common home, we are living at a critical moment of history.

We still have time to make the change needed to bring about a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change.”

Meanwhile in December 2015, the nations of the world signed the Paris Agreement, promising to peak global greenhouse gas emissions as soon as possible, with the goal of reaching net-zero emissions in the second half of the century. This goal requires, as Pope Francis urged in *Laudato si'*, a “new and universal solidarity”. The United States, as one of the world’s largest carbon emitters – especially in per capita terms – has a special responsibility to act. The U.S. exercised leadership in the run-up to Paris, as evidenced by bilateral agreements with both India and China. Building on its own 26-28 percent commitment, leadership was also shown during the negotiations at COP21. At the same time, Pope Francis realistically warned that economic and other special interests can “easily end up trumping the common good and manipulating information so that their own plans will not be affected.” (LS § 54).

I understand that the Supreme Court has stayed implementation of the administration’s Clean Power Plan to reduce emissions from power plants. Let me only comment that greenhouse gas pollution already affects every man, woman, and child on the planet now, and more so in future generations. Law, as Thomas Aquinas said long ago, must always be oriented to the common good. I know that the great majority of Americans fully supports plans to reduce emissions and protect our common home. Let’s make sure that the dynamic set in motion by COP21 in Paris is not derailed.

At the beginning of this month, Abp. Thomas Wenski, head of the Bishops’ Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, wrote to U.S. Senators as follows:

The U.S. bishops have long spoken out on the importance of prudent action to address the growing impact of global climate change. In the past, we expressed support for a national carbon standard and offered moral principles to guide the EPA and states as they take steps to reduce carbon pollution. Among these principles are care for human life and all of creation, social and economic justice (including equitable distribution of costs and assistance to help mitigate impacts on affected workers), and a priority for the poor and vulnerable.

By now (mid-Feb 2016), over 160 parties have produced their own INDCs to reduce emissions. Here at Molloy College, I am happy to know that you are committed to “hold important discussions on issues of faith and society”. No facet of our world is too great or too small, too lofty or too plain, for us to take it on, to pray over it, and to bring it into constructive dialogue with others.

So I hope you will familiarize yourself with the U.S.’s INDC – it’s only 4 pages – and reflect on how the entire college community can follow what happens to it and indeed push for even more “fair and ambitious” targets to avoid or reverse environmental degradation and harm to all God’s people. What are the social and natural environment challenges on this campus, in its neighbourhood, on Long Island and the whole New York City region? How can you bring dialogue, with honesty and a real commitment to action, to bear on these challenges? How will you respond to the plea of Pope Francis: “That we may take good care of creation – a gift freely given– cultivating and protecting it for future generations.” A first impression might be that the

Pope is talking about the Amazon rainforest or about desertification in Africa and Asia – but now realize that *Laudato si'* is also about the endangered shorelines of Long Island.

IV. Capitalism

We turn now to the “Capitalism” in today’s title, “Catholics, Capitalism and Climate”. In fact, neither *Evangelii Gaudium* nor *Laudato si'* mentions capitalism. Instead, Pope Francis joins Blessed Paul VI, St John Paul II and Pope emeritus Benedict XVI in asking deeply, “What is development? What is progress?” In ch. III of *Laudato si'*, Pope Francis critiques that short-sighted confidence in technology and finance which he sums up under the term “technocracy”.

Allow me to add a great national historical voice. Marking Presidents’ Day two days ago at Seton Hall University, I quoted some very moving words of President Lincoln’s in his second inaugural address (4 March 1865). Recalling the beginning of his first term in 1861, he said that “One-eighth of the whole population were coloured slaves” from the sweat of whose faces some wrought “their bread”. Lincoln supposed that American slavery was “one of those offenses” which God “wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South this terrible war as the woe due to those by whom the offense came.” Now everyone hopes and prays “that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman’s two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword,” then still, “the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.”

A wise American professor of law helped me to draw out an illuminating analogy and make Lincoln’s terrible words contemporary.

150 years ago, slavery, and the political “interest” that came from its profits, represented a profound “offense”. Today, irresponsible financial and commercial practices are the offenses that we now tolerate, because of the interests in the profits and lifestyle of excessive consumerism that they promote. These Pope Francis sums up as the dominant technocratic paradigm.

150 years ago, failure to provide a “fundamental and astounding” solution to slavery would lead inexorably, through the justice embedded by God in the nature of things, to the awful bloody cataclysm of the Civil War. Today, we must discover the “fundamental and astounding” steps we need to take to address global warming, environmental and social degradation, or else face cataclysms like the more frequent and higher coastal floods that are predicted here in New York.

Laudato si' does comment on various ways in which business can hurt people and the environment. A key passage, for instance, states that it is naïve to expect markets to solve all problems of poverty; and as was mentioned above, “by itself the market cannot guarantee integral human development and social inclusion” (§109). By contrast, a healthy economy with free and fair markets climaxes in the role of business as a vocation to care for our common home.

V. Conclusion

The core social message of Pope Francis is that humanity is a single family, and we all share a common home to care for. In that home entrusted to us by the Creator, we must not repudiate our Father's love by telling our sisters to scavenge for food and clothing in garbage dumps. We must not repudiate our Father's love by letting our brothers lead unfulfilling lives while machines do most of the work. In his brief February video, the Pope pleads – and prays! – for us to “take good care of creation – a gift freely given– cultivating and protecting it for future generations.”

Laudato si' welcomes the environmental awareness growing world-wide, along with concern for the damage that is being done. And in spite of the enormous offenses as decried by Lincoln, the Pope keeps a hopeful outlook on the possibility of reversing the trend: “Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home... Men and women are still capable of intervening positively... All is not lost. Human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start” (§§ 13, 58, 205).

http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2016/02/17/cardinal_turkson_speaks_on_environment_laudo_si%E2%80%99/1209341

February 23, 2016

Aboriginal activist fears B.C. dam project will destroy sacred land

Helen Knott hopes to halt construction of the BC Hydro Site C dam project, but B.C. Energy Minister Bill Bennett says it's too late.

By Joanna Smith, Ottawa Bureau reporter
The Star

OTTAWA—Helen Knott, 28, believes the stories of her people are alive in the Peace River valley of northeastern British Columbia and fears they will be lost in the flood of a \$8.8-billion hydroelectric dam project.

“When I think about the valley, I think about stories,” Knott said as she described the 107 kilometres of land the project would flood, destroying farmland, sacred burial grounds, as well as areas Treaty 8 First Nations use for hunting, fishing, gathering medicines and other cultural reasons.

They often gather to tell those stories around the fire at the Rocky Mountain Fort, a protest camp Knott and others — mostly young indigenous women — set up Dec. 31 to block the clearing of land to prepare for further construction of the BC Hydro Site C dam project.

“I see it and I feel it as a right to identity, that ability to tell those stories, that ability to connect with those lands and access the blood memories that exists, that would surface by being within that territory,” Knott, a social worker and community activist from Prophet River First Nation, B.C., said recently during a visit to Ottawa.

It is a way of viewing the world — and asserting rights within it — that is hard to fit within the bureaucratic box of environmental assessment processes, judicial reviews, circumscribed consultations with Aboriginal Peoples and the promise of 10,000 new jobs brought into the area.

Yet this view is what pushed Knott to set up the camp and become, quite literally, possibly the last thing standing between her land and the BC Hydro project.

And she has a question for Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, whose government she and local landowners argue could intervene to halt the project in a number of ways, including by revoking federal permits.

“Where are you now?” Knott said.

The previous Conservative government gave approval to the project, as did B.C., in October 2014 following a federal-provincial joint review, concluding the environmental and other impacts the Site C dam would have were justified under the circumstances.

The new Environment Minister, Catherine McKenna, said Tuesday the project was already underway, but BC Hydro must meet requirements laid out by the environmental assessment.

“I have been and will continue to be engaged in discussions with indigenous leaders on how we can work together to ensure better consultation, environmental assessment and natural resource development,” McKenna said in the House of Commons during question period.

Meanwhile, Knott and the small group, allied with nearby farmers and other landowners whose homes and lifestyles are also at stake, could be cleared out in the near future if a British Columbia Supreme Court judge grants BC Hydro, a provincial Crown corporation, an injunction to do so.

The hearing began Monday.

“We took this step because we have an obligation to our customers to keep the project on-schedule and on-budget,” BC Hydro spokesman Craig Fitzsimmons wrote in an emailed statement Tuesday, adding he would not discuss further details while the matter is before the court.

B.C. Premier Christy Clark said last month that she wanted to push the Site C dam project “past the point of no return.”

That is exactly what Rob Botterell, the lawyer representing the First Nations and area landowners, fears will happen, noting BC Hydro plans to continue construction as challenges make their way through the courts.

“We are confident we are ultimately going to win, but that will be too late,” Botterell said during his visit to Ottawa with Knott last week.

B.C. Energy Minister Bill Bennett said the project already went through.

“We’re already past the point of no return,” Bennett said in an interview Tuesday, adding BC Hydro has already awarded \$2.1 billion in contracts and will award another \$1 billion by the end of the year.

“We’re well beyond a place where it would make any sense to consider not building the project,” he said, adding the province has done its due diligence and he does not expect the court to rule against the Site C dam.

“We are very confident we have done things right,” he said.

<http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2016/02/23/aboriginal-activist-fears-bc-dam-project-will-destroy-sacred-land.html>

February 24, 2016

Eminent climate change scientist courts religion

Researcher Veerabhadran Ramanathan attempts to galvanize global action on climate change

By Joshua Emerson Smith
San Diego Union-Tribune

“The worst consequences of climate change will be experienced by the poorest 3 billion (people), largely living in villages, who had nothing to do with this.”

As Veerabhadran Ramanathan makes this prediction, Pacific waves shimmer through the window of his office at UC San Diego’s Scripps Institution of Oceanography in La Jolla.

He speaks softly but with conviction: “Not 100 years from now. Not 50 years from now. Ten to 15 years from now, they’re going to see major disasters.”

This ethical quandary haunts Ramanathan. The 71-year-old has garnered international acclaim pioneering climate research, but he believes his most important work lays ahead — and that he must act urgently.

He recently embarked on a highly unusual journey to court religious leaders from around the globe in an effort to reach audiences apathetic or dismissive of concerns linked to a warming planet. To galvanize the public, his campaign ventures into the ambiguous space between hard facts and personal advocacy — all while attempting to marry the unlikely bedfellows of religion and science.

Undisputed are Ramanathan’s credentials.

Early in his career, he made the shocking discovery that carbon isn't the only human-produced greenhouse gas. And there's his groundbreaking project with drones that has documented how noxious clouds of pollutants travel across the world, further highlighting climate change as an international issue. Later in his career, he advised Gov. Jerry Brown, federal officials and the United Nations on global warming.

"Ram has an incredible ability to explain very complicated scientific topics in very simple terms," Brown told The San Diego Union-Tribune.

By most standards, Ramanathan could retire in comfort and prestige. He earns a base salary of about \$250,000 a year, drives an electric car and lives with his wife in a hillside home covered with solar panels.

But in recent years, he has experienced something of a crisis of meaning. He has viewed his professional accomplishments, and those of his fellow climate scientists, as failing to adequately inspire a global transition away from fossil fuels.

Most of all, he fears for many of the world's poorest people, whom he worries will likely become climate refugees of historic proportions as flooding, prolonged drought and extreme wildfires ravage their resources.

The idea of reaching out to faith leaders came to Ramanathan after he was invited more than a decade ago to join the Vatican's Pontifical Academy of Sciences. Coming to understand organized religion's power to influence the masses, he has personally reached out to — and met — Pope Francis, top Hindu guru Mātā Amṛtānandamayī Devī and the Dalai Lama, the Tibetan Buddhist who won the Nobel Peace Prize. The latest interaction was a meeting with the Dalai Lama this month in Minnesota.

Ultimately, Ramanathan envisions convening an interfaith meeting on climate change, to be held at the Vatican within a few years. But first, he's attempting to court Christian leaders from the West for a future summit in Washington, D.C.

He recognizes that these efforts are not without pitfalls but said he's generated a lot of support from colleagues and other professionals so far.

"When I started on this three years ago, I expected to be mugged when I walked in the hallway (at Scripps)," he said. "And I'm so surprised no one has come and said, 'Hey, you're taking us on a dangerous path.' In fact, I'm besieged by people who want me to talk about this."

Still, his strategy could backfire as he continues trying to engage groups traditionally more skeptical of human-caused global warming.

"There's the danger that how evangelicals feel toward climate science is hardened by efforts to pull on their moral heartstrings," said Tommy Givens, a professor of Christian ethics at the Pasadena-based Fuller Theological Seminary.

“We don’t like it when we’re made to feel like we’re an interest group that people need to pump up their own project,” he added.

As Ramanathan has waded deeper into the waters of politics and advocacy, he has made a number of wrong turns, learning the hard way how to navigate the media, lawmakers and even fellow scientists.

He’s become “more sophisticated about messaging,” said David Victor, a professor of global politics at UC San Diego who has written a number of opinion articles with Ramanathan for The New York Times and Foreign Affairs magazine.

“That’s the single biggest shift that I’ve seen,” Victor said. “He’s much more attentive to how different communities can see the same set of words and read something different, especially people who are opposed to your message.”

Ramanathan’s increasing savvy dovetailed nicely with what he calls the “biggest moment” of his career. In the final days of a workshop on environmental sustainability at the Vatican in 2014, he found himself talking to Pope Francis in a parking lot.

With just a few moments to make his point, Ramanathan told the pontiff that the world’s poorest contribute the least to climate change but will suffer the most. The following year, the pope delivered an encyclical that, among many things, called for major lifestyle changes to combat global warming and highlighted the plight of the poor.

“I don’t know of anyone else in the climate community who had that opportunity to communicate climate science because of access through the pontifical council,” said Marcia McNutt, editor in chief at the journal Science and president-elect of the National Academy of Sciences. “One might say this was an unheard-of opportunity to communicate climate science to the Vatican.”

Perhaps not surprisingly, Ramanathan denies being an activist, a label the scientific community seems to abhor. But he’s not cagey about his plans. While he said he routinely turns down community speaking events and refuses to tell people how to live, he’s open about his efforts to recruit others to do as much.

“It’s become a moral, ethical issue,” he said. “As a scientist, I have no business talking about that. So I need to inform faith leaders so that this is taught in every church, every synagogue, every temple, every mosque.”

Veerabhadran Ramanathan: A timeline

1944: Born in Madras, India (now known as Chennai). At the age of 11, he moves with his family to Bangalore.

1960: Finishes high school as the Sino-Indian War broke out. Inspired by a patriotic call for combat engineers, he enrolls in a university program to learn the required skills.

1969: Graduates with a master's in engineering from the Indian Institute in Science.

1974: Receives a Ph.D. in planetary atmospheres from the State University of New York at Stony Brook. He immediately goes to work for NASA studying ozone depletion.

1975: Discovers that chlorofluorocarbons or CFCs — gases that had been only associated with the destruction of the ozone layer — were also powerful drivers of the greenhouse effect. For nearly 100 years, scientists believed carbon dioxide was only human-produced greenhouse gas.

1976-86: Works for the National Center for Atmospheric Research located in Boulder, Colo., developing cutting-edge climate models.

1986-90: Teaches and researches climate science at the University of Chicago. By this time, he had predicts that global warming would likely have catastrophic impacts.

1990: Joins Scripps Institution of Oceanography at UC San Diego. He brings with him The Center for Clouds, Chemistry and Climate funded with a \$20 million grant from the National Science Foundation.

1999: Publishes his first major paper on Atmospheric Brown Clouds, toxic plumes of climate pollution hanging over large swaths of Asia. The clouds, large enough to cover the continental United States, are also believed to alter critical monsoon patterns necessary for subsistence farming, as well as contribute to glacial melt.

2004: Pope John Paul II invites Ramanathan to join the Pontifical Academy of Sciences. Over the next decade, he would attend and convene numerous conferences on climate and the environment at the Vatican.

2007: Helps craft a landmark United Nations report on global warming as a member of Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. The report calls the evidence that the planet is warming “unequivocal.”

2009: Writes the first of numerous mainstream articles calling for action to curb short-lived climate pollutants found in the brown clouds. Motivated by his writing, then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton launches the Climate and Clean Air Coalition, which today has more than 50 member nations.

2014: Meets with Pope Francis in the parking lot of the Vatican and used the opportunity to tell the pontiff that 3 billion of the world's poorest people will suffer the worst consequences of climate change.

2015: Attends the United Nations climate talks in Paris as a science adviser to the pope's delegation. The pledges to reduce reliance on fossil fuels agreed to by nations at the summit have been widely hailed as a turning point in efforts to curb global warming.

A desire to succeed

Ramanathan grew up in India with a father who worked as a traveling salesman for Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co. His family moved around a lot, but one constant were his father's brochures filled with pictures of 1950s-era cars.

At the time, the United States was seen as the "land of milk and honey," he said. "It shocks people because they think I came to America for doing science, pursuing higher education. No, I just wanted to own an Impala car."

His family ended up in the southern Indian city of Bangalore, where he attended an English-speaking high school. Used to communicating in his native language of Tamil, he did poorly but cultivated a deep sense of self-reliance.

"I didn't understand a word of what these guys were saying, so I lost the habit of listening to my teachers," he said.

As Ramanathan finished high school, the Sino-Indian War broke out. Like many, he responded to the Indian government's patriotic call for young men to become combat engineers. By 1965, he had graduated with a degree in engineering, but the war was over.

After about two years spent working on refrigerators, Ramanathan grew bored. Despite making a robust \$14 a month, he quit to go back to school.

In 1969, he graduated with a master's degree and his father tried to get him a job with Goodyear in the United States. When the deal fell through, Ramanathan scrambled to realize his dream of going to America.

"I think I finally discovered what I was good at: research, generating knowledge," he said.

By the next year, Ramanathan was admitted to the State University of New York at Stony Brook (now Stony Brook University) on Long Island. He entered as an engineering student, but immediately transitioned to atmospheric sciences. In particular, he studied greenhouse-gas models for Mars and Venus.

By 1974, he had earned his Ph.D. and was working at NASA Langley Research Center in Hampton, Va., studying the effects of Earth's ozone depletion.

While there, Ramanathan stumbled on research about how chlorofluorocarbons, or CFCs, had eaten away at the ozone layer. The research caught his eye because of his scientific expertise — and because he had worked on refrigerators in India that leaked the chemical coolant.

Laboring at night after his regular NASA work, the 30-year-old developed a theory within a few months that these complex molecules were potent contributors to the greenhouse effect. Specifically, he found that a ton of CFCs trapped more heat than 10,000 tons of carbon dioxide.

In 1975, this was a startling claim. For nearly 100 years, the world community had agreed that the only greenhouse gas to worry about in terms of human activity was carbon dioxide.

Reputable scientists called Ramanathan's finding "dangerous, wrong and idiotic," he recalled. "That paper was a defining moment. Until then, I was an unknown, obscure guy from India."

Eventually, his theory became accepted. His discovery led to subsequent identification of other human-produced greenhouse gases.

During the next decade, Ramanathan helped develop cutting-edge climate models for the prestigious National Center for Atmospheric Research in Boulder, Colo. Then he spent about four years at the University of Chicago teaching and conducting climate research.

By the mid-1980s, he had publicly predicted that a warming planet would become one of the greatest threats to humanity. Around this time, he had a telling experience with the politics of making such assertions.

He remembers that on a radio talk show, he was introduced as a "spice-eating scientist" who had come to "dismantle the American economy." The accusation caught him off-guard.

"I was really livid," he said. "This is something I cannot control: If somebody says something like that, that charges me to be even more vocal."

Similarly, an unwitting Ramanathan remembered speaking before Congress a few years later during a series of landmark hearings on global warming. Those sessions included then-Sen. Al Gore and NASA climatologist James Hansen, who made headlines when he said it was 99 percent certain that humans were causing global warming.

"I was being invited by Republicans to testify because I was talking about uncertainties," Ramanathan said. "The public understood uncertainty means errors. It took me some time to catch on to that."

In the early 1990s, he moved to Scripps.

With about \$20 million from the National Science Foundation, he launched research into atmospheric brown clouds. In the course of a few years, the project grew to include six aircraft and roughly 200 scientists from half a dozen countries.

Flying offshore along the Indian subcontinent, Ramanathan and the research team found thick clouds of pollution large enough to cover the continental United States. They tracked the source of the haze to soot generated by cooking with wood and cow dung, the burning of fossil fuels and industrial aerosols.

“No one knew that the pollution was so widespread,” he said. “The air pollution was thought to be locally concentrated, like over cities. What we found is that this pollution stayed in the air long enough, a few weeks, that it covered the entire northern Indian Ocean.”

The brown clouds are primarily a mixture of what are called short-lived climate pollutants, including black carbon or soot, methane, ozone and industrial gases such as hydrofluorocarbons and chlorofluorocarbons. Scientists have estimated that these pollutants are responsible for as much as 40 percent of human-caused global warming.

Ramanathan’s team first published its brown-cloud findings around the turn of this century. The conclusions provided a significant opportunity to quickly combat climate change. While carbon remains in the atmosphere for hundreds of years, this cocktail of pollution could start to clear up within weeks and dissipate completely within a decade.

However, talking about the discovery would prove vexing.

First dubbed “Asian Brown Cloud,” the name was quickly overhauled after governments in Asia felt unfairly targeted. Then the science community became anxious when he suggested that cleaning up brown clouds would “buy time” for dealing with cutting carbon emissions.

“I think a lot of people misread our earlier work as saying you shouldn’t pay attention to the the long-term climate pollutants,” said Victor at UC San Diego, who has publicly advocated with Ramanathan for governments to aggressively target climate pollutants beyond carbon dioxide.

“One thing we learned along the way was how to talk to policymakers about what you can do now, while also making sure that the full range of the science is accurately conveyed,” he added.

Around this time, Ramanathan, then 60, started to get depressed. He watched as the brown clouds floated across oceans, contributed to rising temperatures, melted glaciers and caused respiratory diseases linked to the premature deaths of millions of people a year.

“I have seen my grandmother cooking with firewood and suffering from the smoke,” he said.

“It’s like watching a crime scene, and you know who committed it but you’re not able to do anything about it,” he added. “It was just stewing inside me.”

His scientific calculations also showed that millions of subsistence farmers in his native country and elsewhere faced an increased likelihood of prolonged drought due to a complex set of events triggered by the brown clouds.

“I started feeling like my entire life was such a failure,” he said. “Every time I take my instruments and go, I come back with bad news. It did get me promotions and career recognition, but I was more getting interested in action in the field.”

He was reluctant at first to venture too far outside of his traditional role as a scientist, said Giri Ramanathan, his wife of more than 40 years.

“He was feeling let down and frustrated,” she said. “He wanted to be a scientist. He didn’t want to go into this arena of mitigation or policy or telling people what they should do.”

That gradually changed as he continued to see the impacts of climate pollution outpace action on the ground.

“What he cared about was the truth,” Giri Ramanathan said. “Wherever his research led him, he went.”

Taking action

In 2007, Ramanathan had something of an epiphany. During a United Nations International School conference on climate change, a student from Africa asked him what he was doing to counter global warming.

“She said, ‘Professor Ramanathan, you made us cry with your story, but you didn’t tell us what you’re doing about it,’” Ramanathan remembered.

“I couldn’t tell her anything I was doing about it,” he added. “I didn’t answer. She dumbfounded me.”

Within a year, he started making lifestyle shifts such as commuting via public transportation and installing solar panels on his home. He eventually bought an electric vehicle.

Later that year, he launched a project to bring specialized stoves to India that reduce emissions linked to cooking with wood, cow dung and crop waste by 50 percent to 90 percent. So far, the initiative has provided these eco-friendly stoves in more than 4,000 homes.

While the cook stoves directly help clean up the air, they also could have a political impact. If the project can expand significantly, Ramanathan hopes it would make enough of a dent in brown-cloud formation to grab the attention of government leaders who have the power to enact sweeping environmental reforms.

“If you cut (short-lived climate pollutants) globally just using technology already available in California, we can bring down the warming by 50 percent,” he said.

Ramanathan made this point in a 2009 article in *Foreign Affairs* magazine that caught the eye of then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. A few years later, she held a news conference — with him in the front row — to announce the Climate and Clean Air Coalition to Reduce Short-Lived Climate Pollutants.

The campaign now includes about 50 countries, as well as dozens of groups such as the United Nations and the World Bank.

While Ramanathan continued to write opinion pieces for mainstream newspapers and magazines, he also started to more fully appreciate the reach of the Roman Catholic Church. As a member of the Vatican's Pontifical Academy of Sciences, he regularly attended or convened meetings with scientists and Catholic leaders.

"It became clear to me that bringing science and religion together on the issue of environment could have a transformational impact," he said.

Over this time, Ramanathan became a trusted adviser to the Vatican. Archbishop Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo, chancellor of the academy, referred to him in an interview with the *Union-Tribune* this month as "sort of like an apostle" for climate change.

After his parking-lot pitch to Pope Francis and the subsequent papal encyclical, Ramanathan became more determined to inspire an even broader audience. That conviction crystallized when he traveled to Paris in November for a United Nations summit on climate change as part of the pope's delegation.

"The Paris agreement is a watershed, but it's a toothless agreement," Ramanathan said. "The actions we need to take are so drastic, no leader in the world has the support to take these actions.

"Religious leaders taking it down to their parishes will have a transformative effect," he added.

Still, the change in zeitgeist that Ramanathan advocates would require people to go beyond just acknowledging the science of climate change. Of the 53 percent of Americans who think humans are causing global warming, only about 16 percent say they are "very worried" about it, according to a study last year from Yale and George Mason universities.

"The challenge is the depth of the crisis is still not perceptible, not only to evangelicals, but to the wider public," said Givens at Fuller Theological Seminary — adding that he and nearly all of his colleagues acknowledge human-driven warming.

And one wrong step could compromise Ramanathan's public standing. In recent years, some scientists have thrown their objectivity into question in their zeal to address the issue, Victor said.

"I think Ram has been more careful about the line between fact and opinion," he said. "Other folks have not been so careful and are so seethed by the idea that we're in a climate crisis that (they believe) the ends justify whatever means."

For Ramanathan, the ends do not justify the means. For him, people don't need to be tricked into action. They simply need to pay attention to the facts.

"Climate change is such an important, potentially catastrophic problem, you don't need to exaggerate it," he said.

If he's right, those best poised to communicate the implications of climate science will be those who have rejected many previous findings.

However, it's these moral leaders, he believes, who are now best situated to cut through ideological divisions on climate science.

"We need to use this alliance to break this schism we have in America where climate change has been a political thing," he said. "It's not a political issue. It's a scientific issue, and the future is at stake."

<http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/2016/feb/24/sd-me-ramanathan-scripps-climate-change/>

February 24, 2016

On climate issue, Catholics urged to 'feel pain of the planet, the poor'

By Tom Tracy
Catholic News Service

MIAMI (CNS) -- Pope Francis' right-hand man on the environment and climate change issues urged Catholics attending a local academic conference to let Christian spirituality guide their thinking and actions toward preserving the full range of God's creation.

Cardinal Peter Turkson, president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, spoke Feb. 19 in Miami at St. Thomas University as part of the school's two-day International Conference on Climate, Nature & Society. The event was spearheaded by the university's Institute for Bioethics.

The conference tackled the science and social impact of ecological change with talks from leading experts in the field along with Cardinal Turkson, who recently made several U.S. stops last week in the Vatican's efforts to promote Pope Francis' encyclical on the environment, "Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home."

In addition to being a scriptural scholar, Cardinal Turkson is credited with helping to draft "Laudato Si'," the first papal encyclical in the 2,000-year history of the Catholic Church devoted solely to environmental and mankind's collective responsibility to pass along a clean and safe planet to future generations.

"It is urgent that we change our sense of progress, our management of the economy and our style of life," Cardinal Turkson said at the outset of his remarks, echoing Pope Francis' appeal for a "new ethical and spiritual itinerary to reduce our footprint and reverse the deterioration of the natural and social environment."

Cardinal Turkson has been likened to a touring "rock star" bringing forward the concepts discussed in "Laudato Si'" and the "the way the encyclical challenges human, social conscience."

The document touches on such important areas related to human activity such as urban planning, overconsumption and human trafficking and they affect both humankind and the environment.

Changes require shifts in thinking, the cardinal told the audience, which included students from several local Catholic high schools along with Miami Archbishop Thomas G. Wenski and several clergy and religious leaders of the Miami Archdiocese and of St. Thomas University.

Pope Francis has a very deep sense of trust and belief in the ability of humanity to do things for the better, according to Cardinal Turkson. "To make such change will require major shifts in our thinking and commitments, indeed a conversion of every individual and of groups and institutions at every level from local to global and all of us in humanity."

"Pope Francis asks us to consider what is happening to our common home, and he proposes an integral ecology that is natural but is also human and even social, and then bring this home to see what is happening in the United States and in Florida and what can be done by a university like St. Thomas University," the cardinal said, noting the role of the church and Catholic academia.

"Pope Francis invites us to feel the pain of the planet and of the poor, and to resolve to change, calling us to a certain amount of compassion to what is happening to our home and to the poor ones in our midst," he said. "Our sins do impact on the earth and the earth's surface as a result of the way we treat the environment."

The cardinal touched on a list of fragile global communities and shorelines -- including that of Miami Beach along with rainforest, desert and Pacific island communities -- which scientists have identified as being under threat of environmental changes, rising sea levels and changes in precipitation.

On the correlation between our own spiritualities and our treatment of the environment, Cardinal Turkson said our conscience is the "seat and home" of a conversion.

"The care of our common home, as Pope Francis sees it, can never be achieved by individual initiatives or by the united efforts of men bred in an individualist way. It calls for a union of skills and unity of achievement of that can only grow from a quiet and different attitude," he said.

"Social problems must be addressed by community networks and not simply by the sum of good ideas, which means that for Pope Francis ecological conversation becomes community conversation undergirded by a very sound and profound spirituality," Cardinal Turkson said.

"Pope Francis recognizes that a commitment to this lofty idea cannot be sustained by mere doctrine, it must be sustained by spirituality, that interior impulse that encourages, motives, nourishes and gives meaning to our individual and communal activities."

In a separate conversation with local media, Cardinal Turkson said the Vatican is welcoming a dialogue with U.S. industry and business leaders who are interested in furthering Pope Francis' conversation and challenge to protect the environment, including U.S.-based solar companies.

Plans are the works, he said, for a gathering at the Vatican in April for business and church leaders to discuss ecological issues.

The conference organizer was Father Alfred Cioffi, a Miami archdiocesan priest, who holds the university's Florida Blue endowed chair in bioethics and is director of St. Thomas' Institute for Bioethics. He said he hopes the conference educates people, but more importantly, unleashes actions and ideas to curb global climate change.

<http://www.catholicnews.com/services/englishnews/2016/on-climate-issue-catholics-urged-to-feel-pain-of-the-planet-the-poor.cfm>

February 25, 2016

Connecticut Program Makes Solar Affordable for Low-Income Families

Faith groups and churches are working with a third-party solar provider to spread renewable energy to people who normally could not afford it.

By Zahra Hirji
InsideClimate News

Churches, synagogues and mosques across Connecticut are supporting a groundbreaking program that aims to make solar power affordable for all homeowners.

Residents who sign up to lease a rooftop solar system through this initiative will not have to pay a deposit or go through a credit or background check, some of the biggest barriers to going solar for many low- and moderate-income families. The solar leasing costs—initially \$20 a month, in some cases—are likely the lowest currently available in the state, and the country.

"It's stellar," said [Rev. Carl McCluster of the Shiloh Baptist Church](#) in Bridgeport, one of the churches participating in the program. "In communities where there are low-income households like Bridgeport and like most urban areas...sometimes you are stretched to make ends meet." Credit checks and deposits are often impossible for these families, he said.

McCluster is also the managing director of the national network of religious groups called Faith Restoration Empowerment & Economic Development Outreach Ministries, Inc., or FREEDOM. For this solar offering, FREEDOM members in Connecticut teamed with the solar provider [PosiGen](#) and [Connecticut Green Bank](#), an organization devoted to growing local clean energy and climate-friendly opportunities.

In the coming weeks, FREEDOM members will host informational sessions about the solar program to their communities. Anyone who signs up at those meetings, whether a member of the faith organization or not, can take advantage of the deal.

Soaring Solar

Connecticut has one of the smaller solar markets in the country, ranking 16th nationwide in 2014 for total installed solar power. But with this new program, Connecticut is striving to be a leader on solar accessibility. It also helps the state get closer to its goal of generating 27 percent of its electricity through renewable energy sources by 2020. And it does so in a way that makes solar power available to families across income levels.

It's not just Connecticut looking to boost solar—it's a nationwide phenomenon. Last year for the first time, more generating capacity for solar than natural gas went online in the United States, according to the market analysis group GTM Research and industry trade group Solar Energy Industries Association. Their report said 7.3 gigawatts of solar were installed in 2015—enough to power more than 5 million homes. The boom is largely driven by plunging solar costs. The average installed price for residential solar systems [dropped 9 percent](#) between 2013 and 2014, continuing a downward trend.

Even with the steady drops in price, coupled with programs such as solar rentals or leasing aimed at homeowners and small businesses, solar remains inaccessible for less affluent families. "It's important to recognize that we aren't there yet in universal access to solar," said [John Rogers](#), a senior energy analyst at the Union of Concerned Scientists, a Massachusetts-based science advocacy and research group.

Connecticut's program, which has bipartisan support from state officials, hopes to change that by offering even better deals.

"Solar energy is a win-win for our environment and our economy—providing clean, renewable energy and cutting utility bills for families, businesses, and even houses of worship," U.S. [Sen. Richard Blumenthal](#), a Democrat, said in a statement. Blumenthal is one of many Connecticut politicians from every level of government who have endorsed the program.

Heavenly Power

PosiGen, a solar company of about 200 people, launched in New Orleans in 2011 and has since spread to four states, including Connecticut. In its program, "Solar for Everyone," PosiGen offers the same package to homeowners whose roofs can handle solar: a 20-year contract to lease a small solar system of 6 kilowatts for \$79 a month with no deposit, no credit check and no background check.

Similar to other so-called third party solar providers, the company owns the solar panels and will pay for maintenance or replacement. But unlike other solar competitors' plans, the monthly cost does not increase yearly. The price will stay at \$79 for 20 years, regardless of inflation. Also baked into the monthly cost is a free energy efficiency audit and household upgrade.

"We just thought it made sense," Tom Neyhart, CEO of PosiGen said to InsideClimate News. "The savings from solar alone...it wasn't substantial enough," he said. But the savings are greater when you are not only generating at least some of your own power, but also getting more mileage out of that power with energy efficiency upgrades, Neyhart said, such as installing new thermostats and light bulbs, insulating pipes and hot water heaters, and reducing attic leaks.

The program being offered through the Connecticut congregations goes a step farther. Starting in a few weeks, faith organizations that support the program will host informational sessions that are open to anyone in their community. People who attend and sign up at one of those meetings over the next year can lock in a cost of \$20 per month for the first three months.

PosiGen, along with the Connecticut Green Climate Bank, ran a similar promotion for the entire town of Bridgeport last year. An identical initiative was launched in New Haven, and will run through March. More than a hundred people have already signed up with PosiGen in the state. Even more Connecticut towns are set to adopt the program this year, according to Beth Galante, vice president of business development at PosiGen.

PosiGen can keep its costs down by providing only one size solar panel, of 6 kilowatts, as well as hiring workers and contractors locally. The company also reaps the benefits of state or federal incentive program or tax credits, such as the federal tax incentive for the solar industry that has been extended past 2020. While the 6-kilowatt system is not expected to meet the each home's entire electricity needs, it can help lessen the load dramatically, according to PosiGen.

<http://insideclimatenews.org/news/25022016/connecticut-program-solar-power-low-income-families-freedom>

February 26, 2016

Pope Francis should win this year's Nobel Peace Prize

By Robert Christian
National Catholic Reporter

Critics of the Nobel Peace Prize often note its [glaring omissions](#), perplexing choices, and selection of those with pasts that are checkered at best. But the award has gone to many extraordinary champions of human rights and genuine peace: Martin Luther King, Jr., Lech Wałęsa, Elie Wiesel, Wangari Maathai, Shirin Ebadi, Malala Yousafzai, Liu Xiaobo, and Jody Williams are just a few of the many worthy recipients.

While Mother Teresa won the award in 1979, no pope has ever received the honor of being a Nobel Peace Prize laureate. That should change this year.

For his leadership in confronting climate change and the degradation of the environment, Pope Francis should win this year's Nobel Peace Prize. He has had a transformative impact on the public's consciousness of the grave threats facing creation, including the growing menace of climate change. He described these threats in stark terms, saying, "If present trends continue, this century may well witness extraordinary climate change and an unprecedented destruction of ecosystems, with serious consequences for all of us." And with this searing critique of the status quo, he has also offered a vision of a better future: sustainable development that is rooted in respect for creation and the dignity of the human person.

Pollution, climate change, and other environmental threats pose a serious risk to international and human security. They threaten future generations with inhumane living conditions and diminished resources, while prematurely ending the lives of millions of people around the world today. The World Health organization [estimates](#) that over 7 million people die each from air pollution alone. The degradation of the environment will intensify competition for resources in ways that will spark future conflicts. To care about peace is to care about creation.

The environmental movement (however unfair the characterization may be) has a reputation among many Americans for being secular, technocratic, and more concerned with the plight of obscure insects than human welfare. Pope Francis is changing this reputation.

His concerns about climate change center less on the risk to polar bears and more on the human impact. He has elevated the critical point that confronting climate change and protecting the environment are necessary for the full protection of human rights. The destruction of creation cannot be separated from the throwaway culture that Francis has denounced again and again.

The pope has framed these issues in moral terms, asking for all of the world's people and governments to reflect upon and live out their moral responsibilities to creation and the vulnerable people of the world.

By enlisting the Catholic Church in this fight, Pope Francis' encyclical has been a game changer. But Pope Francis has not limited his outreach to just Catholics or even Christians. In *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis is addressing every person on the planet, knowing that we have a responsibility to respond as one human family to the crisis facing our common home. He has provided real global leadership on these critical issues. And we may already be seeing positive outcomes linked to this leadership.

The 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference was a critical test to see if the world would heed Francis' advice and respond to the challenges posed by climate change. Pope Francis did not sit on the sidelines or let his past remarks stand. Instead, Pope Francis [expressed confidence](#) that the Paris conference would "secure fundamental and effective agreements." His encouragement and the moral framework that he provided helped to push the conference toward a successful outcome. Dr. Alison Doig of Christian Aid [called](#) Pope Francis' impact on the talks "transformative."

Pope Francis has also taken on the challenge of upending the status quo in American politics on climate change. Many conservative parties in Europe and elsewhere are shaped more by Catholic social teaching than social Darwinism and therefore have a strong commitment to protecting the environment. It seems entirely fitting that a conservative would recognize the wisdom and morality of conserving the environment and protecting God's creation. Even in the United States, it was the Republican administration of Theodore Roosevelt that most dramatically reshaped our nation's commitment to conservation. And many still remember President George HW Bush's pledge to be "the environmental president," which he made in his campaign for the presidency.

But there now exists a sharp break between the GOP's approach to the environment and the approach taken by the center-right parties of other affluent countries. Roosevelt Republicans are

almost entirely absent from elected office. Climate change skepticism and denialism permeate the Republican Party, setting it apart from mainstream conservative parties around the world.

The casual dismissal of scientific consensus, reckless disregard for the responsibilities of good stewardship, and extreme devotion to a free market fundamentalist agenda have shown that the Republican Party is more reactionary than conservative. Given the necessity of American action when it comes to truly tackling climate change and the difference that bipartisan support would make, the party's spiral into collective indifference is a serious problem.

But Francis did not shy away from this problem in his trip to the US, directly emphasizing the need to respond to climate change. During his trip, Francis [said](#), "It seems clear to me also that climate change is a problem which can no longer be left to a future generation. When it comes to the care of our 'common home,' we are living at a critical moment of history." Millions of Republican voters agree. And Pope Francis' trip seemed to inspire a few Congressional Republicans to [break ranks and affirm](#) their belief that climate change is real and that this should not be a partisan issue. This shift is slight, but real.

Pope Francis' global leadership on climate change and the protection of the environment is making a real difference. When Nobel voters cast their ballots, they should reflect upon the serious threats posed by climate change and environmental degradation and recognize the efforts of Pope Francis, who has persuasively and persistently challenged the world to respond to this great challenge to justice and peace.

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<http://ncronline.org/blogs/distinctly-catholic/pope-francis-should-win-year-s-nobel-peace-prize>

February 29, 2016

At Catholic Worker house, Sr. Elizabeth Johnson explores human kinship with God's creation

By Beth Griffin
National Catholic Reporter

New York -- While it may come as a shock, humans are neither central nor supreme in the grand scheme of creation. Humans have a place among other beloved creatures of the same living God, and it's more humble kinship than dominion.

On Friday evening, St. Joseph Sr. Elizabeth Johnson, distinguished professor of theology at Fordham University, shared thoughts on the idea of such kinship with nature and described new ways to understand how humans fit into God's work of creation during a well-attended talk at Mary House, a Catholic Worker house in New York's East Village.

The talk, titled “Creation: Where Do People Fit?”, was part of a regular Friday evening meeting series held at Mary House.

The natural world and its creatures are in crisis as a result of consumerism and greed, as well as their diminished place in contemporary religious imagination, Johnson said. The remedy is a 180-degree conversion to the earth by focusing on God who loves the earth.

Johnson said that Pope Francis’ encyclical “*Laudato Si’*, on Care for Our Common Home” offers a religious vision of environmental coexistence that is different from the traditional picture. It calls for a new way of being human that will enhance and not diminish those with whom the planet is shared.

As a theological extension of the option for the poor, Johnson said nature becomes the new poor and “our love of a neighbor needs to extend to include the poor natural world diminished by an elite group of humans.”

Johnson said the longtime Catholic understanding of creation was of a pyramid with humans at the pinnacle and all other creatures as a neutral backdrop. “There’s a hierarchy and we’re on top and others are meant for our use,” she explained.

“I find it daunting to realize how deeply this sense of human beings as the rulers of nature has shaped Christian belief and practice and has largely erased creation from the faith experience,” she said.

Johnson said the theory developed from ancient Greek philosophy that valued spirit over matter, leaving rocks and plants farthest from the divine and angels the closest.

In *Laudato Si’*, Francis points out that Jesus Christ rejected such a notion of hierarchy:

Yet it would also be mistaken to view other living beings as mere objects subjected to arbitrary human domination. When nature is viewed solely as a source of profit and gain, this has serious consequences for society. This vision of “might is right” has engendered immense inequality, injustice and acts of violence against the majority of humanity, since resources end up in the hands of the first comer or the most powerful: the winner takes all. Completely at odds with this model are the ideals of harmony, justice, fraternity and peace as proposed by Jesus. As he said of the powers of his own age: “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant” (Mt 20:25-26). [*Laudato Si’*, Paragraph 82]

An alternative to the pyramid of privilege metaphor is the circle of life that embraces evolution and a biological history shared among all creatures on the planet, Johnson said.

“We have to conclude, very radically, the living breath in us has the same source as the living breath in the animals. Because we are all created by God, we have more in common than what separates us as creatures,” she said.

Francis is contributing something new to the long-running discussion by emphasizing the community of creation. There is no justification for domination over other creatures, because they also have intrinsic value and share in the love of God.

Moreover, mistreatment of nature and creation is profoundly sinful, and contradicts the will of the creator that the world should flourish, Johnson said.

The conversion to the earth includes intellectual, emotional, ethical and spiritual components. Intellectually, the shift away from a human-centered view of life will honor the presence of God “in, with and under the ecological community of all species,” Johnson said.

Emotionally, there is a need to turn away from the delusion of the separate human self and isolated human species to a felt kinship and affiliation with all creatures. If the effort is successful, Johnson said images such as “Brother Sun, Sister Moon” -- central characters in St. Francis of Assisi’s “Canticle of the Creatures” -- become felt truths and not poetry.

Ethically, conversion requires society to “relate to the earth with respect, not rapaciousness,” she said. “A moral universe limited to the human person is no longer adequate. Attention must re-center on the whole communion of life.”

“Being converted leads us to weave the natural world back into our religious imagination with prayer, art, music, justice and charity. Our challenge is to develop a spirituality that makes loving the earth and its creatures an intrinsic part of faith in God, rather than an add-on,” Johnson said.

She continued: “Ecological conversion is falling in love with the earth as an inherently valuable living community in which we participate, and bending every effort to be faithful to its creative well-being because we love God who loves the earth unconditionally.”

“We’re not talking simply about a moral mandate. This is a call to a deeper relationship with God that transforms us to a greater-heartedness in resonance with the love who made and empowers us all,” Johnson said.

“How could God create the whole world and let only one species make it through death?” she concluded.

[Beth Griffin is a freelance journalist based in New York.]

<http://ncronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/catholic-worker-house-sr-elizabeth-johnson-explores-human-kinship-god-s-creation>

February 29, 2016

Bishop urges all to 'redouble' prayers, efforts to help people in Flint

By Catholic News Service
National Catholic Reporter

Lansing, Mich. -- Especially during the Lenten season, everyone should "redouble both their prayers and their generosity" for the people of Flint still struggling with unsafe drinking water through the city's water crisis, said Lansing Bishop Earl Boyea.

"It is gratifying to see that Catholic communities in Michigan and beyond have come forward to assist the remarkable efforts of Catholic Charities," he said in a statement.

Catholic Charities of Shiawassee and Genesee Counties, based in the heart of Flint, "is on the front lines of the relief and recovery efforts" in partnership with many other community members, the Lansing diocese noted in a news release with the bishop's statement.

"The roots of Flint's difficulties are deep, and it will take years of courageous, difficult, loving effort to rebuild this community," Boyea said Feb. 15. "During this holy season of Lent, please take time to ask the Lord, in a particular way, to guide those seeking to help and to protect the children and the vulnerable."

CNN reported Feb. 28 that newly released emails show that "a year before the seriousness of the crisis became clear," some top aides to Gov. Rick Snyder urged state officials to switch Flint's source for drinking water away from the Flint River.

In April 2014, when the city was under the control of a state-appointed emergency manager, a decision was made to switch the city's water source from Detroit's supply to the Flint River to save money.

According to several news accounts, the water from the river contains eight times more chloride than Detroit's water and that the chemical, which is corrosive to metals, ate away at old lead-lined service pipes that connect to residents' homes. It allowed lead to enter people's water supply because officials put no controls in place to prevent that from happening.

In March 2015, the Flint City Council voted to do whatever was needed to return to purchasing water from the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department. In mid-October, Flint reconnected to the Detroit water supply. This year, Snyder declared a state of emergency in Flint on Jan. 5.

Besides lead, residents have been exposed to chemical byproducts, E. coli and Legionnaires' disease in the water.

In an earlier statement, Boyea said the city of Flint "has undergone many trials in recent years."

"Often, its people have faced the temptation to lose hope, to surrender to despair. The water crisis again presents that temptation, but again the answer must be to find strength in the love of God and the support of men and women of good will," he said in a statement.

"In this Year of Mercy," he continued, "I also urge Catholics, and all people of goodwill, to continue praying for the people of Flint. With prayer and fasting, let us call down the power of God on this city."

About 40 percent of Flint's residents live in poverty; the average household income is \$25,000.

<http://ncronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/bishop-urges-all-redouble-prayers-efforts-help-people-flint>
