

See end of this paper for info



The Catholic Coalition on Climate Change

5727 Lockwood Road
Cheverly, Maryland 20785
301-322-1180

www.catholicsandclimatechange.org
info@catholicsandclimatechange.org

Winter 2008 Update

On behalf of the members of the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change Steering Committee and our Program Assistant, Kolya Braun-Greiner, I wish you a Happy New Year and pray that it will be peaceful and prosperous for you.

From Congressional halls to church basements climate change took center stage for much of 2007. As we reflect on 2007 accomplishments there is much to celebrate. Much of this is chronicled below and throughout the [CCCC website](#).

But as we look forward to 2008, there is much to be done. With your help, we will continue to make significant progress in raising awareness that spurs action on behalf of those forgotten in the climate change debate: the poor at home and abroad who have contributed the least to climate change but will likely bear its harshest impacts.

LOOKING BACK

Catholic Climate Change Hearings

It is difficult to express the power and purpose of the [Florida, Ohio, and Alaska Hearings](#) co-sponsored by the state Catholic conferences, dioceses, the [U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops](#) and the CCCC. The day-long events examined Catholic teaching on climate change, the scientific consensus around the issue and what is at stake for poor people, businesses, services and our natural world.

For example, in Florida property insurance premiums are skyrocketing impacting homeowners and renters alike and putting the squeeze on low-income household budgets. State intervention adds to budgetary pressures and other vital state services may need to be curtailed. In Ohio, energy bills are already increasing and when greenhouse gas pollution is taxed—whether through a cap and trade approach or an energy tax—utility bills will increase even more. The energy company executives who testified also recognized that there would be a need to use some of the revenue generated by either approach to offset these higher costs for low-income families. And in Alaska, an eminent scientist from the University of Alaska at Fairbanks outlined the science of climate change. Other panelists expressed concern about the impacts on wildlife upon which so many Native Alaskans rely for year-round food.

Education and Training

In collaboration with [JustFaith Ministries](#), we developed an 8-week climate change educational program that is available for JustFaith graduates and others who wish to gain a deeper appreciation for how science and faith intersect on this morally complex issue. Early reviews of the program are very

positive and we'll continue to work to improve the module.

The premier training program for new and veteran diocesan social action directors, the [Social Action Institute](#), invited CCCC and others to present a two-day seminar on a Catholic approach to climate change. Over 75 veteran social action directors and staff of national Catholic organizations now have a greater appreciation for how to talk about and encourage action on climate change with Catholic audiences.

Climate change policy has also become a regular feature at the annual [Catholic Social Ministry Gathering](#) in February.

Vatican Speaks on Climate Change

Few Catholic leaders have offered more clarity and expressed more urgency to address climate change and its impacts on the poor than have Pope Benedict XVI. In his inaugural homily he proclaimed:

The external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast. Therefore the earth's treasures no longer serve to build God's garden for all to live in, but they have been made to serve the powers of exploitation and destruction.

And in his [January 2008 World Day of Peace Message](#), the Holy Father emphasized the universal destination of the created order, the needs of future generations, and the priority concern for the poor, among other important themes:

Respecting the environment does not mean considering material or animal nature more important than man. Rather, it means not selfishly considering nature to be at the complete disposal of our own interests, for future generations also have the right to reap its benefits and to exhibit towards nature the same responsible freedom that we claim for ourselves. Nor must we overlook the poor, who are excluded in many cases from the goods of creation destined for all.

We anticipate that caring for creation will be a major theme when His Holiness visits the United States and addresses the United Nations this coming April.

Articles, Presentations and Workshops

The CCCC has contributed articles to a variety of religious and secular publications including:

- [Today's Parish Minister](#)
- [Monday Developments from InterAction](#)
- [Catholic Charities USA Newsletter](#)
- Catholic Radio Weekly interview
- [Sirius Radio: Archdiocese of New York Radio Program](#)
- [ArcWire: Grassroots Journalism for a Green Future](#)
- [Missouri Catholic Conference Messenger](#)

We've also presented at a variety of other workshops and programs including:

- Biennial Meeting of the National Council of Catholic Women;
- Annual Meeting of the International Catholic Stewardship Council;
- Missouri State Catholic Conference Advocacy Day;
- Diocese of Buffalo
- St. Vincent College

- Archdiocese of Philadelphia
- Archdiocese of Omaha

You can find some of these articles and presentations on the “Coalition Activities” page on the CCCC website. Click on the [From the Director](#) link.

Advocacy

Throughout much of the summer and fall, the CCCC assisted the US Conference of Catholic Bishops with legislative action. At issue was the Lieberman/Warner [America’s Climate Security Act of 2007](#), a climate change bill that offered the best chance in this current Congress for a significant step forward in addressing the issue at the federal level.

Bishops, diocesan peace and justice ministers, parishioners, and many others from the faith community contacted senators and in the end we largely succeeded in ensuring that this “cap-and-trade” approach to limiting greenhouse gas pollutants included provisions to hold poor people at home and abroad harmless from both the impacts of climate change and climate change legislation.

The process was not without some fairly high drama including nearly losing all of the funding targeted to help least developed countries adapt to climate impacts.

In early December, the Senate’s Environment and Public Works Committee voted to send the bill to the floor of the Senate chamber. We anticipate floor action in the spring and will be calling on you to help ensure its passage with these key poverty provisions intact if not strengthened. While it is unlikely that the measure will go beyond this floor vote, the legislation will contain the framework for the next Congress so it is important that we frame it right now.

Publicity

The final item we’d like to highlight is the meteoric rise in awareness of climate change as a religious issue.

In Catholic News Service’s annual survey of top stories, environment was number 9 out of 10. The issue was never in the top 10 before, so this is truly significant. Even more impressive is the survey of the nations’ religion writers: they put climate change at number three on the list of top religion stories of 2007 ahead of immigration and the sex abuse crisis.

LOOKING AHEAD

We are so grateful for all that was accomplished in 2007. We will redouble our efforts this coming year and rely on you more than ever to continue this important mission. Here is a snapshot of what we will try to accomplish:

Integration: we will work to engage more [partners](#) in this work beginning with national organizations, state Catholic conferences and diocese social ministry offices. We will develop new tools and resources to assist in this effort and become a clearinghouse of information and ideas about how to address climate change from a Catholic perspective.

Training: while we will continue to accept invitations to speak to national and diocesan groups, we will also develop a downloadable PowerPoint presentation for your use in sharing the Church’s teaching on this emerging issue and to provide a consistent message and approach. We’re also working on a

question and answer piece that will address the tough questions that remain about why the Church is engaged in this issue. Both of these tools should be available in the first quarter of this year. Look for an announcement in the next couple of months.

Hearings: We will organize more diocesan or state Catholic conference hearings focusing specifically on the poverty question: how will climate change and climate change policy impact low-income communities in various places around the country.

Advocacy: We will assist the U.S. bishops with grassroots advocacy to ensure that their particular contribution to climate change legislation—that the poor at home and abroad are held harmless—is a public policy priority for the entire Catholic community

Communication: We will continue to promote the [U.S. bishops' statement](#) that highlights three key principles: the pursuit of the common good, the promotion of the virtue of prudence and protection of the poor. We'll also develop and share other messages that reflect the best science, theology and Church teaching to enable us to communicate more effectively with other Catholics, policy and opinion makers and the country at large.

Thank you for your continued interest in this emerging issue and your efforts to lessen your own environmental footprint on God's precious and holy Creation.

The National Religious Partnership for the Environment helps fund the Coalition. The USCCB is a founding member of the NRPE.