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For many, climate change is an issue of faith

The rancorous, partisan debate on climate change has stifled attempts to deal with what many are calling the greatest challenge humanity has ever faced. Increasingly, though, communities of faith are coming to view the issue, not in political terms, but in moral and spiritual terms.

As the U.N. climate conference opened in Durban, South Africa, Pope Benedict XVI issued a [call to action](#) on climate change for all parties attending:

"I hope that all members of the international community can agree on a responsible, credible and supportive response to this worrisome and complex phenomenon, keeping in mind the needs of the poorest populations and of future generations."

The Pope's message is the latest response from faith communities about the worsening problem of climate change and the need to address it. That need grows more urgent, as recent reports suggest:

- In the run up to the [COP17](#) climate conference in Durban, South Africa, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released [a report](#) that the frequency and severity of extreme weather events will increase with climate change. Such extreme weather is already affecting [food security](#) and will worsen if carbon dioxide emissions do not decline.
- The International Energy Agency [warned that we have five years](#) to start bringing down greenhouse gas emissions before climate change becomes irreversible. Fatih Birol, chief economist for the agency said, "If we do not have an international agreement, whose effect is put in place by 2017, then the door to [holding temperatures to 2C of warming] will be closed forever."
- The U.S. Department of Energy reported the [largest leap ever in CO2 emissions](#) in 2010, surpassing worst-case scenarios envisioned by many climate scientists.

For faith communities, the issue is about stewardship: God created the world and entrusted its care to humans. We should, therefore, take steps, not only to protect that creation, but also to protect the poor, who will suffer the consequences of climate change sooner and more severely than others.

Speaking at the Festival of Faiths conference in Louisville, Kentucky, on Nov. 7, [Catholic Bishop Stephen E. Blaire](#) of Stockton, Calif., said, “And as people of faith, we bring a moral voice to often-contentious debates about environmental concerns such as air pollution... People of faith bring a unique and important message: about the care of God’s gift of creation, about those most vulnerable to environmental injustice – those on the margins of our societies and those with fewest resources to protect themselves or advocate on their own behalf.”

Resources on climate change and faith-based communities

[Interfaith Power and Light](#)

IPL, a religious response to global warming, has state chapters in many parts of the country.

[Katharine Hayhoe](#)

A climate scientist at Texas Tech Univ., Katharine is co-author with her minister husband, Andrew Farley, of “A Climate for Change: Global Warming Facts for Faith-Based Decisions.”

[Catholic Climate Covenant](#)

“The impact of climate change falls heaviest on the world’s poor. As Catholics, our faith demands prudent action.”

[Presbyterians for Earth Care](#)

PEC urges all members to take immediate action to reduce carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions through personal lifestyle change, public policy advocacy, and corporate responsibility.

[Jewish Climate Initiative](#)

Providing a Jewish response to the climate change crisis that threatens the ecosystems of our planet during our lifetimes and the lives of our children.

[Evangelical Environmental Network](#)

Base for the Creation Care movement. Rev. Jim Ball is the author of “Global Warming and the Risen Lord.”

How vulnerable are the poor?

- Worsening droughts and floods will [decrease crop yields](#), driving up the cost of food for families already struggling to feed themselves.
- [Glaciers](#) that supply water for nearly a billion people are gradually disappearing, creating shortages of water for drinking and crop irrigation.
- Rising sea levels will [displace tens of millions](#) of people, turning them into climate refugees.

Solutions to climate change will not be easy, but one approach with great potential is outlined in the [Save Our Climate Act](#) (H.R. 3242) recently introduced by Rep. Pete Stark (D-CA). It places a gradually-rising tax on carbon-based fuels and returns most of the revenue to the public. The clear price signal on carbon will shift investment away from fossil fuels and toward clean energy. Returning the revenue to households will shield families from rising energy costs associated with the carbon tax.

Statements from faith communities on climate change

Southern Baptist Declaration

There is undeniable evidence that the earth — wildlife, water, land and air — can be damaged by human activity, and that people suffer as a result. ... We must care about environmental and climate issues because of our love for God — “the creator, redeemer, preserver and ruler of the universe” — through whom and for whom the creation was made. This is not our world; it is God’s.

Evangelical Call to Action

As American evangelical Christian leaders, we recognize both our opportunity and our responsibility to offer a biblically based moral witness that can help shape public policy in the most powerful nation on Earth, and therefore contribute to the well-being of the entire world. ... The consequences of the pollution we create now will be visited upon our children and grandchildren.

Vatican Pontifical Academy of Sciences

Three recommendations — reduce worldwide carbon dioxide emissions without delay, reduce the concentrations of warming air pollutants and prepare to adapt to the climatic changes, both chronic and abrupt, that society will be unable to mitigate. The cost of the three recommended measures pales in comparison to the price the world will pay if we fail to act now.

Buddhist Declaration

We have a brief window of opportunity to preserve humanity from imminent disaster and to assist the survival of the many diverse and beautiful forms of life on Earth. ... Future generations ... have no voice to ask for our compassion.

Society of Friends (Quaker)

We unite in urging individual Friends, monthly meetings, and other Friends organizations to seek divine guidance in understanding how to reduce our own use of energy and material resources; support strong international agreements for reducing greenhouse gas emissions; promote national policies for assuring energy and resource conservation; participate in a transition to less-damaging technologies in our industries, agriculture, buildings and transportation. These are essential steps to protect life on Earth as God creates and sustains it.

Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life

Together, humankind has a solemn obligation to do whatever we can both to prevent harm to current and future generations and to preserve the integrity of the creation with which we have been entrusted. Not to do so when we have the technological capacity — as we do in the case of non-fossil fuel energy and transportation technologies — would be an unforgivable abdication of our responsibility.

The National Council of Churches

Over the past several decades, slowly but faithfully, the religious community in the United States has attempted to address issues of ecology and justice. ... While we honor the efforts in our churches, we have clearly failed to communicate the full measure and magnitude of Earth's environmental crisis — religiously, morally or politically. It is painfully clear from the verifiable testimony of the world's scientists that our response has been inadequate to the scale and pace of Earth's degradation. To continue to walk the current path of ecological destruction is not only folly; it is sin.

Source: [Judeo-Christian Positions on Climate Change](#) by Lynn Whitney, Citizens Climate Lobby