

## Climate Change, a Pro-Life Issue

**The Catholic Church's commitment to being pro-life is rooted in a "consistent ethic of life."** This means that all life is sacred and has dignity from its beginning to natural death. There is nothing a person can do to forfeit this dignity. Being pro-life includes the promotion of public policy that protects life at every stage of development. For this reason, John Paul II emphasized that the Catholic Church's opposition to abortion, euthanasia, and capital punishment must also "address issues of racism, poverty, hunger, employment, education, housing, and health care" (The Gospel of Life, no. 23).

**As Catholics we want to apply our pro-life ethic consistently** so that our Catholic identity and our actions preserving life are firmly aligned. The harmful effects of climate change – pollution and harm to mothers and children, food and water stresses, more frequent severe weather events, and disease—directly threaten the Church's commitment to protect and defend human life and dignity. We reject that which deals death, illness, or destruction. In this way we live out our Christian identities more fully and deeply.

Increasingly, people of faith and good will are becoming aware that **this means listening, as Pope Francis says, to "both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor" (Laudato Si, no. 49).** Like a seamless garment, the lives of the most poor and vulnerable depend on, and are inseparable from, the health and life of our planet. **"We are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it" (LS, no. 139).**

Given this integral connection, it is no surprise, then, as Pope Francis reminds us, **the scientific consensus links the ill health of our planet to human causes** (LS, no. 23). Indeed, our treatment of the planet **reflects the "culture of death"** so vividly described by Pope John Paul II, which places profit and "efficiency" over loving, care and concern for all life (Gospel of Life, no. 12). The ecological crisis reflects a moral crisis within the human community.

**Many promise miracle tech-solutions to the ecological crisis,** suggesting more efficient ways to extract or market the goods of the earth such as the promise of clean coal technology, carbon credits, or carbon capture solutions, deepen a culture of death by placing the interests of economic and political power over care for the most vulnerable. **This perspective masks the need for a lifestyle change** and denunciation of our "throwaway culture which affects the excluded just as it quickly reduces things to rubbish" (LS, no. 22). **Indeed, we have sacrificed the poor and vulnerable and the goods of the earth for the benefit of the few.**

**Perhaps no one is more vulnerable to climate change than the youth of the world, who will have to deal with the effects of our current disregard for the dignity of all of creation. Our pro-life stance calls us to ensure that every child reaches the fullness of their God-given physical health and intellectual abilities.** Yet today **nearly one out of every six babies born in the U.S. has harmful mercury levels in his or her blood,** which affects developing children's brains, potentially causing brain damage, developmental disabilities, neurological disorders, lower intelligence, and learning difficulties.

Coal-burning power plants are the largest human-caused source of mercury emissions to the air in the United States, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. **We must ensure that our children grow up in healthy environments and that we care for our common home, leaving it clean and healthy for the next generation.** As the Pope stress, "the notion of the common good also extends to future generations...We can no longer speak of sustainable development apart from intergenerational solidarity" (LS, no. 159). It is essential that we take steps to protect our Children's atmospheric trust, **this means treating the atmosphere as if it were a common good.**

Scientists have shown that **air pollution from cars, factories and power plants is a major cause of asthma,** which has dramatically increased in inner cities, and disproportionately strikes the elderly, children, and the poor, who are "at least 50 percent more likely to have the disease than those not living in poverty," according to the American Asthma Association. The American Lung Association said meeting the carbon emission targets set by the Clean Power Plan "will **prevent up to 4,000 premature deaths and 100,000**

**asthma attacks during the first year implemented (2020), and prevent up to 6,600 premature deaths and 150,000 asthma attacks in 2030, when fully implemented.”**

**Addressing climate change by transitioning from dangerous and polluting fossil fuels to cleaner renewable energy will greatly reduce these risks.** The pope emphasizes, “there is an urgent need to develop policies so that, in the next few years, the emission of carbon dioxide and other highly polluting gases can be drastically reduced, for example, substituting for fossil fuels and developing sources of renewable energy” (LS, no. 26). The transition to clean, affordable, reliable fuels will turn energy poverty into energy prosperity, and employ many more people, supporting more families. Such a shift is integral to the health and future of future generations, as well as our own lives and well-being.

**Shifting to cleaner, renewable energy for the health and safety – and very lives -- of current and future generations isn’t just a critical pro-life issue; it’s also practical and doable.** The developing world is leap-frogging over old-fashioned fossil-fuel power in favor of renewables. Solar installations are doubling every two years, with developing countries installing renewable energy projects at nearly double the rate of developed nations. The energy transition has begun, but we all have an obligation to ensure to ensure that it moves forward, with commitment and purpose.

**We are called to live life and live it abundantly! As Pope Francis has proclaimed “I ask you, in the name of God, to defend Mother Earth!”**

*Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach...See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you...But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long...This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that **I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him.** For the LORD is your life... Deuteronomy 20: 11-20*