



Statement on Environmental Stewardship and Justice

Global climate change has had adverse, observable effects on the environment that scientists say will worsen unless significant action is taken to reduce the emission of greenhouse gasses. These include: shrinking glaciers causing an 8 inch rise in sea level; decreasing animal ranges; disappearing animal and plant species; declining coral reefs; devastating floods; intensifying hurricanes and typhoons; longer wildfire seasons; and globally, 2014 through 2017 were the four hottest years on record. Scientists predict that sea level will rise up to 4 additional feet by 2100 with low lying coastal areas and islands at risk of becoming submerged. In addition, droughts and heat waves will intensify, affecting water supplies, human health, agricultural yield, and much more. Tragically, the World Health Organization estimates that between 2030 and 2050, climate change will cause approximately 250,000 additional deaths per year from malnutrition, malaria, diarrhea and heat stress. Areas with weak health infrastructure, primarily in developing countries, will be the least able to cope without assistance to prepare and respond.

The U.S. National Aeronautics and Space Administration points out that "Multiple studies published in peer-reviewed scientific journals show that 97 percent or more of actively publishing climate scientists agree: climate-warming trends over the past century are extremely likely due to human activities. In addition, most of the leading scientific organizations worldwide have issued public statements endorsing this position." Yet, almost three in ten Americans disagree that increases in Earth's temperatures are primarily due to the effects of human activities, according to a March 2017 Gallup poll. One reason for lingering public skepticism was documented by the Union of Concerned Scientists which reported that ExxonMobil and other top carbon polluters have been fully aware of the reality of climate change for decades, and have spent tens of millions of dollars to deceive the public about climate science. In addition, since 1997, Koch Industries, an oil corporation and the second largest privately-held company in the U.S., has funneled more than \$100 million to climate-denial groups working to delay or nullify policies and regulations aimed at reducing global warming.

Trump administration Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Scott Pruitt received at least \$215,000 in campaign contributions from the fossil-fuel industry while successfully running for Oklahoma Attorney General in 2010 and 2014, and sued the EPA 14 times in opposition to measures intended to protect the environment. In March 2017, President Trump signed an Executive Order to rollback Obama-era regulations aimed at fighting climate change, including the Clean Power Plan, which established federal limits on carbon emissions from coal-fired power plants. In June 2017, Trump decided to formally withdraw the U.S. from the Paris Climate Agreement.

The organized, well-funded effort to promote climate change denial, as well as the active anti-environmental stance of the current U.S. administration, reveal the extent to which greed and selfishness threaten the very survival of humanity. Water, air, soil, plants, animal life and human life are to be valued and conserved because they are God's creation.

Catholic social teaching maintains a God-centered and sacramental view of the universe, which grounds human accountability for the fate of the Earth. In his encyclical letter *Laudato Si'* ("On Care for Our Common Home"), Pope Francis writes that the Earth "cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her." Furthermore, "A true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor ... Everything is connected. Concern for the environment thus needs to be joined to a sincere love for our fellow human beings and an unwavering commitment to resolving the problems of society."

Environmental stewardship is a profoundly spiritual concern. Humankind was “created in God’s own image” (Genesis 1:27) and has an obligation “to care for and maintain God’s garden,” the Earth (Genesis 2:15). Environmental justice, in view of the merciless destruction of the natural world and the corresponding and potentially catastrophic ecological crisis, is an urgent responsibility for Christians who recognize that the web of existence is linked to the protection of and care for God’s creation.

Accordingly, Pax Christi Michigan embraces the following Environmental Stewardship and Justice principles and strategies.

- The entire Cosmos, including the Earth, humankind, and all living beings were created and are sustained by God, and as such are intrinsically sacred.
- We understand “dominion” over the Earth not as an excuse for unbridled exploitation, but rather as a command to be faithful stewards of natural resources.
- With reverence and humility, we perceive God’s presence in all living beings. Therefore, we accept responsibility for their care; of particular concern - the preservation of endangered species.
- All people and all living beings have a right to a clean and healthful environment, including water, air, land and plant life, as well as unimpeded access to clean drinking water and abundant sources of nourishment from Earth’s bounty.
- Our responsibility for God’s creation extends to the Earth itself. We support: restoring areas that have been harmed including oceans and rainforests; preserving wilderness areas; conservation and sustainability of natural resources to maintain an ecological balance; upholding biodiversity, the variability of living organisms that forms the foundation of the vast array of ecosystem services that critically contribute to human well-being; reducing carbon emissions and stabilizing the levels of heat-trapping greenhouse gases in the atmosphere; and, halting pollution from hazardous waste, radioactive material, and chemical poisoning of land, air and water.
- We call for an immediate shift away from fossil fuels and simultaneously, widespread conversion to and application of renewable energy sources.
- The devastating and disproportionate impact of climate change on poor people and vulnerable nations amplifies the urgency of pursuing climate change solutions, in accord with the common good - the profound Catholic social teaching of care for the greatest good of all persons.
- Mindful of our interdependence, we support an ethic of solidarity promoting cooperation and a just structure of sharing within the world community, as well as international environmental agreements and regulatory norms that decisively address the climate change crisis.
- We respect and support scientific consensus on climate change, and correspondingly deplore: the commodification and depletion of natural resources; the dominance of corporate and economic interests over living beings and ecosystems in view of the calamitous effects of climate change; extreme consumerism; and, the misguided notion that a reliance on technology alone will alleviate the harmful effects of climate change.
- Education will play a crucial role in: countering climate denial; raising awareness of environmental challenges; shaping the attitudes and behaviors that can make a difference; and, preparing critical thinkers who can connect their daily decisions to long-term consequences for themselves and for society as a whole. Our schools and universities must play their part in helping us address this challenge.
- For a variety of reasons, we ardently oppose nuclear weapons, which pose the most significant threat to the Earth’s environment. In addition to tens of millions of deaths, even a small-scale nuclear war would devastate the world’s climate and ecosystems, depleting the ozone layer by 40% over much of the planet, and severely impacting agricultural output for many years. And, the U.S. military is the world’s largest polluter, “producing more hazardous waste than the five largest U.S. chemical companies combined,” according to EcoWatch. Consequently, we deepen our commitment to Gospel nonviolence, to opposing militarism in our nation and world, and to protecting God’s creation: the Earth itself and all living things.

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