

Climate change is a moral issue

By Stephen E. Blaire, Xavier Ochoa and Jaime Soto Special to The Bee

With the release of his encyclical, [Pope Francis has issued a moral challenge](#) to all people of the world. As the Catholic bishops of three dioceses in Northern and Central California, we join our voices with his in calling for urgent action to care for “our common home.” Please join us in reading and prayerfully considering *Laudato si’* over the coming weeks.

Pope Francis shares his predecessors’ concern for both human and environmental degradation. In 1990, Pope John Paul II warned: “The gradual depletion of the ozone layer and the related ‘greenhouse effect’ has now reached crisis proportions.”

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Twenty years later, Pope Benedict XVI asked: “Can we remain indifferent before the problems associated with such realities as climate change, desertification, the deterioration and loss of productivity in vast agricultural areas, the pollution of rivers and aquifers, the loss of biodiversity, the increase of natural catastrophes and the deforestation of equatorial and tropical regions?”

In California, we have been devastated for several years by severe drought. This has hurt the health of our residents, risked the vitality of our waterways and harmed our economy. No matter the explanations, Californians must learn to steward responsibly and reverentially our portion of God’s creation.

The American Lung Association ranks the Central Valley’s air quality among the unhealthiest in the nation. Soot and particles from automobile and industrial emissions can cause heart problems and cancer. By ignoring our moral responsibility to care for the creation entrusted to us, we risk being overwhelmed by our own folly.

Of particular concern is that environmental degradation and climate change disproportionately burden “the least among us.” Our children and seniors are most vulnerable to negative health impacts, and poor families are least able to afford additional medical and utility costs associated with this crisis.

The Catholic perspective is that human and natural ecology go hand in hand. We are called to solidarity with the poor as well as stewardship of the Earth. Our deep regard for the dignity of every person commands us to cultivate a climate of life where each of God’s children thrive and join with creation in praising our Creator. This is the “integral ecology” of which Pope Francis speaks.

Personal decisions have social consequences, and public policies governing use of resources have implications for the welfare of the entire human family. Therefore, all of us must engage in the political process and urge our leaders to work together to ensure our common earthly resources – our land, air and water – are pure and accessible.

A reliance on technology will not restore the Earth to health. Instead, we must each undergo a personal conversion of heart and mind. Together we can create a moral climate change that reflects our values of human dignity, global solidarity with the poor, reverence for creation and working for the common good.



We must ask ourselves: What kind of world do we intend to leave to our children and grandchildren? Creation is a blessing held in common among all people and in trust for future generations. We invite people to join hands and hearts with all people of goodwill in caring for the least among us by ensuring that Earth be a home for all.

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