

PRAY + LEARN + ASSESS + ACT + ADVOCATE

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



Catholic Climate Covenant: St. Francis Pledge Resource Packet - 2009

This packet was produced by the Office for Catholic Social Justice Ministry to assist parish social ministry committees in the implementation of the St. Francis Pledge. Please contact the office for further assistance.

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For updates and background materials:

www.catholicsandclimatechange.org

For resources:

www.catholicclimatecovenant.org

Why Are Catholics Being Encouraged to Join the Catholic Climate Covenant and Take the St. Francis Pledge?

For the last 20 years, the Vatican and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops have developed Catholic social teaching that highlights the moral dimensions of the need to care for God's creation and to lessen the impact of environmental destruction on the poor and most vulnerable. Now the Catholic community is encouraged to become more engaged in both practical actions and public policy remedies to address global climate change.

In 2001, the **U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops** said in their pastoral letter, *Global Climate Change: a Plea for Dialogue, Prudence and the Common Good*:

"As Catholic bishops, we make no independent judgment on the plausibility of 'global warming'. Rather, we accept the consensus finding of so many scientists and the conclusion of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) as a basis for continued research and prudent action....

At its core, global climate change is not about economic theory or political platforms. It is about the future of God's creation and the one human family, about our human stewardship of God's creation and our responsibility to those who come after us. As Catholic bishops, we seek to offer a distinctively religious and moral perspective.... to what is necessarily a complicated scientific, economic and political discussion. Action to mitigate global climate change must be built upon a foundation of social and economic justice that does not put the poor at great risk or place disproportionate and unfair burden on developing nations."

Pope Benedict XVI [and in many other statements]:

"Preservation of the environment, promotion of sustainable development, and *particular attention to climate change* are matters of grave concern for the entire human family. With increasing clarity, scientific research demonstrates that the impact of human action in any one place or region can have worldwide effects." *Address to religious and scientific leaders, September 1, 2007*

As Catholics, we are seeking ways to honor the gift of creation and to live out the demands of the Gospel to care for people in poverty. It will be the poorest and most vulnerable people –the elderly, the sick, children, the poor here and abroad– who will suffer the worst consequences of climate change from drought and flooding, failed crops and hunger, spreading disease, more heat waves, rising sea level and more intense storms.

The Climate Covenant & St. Francis Pledge is a project of the **Catholic Coalition on Climate Change**, formed by major Catholic organizations to engage Catholics in reflection, learning and action. [See www.catholicsandclimatechange.org for social teaching, Papal statements, and many resources]

What is the St. Francis Pledge? Who can take it?

Individuals, families, schools, parishes, and organizations join the Catholic Climate Covenant by taking the **St. Francis Pledge**. They will be asked to fulfill all five elements of the Pledge:

- **PRAY** and reflect on the duty to care for God's creation and protect the poor and vulnerable;
- **LEARN** about and educate others on both the reality of climate change and its moral dimensions;
- **ASSESS** your participation—as individuals and organizations—in contributing to climate change (i.e. consumption and conservation);
- **ACT** to change your choices and behaviors contributing to climate change and;
- **ADVOCATE** for Catholic principles and priorities in climate change discussions and decisions, especially as they impact the poor and vulnerable.

Where can I get more information on ways to fulfill the St. Francis Pledge?

The Covenant's bi-lingual website www.catholicclimatecovenant.org offers many ways for individuals, families, schools, parishes and other institutions to take action. It includes information, suggestions, stories, and materials for each part of the pledge, including: 1) an explanation of the Covenant; 2) a welcoming message; 3) a poster titled "Who's Under Your Carbon Footprint?"; 4) a bulletin insert & pledge form with ways to fulfill it; 5) a short inspirational video explaining the goals of the Covenant. 6) background materials and Papal statements; 7) sign-up for a monthly e-news and information update; 8) links to other resources.

...and see pages of this Resource Packet.

What is the connection between St. Francis and climate change?

St. Francis of Assisi (1181-1226) founded the Franciscan Order. St. Francis gave up his wealth and position in society to live a life of poverty among the poorest in his day. He is well known for his respect and care for all living things. His love of the natural world, his profound gratitude to God, and his understanding that we depend on the services provided by the gifts of God's creation are expressed in his *Canticle of the Sun*. In this hymn, he speaks of Brother Sun, Sister Moon, Mother Earth, Sister Water, and all of God's creation. In one stanza, Francis proclaims: *Praised be my Lord for our brother the wind, and for air and cloud, calms and all weather, by which you uphold in life all creatures.* In our time, we can understand this as including Earth's life-supporting atmosphere that we must protect. The life and ministry of St. Francis continue to inspire Catholics, and all people of good will, to care for creation and those in poverty. Pope John Paul II named Francis the Patron of Ecologists.

Ideas for Getting Started

- Revisit the website www.catholicclimatecovenant.org.
 - Pray for God's guidance on how this pledge can best be used in your own parish community.
 - Brainstorm ways the pledge could be used in the parish.
 - Identify a leader(s) to ensure that your pledge efforts are carried out and to assist other parish staff and volunteers as they incorporate the pledge into their programs.
 - Meet with your pastor and parish council to discuss use of the pledge in the parish and to get ideas and suggestions on how it could best be used. Share the suggestions made by your own committee, and volunteer to help organize use of the pledge in the parish.
 - Discuss the pledge with various organizations and groups within the parish for use within their events, retreats, etc. Ask how the pledge can be used in connection with their work.
 - Develop a plan for using the pledge or how the pledge can fit into existing parish activities. Among the questions you may want to consider are:
 - What kind of preparation should we do before distributing the pledge?
 - Is it too much to ask people to sign the pledge the first time they see it?
 - Should we put information in the bulletin over a period of weeks, explaining the connection between Catholic social teaching and climate change?
- Should we offer advance information and discussion time in our religious education and youth programs and in the school?
 - Should we offer a special adult education session on Catholic social teaching and the environment?
 - How and where do we want to distribute the pledge?
 - Do we want to work with the liturgy committee to develop Pledge Sunday, when we could distribute copies of the pledge at all the Masses?
 - Do we want to distribute the pledge in the school, in the religious education program, RCIA, small faith communities and in other parish groups?
- Plan your follow-up. What individual or group opportunities will you provide? What resources will you provide? Can you identify people who are willing to lead parish based activities? How will you share what has been done to engage others?



For updates and background materials:
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The St. Francis Pledge to Protect Creation and the Poor

All across our country, Catholics are taking the St. Francis Pledge to Care for Creation and the Poor and joining the Catholic Climate Covenant. The St. Francis Pledge is a promise and a commitment by Catholic individuals, families, parishes, organizations and institutions to live our faith by protecting God's Creation and advocating on behalf of people in poverty who face the harshest impacts of global climate change. Then join the Covenant you commit to act on each of the five elements of the St. Francis Pledge and register your Pledge at www.CatholicClimateCovenant.org.

I/We Pledge to:

- Pray and reflect on the duty to care for God's creation and protect the poor and vulnerable.
- Learn about and educate others on the causes and moral dimensions of climate change.
- Assess how I contribute to climate change by my own energy use, consumption, and waste.
- Act to change my choices and behaviors contributing to climate change.
- Advocate for Catholic principles and priorities in climate change discussions and decisions, especially as they impact the poor and vulnerable.



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Climate Covenant / St. Francis Pledge Worksheet

This worksheet was completed by participants of our June 13 Climate Change workshop; additional suggestions are listed at www.CatholicClimateCovenant.org

- build on what you have already done.
- learn from other parishes and dioceses [contact OCSJM for listing of parish activities]
- find those in your parish and town with expertise: gardeners, teachers, health professionals or parish nurse, energy experts, and more.

PRAY and reflect on the duty to care for God's creation, the poor and vulnerable:

- Expand your parish's Blessing of the Animals to include the wider ecosystem, in which you live, animals used for food and clothing, pollinators, etc.
- Prayers of the Faithful: frequently include intercessions for care of creation as essential for human well-being and to protect God's creation.
- Build connections, on first weekend in October, between Respecting Life and children's health with St. Francis, care of creation, and climate change.
- Pray and reflect on the duty to care for God's creation and protect the poor and vulnerable.
- Commission those doing activities to increase awareness and understanding in wider parish.
- Encourage homilies on Church teaching on environmental justice and care of creation. Share Church websites and resources with your pastor and deacon.
- Decorate altar area: have water, globe, other symbolic objects brought up before Offertory procession.
- Music and Banners on care of creation themes.
- Pass out pledge cards as invitation to an educational event about the Pledge; bring pledge cards to altar on the following Sunday.
- Have a retreat, attend a creation themed retreat at a nearby center, or create one, perhaps with another parish.
- Host a Lenten prayer service focused on "Care for God's Creation" (St. Patrick Church, Farmington).

LEARN about and educate others about the moral dimensions of climate change:

- Have regular bulletin segments of Papal quotations on care of creation linked with an action suggestion. [see "Benedict XVI Environmental Quotes" document]
- Show a video/DVD and have discussion leading to a next step or action.
- Learn about and enjoy your local environment: visit a nature center, park, land trust, take a canoe trip or hike, etc. Include prayer of praise and thanksgiving.
- Participate in the JustFaith 8 week Climate Change module (www.justfaith.org)
- Connect finances to energy—saving ideas and actions.
- Invite speakers such as Sr. Mary Ellen Murphy (St. Joseph College) or other scientists; Dr. Mark Mitchell (CT Coalition for Environmental Justice) or other public health officials; speakers listed at www.ctclimatechange.com, local ecologists, river group leaders, etc.
- Newsletter, bulletin, or website: include environmental information and Church teaching, and links to Climate Covenant and other Catholic environmental websites.

- Bulletin boards: use visuals such as climate footprint poster, climate map, CRS materials, etc. to raise awareness or invite folks to an event.
- Use existing events—Blessing of Animals, picnics, fundraisers, coffee hour, Lenten suppers—to introduce Pledge or educate folks.

ASSESS our participation as individuals/organizations in contributing to climate change:

- Calculate your carbon footprint: www.nature.org/initiatives/climatechange/calculator or other sources. Also for your parish: <http://www.coolcongregations.com/>
- Resources for energy audits, rebates and efficiency ideas through local energy providers: www.cl-p.com, www.uinet.com, or visit UI's Smart Living Center in Orange or see www.smartlivingcatalog.com
- Connecticut Energy Efficiency Fund, www.CTEnergyInfo.com
- For your parish: <http://www.energystar.gov/>
- Assess your parish's carbon footprint at: <http://www.coolcongregations.com>
- Assess your town's level of planning for heat emergencies and extreme weather events.

ACT to change your choices and behaviors contributing to climate change.

- Save energy in home and parish: set AC higher, heater lower, and use only when really needed.
- Use your solar dryer: a clothes line.
- Walk, bike, or carpool to Mass. Have a blessing for all who used less fossil fuel and created less greenhouse gases getting to church.
- Have meatless Fridays outside of Lent to save energy and reduce greenhouse gases, lessen water use and pollution; contribute to local food pantry or CRS.
- Election forums: ask about social and environmental justice issues.
- Fair Trade baskets as part of events.
- Action to increase energy efficiency: conduct energy audit; add insulation, install CFL bulbs and LED exit signs, buy efficient appliances when possible.
- Recycling: use energy and enthusiasm of youth to educate parishioners.
- Reduce paper products &/or buy recycled content products for parish events.
- Fundraise for parish dishwasher to lessen use of paper products.
- Simple alternative gifts; for Christmas, suggestions for reducing consumption and waste.
- Lenten Energy Fast (Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, Hamden).

ADVOCATE for Catholic principles and priorities in discussions and decisions:

- Sign up for and publicize action alerts to protect creation and the vulnerable:
 - United States Conference Catholic Bishops <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/ejp/>
 - Catholic Relief Services www.crs.org
 - Connecticut Catholic Advocacy Network www.ctcatholic.org
- Join CT Coalition for Environmental Justice www.environmental-justice.org and Inter Religious Eco-Justice Network www.irejn.org
- Petition drives, offering of letters/ postcards to legislators after Mass.
- Small group to visit Legislators, advocate Catholic positions on issues.
- Join local groups or form a town-wide group: Interfaith Green Committee (Corpus Christi Church, Wethersfield); Citizens for Greener Manchester (Assumption, St. Bridget)

DVD or Videos on Stewardship of Creation and Care of Neighbor

Borrow from Office for Catholic Social Justice Ministry, 203-777-7279

“God’s Creation and Global Warming” (18 minutes) older youth - adult

Spokespersons for major faith traditions, including Catholic, reflect on the effects of changing climate on the poor and on creation. (*National Council of Churches of Christ & National Religious Partnership for the Environment*)

“Lighten Up! A Religious Response to Global Warming” (15 minutes) youth – adult

Interfaith Power and Light director discusses actions everyone can take to combat global climate change. (*Interfaith Power and Light*)

“The Warming of Connecticut” (50 minutes.) older youth - adult

How climate change is happening and potential effects on environment, health and infrastructure of CT; what we can do to lessen impacts. (*CPTV, Union of Concerned Scientists*)

“Renewal” (Eight 15-minute segments) youth - adult

Christian, Muslim, Jewish, and Buddhist communities and congregations, around the U.S. and in CT, take a variety of prophetic, vivid and creative actions to protect health and the environment. Several segments feature Catholic leaders and a Catholic scientist. Interfaith Power and Light leaders and projects included. (*The Renewal Project & Interfaith Power and Light*)

“The Earth is the Lord’s” (13 minutes) youth - adult

Reflections from scripture, Church tradition, and Catholic social justice teaching on caring for the Earth. Based on the U.S. Bishops' pastoral, “Renewing the Earth.” (*U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops Environmental Justice Program*)

“Caring for Children, Caring for Creation” (20 minutes) adult

Examines ways children’s health can be affected by exposure to outdoor and indoor pollutants; environmental justice; healthy schools. (*National Religious Partnership for the Environment*)

“Water for Life” (18 minutes) youth - adult

Responses to the critical need for clean water in developing countries. (*Catholic Relief Services and National Council of Catholic Women*)

“Keeping the Earth” (26 minutes) youth - adult

Religious and scientific leaders focus on the need to care for the environment and to protect biodiversity. (*National Religious Partnership for the Environment, Union of Concerned Scientists*)

“And Justice for All” (25 minutes) youth - adult

Examines the impact of pollution and toxic wastes on poor and minority communities and how churches and neighborhoods are organizing for justice. (*Presbyterian Church, USA*)

“The Living Sound” (26 minutes) middle school

A middle-school team investigates the ecology of Long Island Sound, its value to the people of Connecticut, and how human activities, even far inland, affect it. (*Connecticut DEP*)

Websites for Environmental Information and Action

Catholic Resources on Care of Creation, Environmental Justice, Children's Health, and Climate Change:

www.catholicsandclimatechange.org and

www.catholicclimatecovenant.org resources for education and action by major Catholic organizations, dioceses and parishes. *Sign on to email update list.*

www.usccb.org/sdwp/ejp Catholic Bishops' Environmental Justice Program

www.usccb.org/case Catholic Children's Health and Environment Initiative

www.usccb.org/sdwp/ejp/case/clavers.shtml An environmental justice and health project in an African American Catholic community.

www.crs.org Catholic Relief Services, water, food, reforestation, Fair Trade

www.ncrlc.com National Catholic Rural Life Conference; & water and food issues

Study Guides:

<http://www.justfaith.org/JF1252.html> *Just Faith/Just Matters: "God's Creation Cries for Justice—Climate Change: Impact and Response."* Curriculum of prayer, readings, DVDs.

http://www.ihmsisters.org/www/Justice_Peace_and_Sustainability/Ecological_Integrity/globalclimate.asp

"This is Your Home: a Study Guide for Reflection Leading to Action to Stop Global Climate Change" & DVD. Borrow from OCSJM.

www.ccappal.org DVD and discussion guide from Catholic Committee of Appalachia. Borrow from OCSJM.

Connecticut organizations and resources:

www.irejn.org Connecticut Inter-Religious Eco-Justice Network

www.environmental-justice.org CT Coalition for Environmental Justice

www.ehhi.org Environment and Human Health, Inc., CT research and advocacy

www.ctclimatechange.com Connecticut's State Action Plan, resources

www.longislandsoundstudy.net Clean water, climate, fisheries, etc.

www.ctcleanenergy.com Connecticut Clean Energy Fund

Other websites of interest:

www.nrpe.org National Religious Partnership for the Environment

www.InterfaithPowerandLight.org

www.ipcc.ch Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

www.pewclimate.org Pew Center on global climate change

www.ucsusa.org Union of Concerned Scientists

www.ncdc.noaa.gov , www.arctic.noaa.gov U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration: National Climate Data Center and Arctic center

www.climatehotmap.org resource map of observed changes around the world

www.psr.org Physicians for Social Responsibility: see Global Warming and Health Impacts.

www.riversalliance.org listing of river and watershed organizations

Pope Benedict XVI on Care of Creation

“At a time of world food shortage, of financial turmoil, of old and new forms of poverty, of disturbing climate change, of violence and deprivation which force many to leave their homelands in search of a less precarious form of existence, of the ever-present threat of terrorism, of growing fears over the future, it is urgent to rediscover grounds for hope. Let no one draw back from this peaceful battle that has been launched by Christ's Resurrection. For as I said earlier, Christ is looking for men and women who will help him to affirm his victory using his own weapons: the weapons of justice and truth, mercy, forgiveness and love.”
Urbi et Orbi, Easter 2009

“The environment is God's gift to everyone, and in our use of it we have a responsibility toward the poor, toward future generations and toward humanity as a whole. (no. 48) Questions linked to the care and preservation of the environment today need to give due consideration to *the energy problem*. The technologically advanced societies can and must lower their domestic energy consumption.... It should be added that at present it is possible to achieve improved energy efficiency while at the same time encouraging research into alternative forms of energy. (no. 49)”
Caritas in Veritate, June 29, 2009

“To indicate the Holy Spirit, the account in the Acts of the Apostles uses two great images, the image of the tempest and the image of fire....the tempest is described as ‘a strong driving wind’, and this brings to mind the air that distinguishes our planet from others and permits us to live on it. What air is for the biological life, the Holy Spirit is for the spiritual life; and as there is air pollution that poisons the environment and living things, there is also pollution of the heart and the spirit, that mortifies and poisons spiritual existence. In the same way that we should not be complacent about the poisons in the air—and for this reason ecological efforts are a priority today—we should also not be complacent about that which corrupts the spirit.”
Homily for the Solemnity of Pentecost, 2009

"Care of water resources and attention to climate change are matters of grave importance for the entire human family....Encouraged by the growing recognition of the need to preserve the environment, I invite all of you to join me in praying and working for greater respect for the wonders of God's creation!"
Greeting to the symposium "The Arctic: Mirror of Life", Greenland, September 2007

"It is essential to ‘sense’ that the earth is ‘our common home’ and, in our stewardship and service to all, to choose the path of dialogue rather than the path of unilateral decisions. The problems looming on the horizon are complex and time is short. One area where there is particular need to intensify dialogue between nations is that of the stewardship of the earth's energy resources.”
2008 World Day of Peace Message

“To the new generations the future of the planet is entrusted, in which there are evident signs of a development that has not always known how to safeguard the delicate equilibriums of nature. Before it is too late, it is necessary to make courageous decisions that reflect knowing how to re-create a strong alliance between man and the earth. A decisive ‘yes’ to the protection of creation is necessary and a firm commitment to reverse those tendencies that run the risks of bringing about situations of unstoppable degradation....This year, attention is focused above all on water, a most precious good that, if it is not shared in a fair and peaceful way, will unfortunately become a cause for significant tensions and bitter conflicts.”
Address to youth at Loreto, Italy, Sept. 2, 2007

“Preservation of the environment, promotion of sustainable development, and particular attention to climate change are matters of grave concern for the entire human family. No nation or business sector can ignore the ethical implications present in all economic and social development. With increasing

clarity, scientific research demonstrates that the impact of human action in any one place or region can have worldwide effects.” *Address to religious and scientific leaders, September 1, 2007*

“Today, we all see that man can destroy the foundations of his existence, his earth, hence, that we can no longer simply do what we like or what seems useful and promising at the time with this earth of ours, with the reality entrusted to us. On the contrary, we must respect the inner laws of creation, of this earth, we must learn these laws and obey these laws if we wish to survive. Consequently, this obedience to the voice of the earth, of being, is more important for our future happiness than the voices of the moment, the desires of the moment....In short, this is a first criterion to learn: that being itself, our earth, speaks to us and we must listen if we want to survive and to decipher this message of the earth. And if we must be obedient to the voice of the earth, this is even truer for the voice of human life.

“Perhaps reluctantly we come to acknowledge that there are also scars which mark the surface of our earth: erosion, deforestation, the squandering of the world’s mineral and ocean resources in order to fuel and insatiable consumption. Some of you come from island nations whose very existence is threatened by rising water levels; others from nations suffering the effects of devastating drought. God’s wondrous creation is sometimes experienced as almost hostile to its stewards, even something dangerous. How can what is ‘good’ appear so threatening?

“My dear friends, God’s creation is one and it is good. The concerns for non-violence, sustainable development, justice and peace, and care for our environment are of vital importance for humanity.” *Welcome to Youth, Sydney, July 17, 2008*

“In recent decades the doctrine of Creation had almost disappeared from theology.... We are now aware of the damage this has caused. The Redeemer is the Creator and if we do not proclaim God in his full grandeur—as Creator and Redeemer—we also diminish the value of the Redemption. And it is he, the Creator himself, who did and can enter into history and operate in it precisely because he is the God of the whole and not only of a part. If we recognize this it will obviously follow that the Redemption, being Christian, and simply Christian, also means responsibility always and everywhere with regard to the creation.... As long as the earth was seen as God’s creation, the task of “subduing” it was never intended as an order to enslave it, but rather as the task of being guardians of creation and developing its gifts; of actively collaborating in God’s work ourselves, in the evolution that he ordered in the world so that the gifts of creation might be appreciated rather than trampled upon and destroyed.”

Talk with priests, deacons and seminarians, Bressanone, Italy, August 20, 2008

For statements, resources for prayer, homilies, action, & information:

www.vatican.va Click Benedict XVI image for encyclicals, homilies, messages

www.usccb.org/sdwp/ejp US Bishops’ Environmental Justice Program

www.catholicsandclimatechange.org Catholic Coalition on Climate Change

www.catholicclimatecovenant.org Climate Covenant & St. Francis Pledge to Care for Creation and the Poor

www.usccb.org/sdwp/ejp/case/mission.shtml Bishops’ Conference Children’s Environmental Health Coalition

www.usccb.org/sdwp/ejp/case/clavers.shtml Knights of Peter Claver Environmental Justice and Health Project

www.ncrlc.com National Catholic Rural Life Conference

www.conservation.catholic.org Prayers, statements, scripture

Respecting Life by Caring for Creation



On the first weekend of October, the observance of **Respect Life Sunday** often coincides with the celebration of the **Feast of St. Francis of Assisi** (October 4), named patron of ecology by Pope John Paul II. This confluence of observances invites us to deeper understanding of the connections between protecting life and caring for the environment, God's creation, which has been entrusted to our care [Gen.2:15]. New forms of violence and disrespect for life call for new responses in faith, and it is ever more obvious that we cannot care for our neighbor or for the most vulnerable, especially children and the poor, unless we protect the environment we share and depend on. This is a moral issue and calls us to work for environmental justice for all.

Threats to Life:

- Protecting life involves addressing the obvious threats to children's health and development: abortion, violence, and lack of adequate food, shelter and health care. But there are less obvious, but very real threats, especially toxic pollutants that reach the infant in the womb and harm growing children. These threats are the unintended consequences of our technology, which has made life safer and more comfortable for many. These pollutants come from sources such as electric power generation, trucks and automobiles, pesticides, industrial and household chemicals, and wastes. They affect infants and children through air, water, food and other routes.
- Children are particularly at risk, before birth and in their early years. Many chemicals reach the child in the womb, where toxins like lead and mercury can harm the developing brain and central nervous system. The immature systems and organs of infants and young children are not as efficient in dealing with pollutants as are adults'. Early and continuing exposure may contribute to neurological problems, learning disabilities, developmental problems, reproductive problems, cancer and asthma.
- Child asthma rates in CT are rising, with high rates of hospitalization and emergency room visits in our cities. The resulting stress on families and the lost school days have long-term consequences for vulnerable children. Hartford has asthma rates twice the national average. Hartford has two interstate highways and the largest trash-to-energy incinerator in the state, which burns trash from 70 CT towns. Hartford is also home to the largest sewage sludge incinerator in the state, which receives sewage sludge from 35 towns in CT, MA, and RI. There is a strong positive correlation between the percentage of people of color in a community and the number of environmental hazards located in that community. The poor and vulnerable among us are bearing an unjust share of the burdens of facilities from which many communities benefit.
- There is rising concern about the effects of global climate change on the most vulnerable. As climate and rainfall become less predictable, farming will fail in many parts of the world—places where millions of children are already malnourished—and diseases due to insects and lack clean water will spread. Even in the U.S., climate change raises public health concerns, from increasing risk of extreme heat stress events to the spread of new

diseases. Low-lying cities and coastal areas, often the most heavily populated, will suffer from rising sea level, storm damage, and flooding of essential infrastructure such as pipelines, power plants, railroads, highways and sewage systems.

Church Teaching and Action:

- Protecting children in the womb, the “first environment” is increasingly understood by our Bishops and the Holy Father as inseparably linked to responsible stewardship of the wider environment. Pope John Paul II spoke frequently of the need to protect life and God’s gift of creation. Pope Benedict XVI is increasingly speaking on the urgent need to address global climate change and many forms of ecological damage that threaten human well being and the future of all life. Caring for creation is the seventh theme of Catholic Social Teaching, an inseparable part of caring for neighbor and living the Gospel.
- Our U.S. bishops have issued pastoral letters and given testimony before Congress. Parishes and dioceses across the country have initiated projects and educated themselves on the links between care of creation and care of neighbor. The Archdiocese of Hartford is a leader in this effort. Organizations such as the National Council of Catholic Women and the Catholic Health Association are working for children’s environmental health, and the Knights of St. Peter Claver are educating and rallying urban parishes to work for environmental justice. The Catholic Coalition on Climate Change is working with dioceses and parishes to educate Catholics and move them to action.
- The violence of environmental destruction is a threat to life and to God’s vision for abundant life and a fruitful Earth.
- Obeying the commandments is the beginning, not the end, of our response to God. Living our faith in action today involves responding to new sorts of violence and disrespect for life. How do our baptismal gift of faith and the cries of the vulnerable call us to act?

Our Response:

- We are called to pray, to protest threats to life, to educate others, and to influence public policies for greater justice. Making changes in our consumer choices and lifestyles, as well as influencing how our legislators vote on public policies concerning air and water pollution, energy production, and disposal of our wastes—all are part of protecting life and the environment. Make phone calls and join the [CT Catholic Advocacy Network](#), to receive action alerts on the environment and pro-life.
- Join the Catholic Climate Covenant and take the “St. Francis Pledge to Care for Creation and the Poor”: pray, learn, assess, act, and advocate as individual, family, parish, school, organization. See www.catholicclimatecovenant.org and materials mailed to your pastor in April, 2009.

We can all do more to protect children’s right to life and healthy development in a life-sustaining environment. May the gift of faith continue to be deepened in each of us and in all of us together, as it is stirred into flame to protect the life and dignity of the most vulnerable, so that we will keep God’s creation the fruitful garden God created it to be.

The Feast of St. Francis – Expand Your Celebration



In **Genesis 9:8-17**, God says to Noah after the Flood that He establishes the covenant “with you and your descendants and with every living creature that was with you: all the birds, and the various tame and wild animals...this is the sign [rainbow] that I am giving for all ages to come, of the covenant between me and you and every living creature that was with you...all living beings...all mortal creatures that are on earth.”

If God covenants with all creatures, we should give thanks for them and protect them, appreciating that they serve God’s purposes and give glory to God in their own unique ways. As the **Catechism of the Catholic Church** says, “God willed the diversity of his creatures and their own particular goodness, their interdependence, and their order.” (#353)

Pope Benedict XVI spoke on care of animals: “We can see that they are given into our care, that we cannot just do whatever we want with them. Animals, too, are God’s creatures... creatures of his will, creatures we must respect as companions in creation and as important elements in the creation.... Certainly, a sort of industrial use of creatures, so that...hens live so packed together that they become just caricatures of birds, this degrading of living creatures to a commodity seems to me, in fact, to contradict the relationship of mutuality that comes across in the Bible.” (*God and the World*, 2002)

How might concern for other creatures and preservation of biodiversity be part of a Blessing of the Animals and other observances?

Beyond blessing those animals that share our lives, add mention of and prayers for others of God’s creatures – those we depend on or delight in, and those that are key to healthy ecosystems: [photos of some could be included]

- Pollinators: bees, moths and butterflies, without whose daily work many fruits, nuts and flowers would not grow [berries, almonds, soybeans, peaches, potatoes, and dozens more, and honey, of course].
- Birds and bats that eat millions of mosquitoes and other insects.
- Fungi that help plants absorb nutrients from soil; earthworms, bacteria, small critters that decompose plant material, helping to create topsoil.
- Animals used in testing the medicines we depend on.
- Cattle, pigs, sheep, chickens and fish that we eat.
- Thousands of species that make up the web of life around us.
- And more.....

Include in or follow a Blessing Service with some action to protect or benefit other creatures:

- Collect food for a local animal shelter.
- Publicize spay and neuter clinics to prevent suffering by unwanted cats and dogs.
- Visit local nature centers and land trusts, to learn about creatures that share your ecosystem. Include prayers of thanksgiving.

- Publicize recycling to prevent water and air pollution that harms people, fish and animals. Urge parishioners to properly dispose of household chemicals, motor oil, pesticides, pool chemicals, batteries, computers, TVs, cell phones, and compact fluorescent light bulbs at collection sites or town Household Hazardous Waste collection days. Put unused medications in your trash, don't flush them.
- Plant a butterfly garden or shrubs and trees that provide food for birds, on your parish grounds and at home.
- Contribute to Catholic Relief Services to support poor farmers' development of tree nurseries for food, shade-grown coffee, and reforestation.

Global Climate Change will affect all species in different ways.

- Take the "St. Francis Pledge to Care for Creation and the Poor" and join the Catholic Climate Covenant to learn more.
www.CatholicClimateCovenant.org
www.catholicsandclimatechange.org

On the first weekend in October, build connections between the Feast of St. Francis and Respect Life Sunday.

- Both observances celebrate life and invite us to grow in understanding of the inseparable connection between protecting human life, especially that of children and the most vulnerable, and protecting our environment, God's creation. [see "Respecting Life by Caring for Creation" in this resource]
- Go to www.usccb.org/case for the Catholic Children's Health and Environmental Justice Program information. Invite parish members to watch DVD "Caring for Children, Caring for Creation," which can be borrowed from the Office for Catholic Social Justice Ministry, 203-777-7279.

Intercessions:

Following St. Francis of Assisi's example, may we delight in the diversity of our fellow creatures and understand that they serve and praise God by their existence, we pray to the Lord. **R/**

That we will more fully appreciate and protect the small creatures: the earthworms, fungi, and bacteria that create productive soil; bees and butterflies that pollinate flowers and food plants, we pray to the Lord. **R/**

That we may be ever better stewards of God's creation --our shared water, air and soil-- protecting the Earth's fertility for future generations, we pray to the Lord. **R/**

That all who work the land, care for animals, and produce and process our food may have safe working conditions and a just income for their families, we pray to the Lord. **R/**

That, as we grow in knowledge of the vastness of the universe, may we grow in wonder, humility and praise of God's goodness and power, we pray to the Lord. **R/**

That businesses, industries, communities, and each of us in our daily lives may be more responsible in disposing of wastes in ways that will protect God's creation, we pray to the Lord. **R/**

That God will increase our awareness that respect for human life and dignity and protection of children, born and unborn, cannot be separated from care of the environment, we pray to the Lord **R/**

That we and our leaders may work to lessen the harmful effects of the changing global climate on the poor and vulnerable in our cities, coastal areas, and in developing nations, we pray to the Lord **R/**

Celebrate and Pray with St. Francis of Assisi

- Interactive Canticle

St. Francis, before he burst forth into song with his "Canticle of the Sun," said:

"I want to compose a new song, a canticle to the Lord through his creatures, whom we use every day, and without whom we cannot live, and through whom the human race greatly offends its Creator. We are constantly ungrateful for his gifts and blessings, and we do not praise the Lord, the Creator, and Giver of all good gifts, as we should."

If Francis saw this as a problem in the 13th century, how much more would he find it so in our time? We are called to praise and thank God in prayer and song, but also by examining and changing many of the ways we misuse, throw away, and neglect to share those gifts, which are meant to allow all people to live with dignity. We are called to examine how we treat other creatures, both in our use of them and in our effects on their habitats, and the soil, water, and air which support all life.

In 1979, Pope John Paul II named Francis the Patron of Ecologists, calling him "a friend of the poor who was loved by God's creatures," one who "offers Christians an example of genuine and deep respect for the integrity of creation." Ecology [from Greek *oikos*, home] is the study the interdependence of creatures with each other and with their physical environment. Francis calls us to acknowledge our complete dependence on God and God's gift of the Earth, which is the basis of right relationship with all people and fellow creatures.

Care for the environment is now understood as inseparable from care of our neighbor. (*Renewing the Earth*, USCCB, 1991; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2415) We are all affected by air and water pollution, by careless use and disposal of toxic substances and wastes, and by global climate change. But the poor and vulnerable, especially developing children born and unborn, minority communities, and people in developing nations are the first to suffer. They are less likely to share in the use of the earth's resources, and they are cannot move away or to protect themselves from environmental harms. "Environmental Justice" calls us all to see these connections, to work to correct such situations, and to protect all the life of the Earth.

We tend to sentimentalized St. Francis—now it is time to let him "escape from the birdbath." He was radically thankful, humble, respectful and active in living the Gospel. May he be our model for gratitude and humility before God, for commitment to protecting the diversity of life, and for more just sharing of the gifts of creation with all our sisters and brothers.

Praise God for the Gifts of Creation with St. Francis of Assisi



Together:

O God, you have done all things wisely.

In your goodness you have made us in your image and set us among the wonders of your creation. We give you praise and thanks for all your works.

You have called us to share your gifts, especially with the poor and vulnerable. You have called us to sustain the fruitfulness of your creation, for all generations.

Through the life of Francis – one of praise, preaching, simple living, and care of the poor – teach us to respect and nurture all life, and to be better caretakers of your creation. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Leader Instructions:

- Before we proclaim, with Francis, his Hymn of praise and thanks to God for all the gifts of creation, take a few minutes to read through the canticle.
- Recall your own experiences of creation, near home or in a special place.
What most gives you joy or fills you with wonder?
What are you most dependent upon?
What would you miss most if it ceased to exist?
- Francis speaks of the heavenly bodies and uses the medieval categories of earth, air, water and fire. Let your imagination expand these categories to include such things as forms of energy, the ozone layer, earthworms, compost, or a sunset.
- As you read each stanza, write a brief phrase, experience or name something or someone. You don't have to put something for each stanza or category.
- We will take 6-7 minutes for reflection, with some music. Then we will pray the canticle together.

[Pause for reflection time.]

- Now we will recite the stanzas together; you may call out your word or phrase after each. We will begin the next stanza when everyone who wishes has spoken.

Canticle of the Sun



O most High, almighty, good Lord God, to you belong praise, honor and all blessing!

Praised be my Lord God with all creatures; and especially our brother the sun, which brings us the day and the light; fair is he, and shining with a very great splendor: O Lord, he signifies you to us!
And for ...

Praised be my Lord for our sister the moon, and for the stars, which God has set clear and lovely in heaven. *And for ...*

Praised be my Lord for our brother the wind, and for air and cloud, calms and all weather, by which you uphold in life all creatures. *And for...*

Praised be my Lord for our sister water, which is very serviceable to us, and humble, and precious, and clean. *And for ...*

Praised be my Lord for brother fire, through which you give us light in the darkness; and he is bright, and pleasant, and very mighty, and strong. *And for ...*

Praised be my Lord for our mother the Earth, which sustains us and keeps us, and yields diverse fruits, and flowers of many colors, and grass. *And for ...*

Praised be my Lord for all those who pardon one another for God's love's sake, and who endure weakness and tribulation; blessed are they who peaceably endure, for you, O most High, shall give them a crown! *And for...*

Praised be my Lord for our sister, the death of the body, from which no one escapes; woe to him who died in mortal sin! *And for ...*

Blessed are they who are found walking by your most holy will, for the second death shall have no power to do them harm. Praise you and bless you the Lord and give thanks to God, and serve God with great humility.

Amen.

Canticle of the Creatures

Adapted Version



O most High, almighty, good Lord God, to you belong praise, honor and all blessing!

Praised be my Lord God with all creatures; and especially our brother the sun, which brings us the day and the light; fair is he, and shining with a very great splendor: O Lord, he signifies you to us! *We give you praise for:*

- The light of Christ, which has come into the world.
- Sunlight, which travels 93 million miles to reach our Earth.
- Solar energy, which warms the land and sea, making life possible and creating our weather.
- The beauty of sunrise and sunset, marking our days

Praised be my Lord for our sister the moon, and for the stars, which God has set clear and lovely in heaven. *We give you praise for:*

- The vast reaches of the universe, billions of stars in billions of galaxies, giving You glory.
- The explosive supernova death of stars, creating and sending the elements needed for life into our solar system and planet Earth.
- The delicate beauty of a new crescent moon and the golden splendor of a harvest moon.
- The moon-governed tides that shape the life of ocean shores.

Praised be my Lord for our brother the wind, and for air and cloud, calms and all weather, by which you uphold in life all creatures. *We give you praise for:*

- The balance of gases in the atmosphere, the ocean of air in which we live and breathe.
- Winds that move clouds of moisture around our planet, giving us rain.
- The ozone layer, protecting life from harmful rays.

Praised be my Lord for our sister water, which is very serviceable to us, and humble, and precious, and clean. *We give you praise for:*

- The waters of Baptism and blessing, of new life and grace.
- Water that makes plant and animal life possible.
- Water that makes up more than half the substance of a human body.
- The power of flowing rivers that generates electricity.
- Marshes and wetlands, streams, lakes, waterfalls and rainbows.
- All the creatures, great and small, that teem in Earth's waters.

Praised be my Lord for brother fire, through which you give us light in the darkness; and he is bright, and pleasant, and very mighty, and strong. *We give you praise for:*

- Sources of light that give us extra hours of day.
- Fossil fuels, products of ancient sunlight, accumulated over the ages, burned to give us energy.
- Flame and candles that pierce the darkness at the Easter Vigil.

Praised be my Lord for our mother the Earth, which sustains us and keeps us, and yields diverse fruits, and flowers of many colors, and grass. *We give you praise for:*

- The work of photosynthesis by plankton and plants, converting sunlight, carbon dioxide and nutrients into food for other creatures.
- The incredible beauty, intricacy and diversity of flowers and foliage.
- Grasses-- rice, wheat, corn, barley, oats, millet -- the staff of life.
- Wheat and grapes, fruits of the Earth, become our Eucharistic banquet.
- Earthworms, fungi, and all small creatures that create fertile soil.
- Bees and all pollinators, whose work is essential for the life and fruitfulness of many plants.
- All creatures who serve God's purpose and vision for creation.

Praised be my Lord for all those who pardon one another for God's love's sake, and who endure weakness and tribulation; blessed are they who peaceably endure, for you, O most High, shall give them a crown!

We give you praise for the lives and work of:

- St. Francis of Assisi, who rejoiced in the whole community of life and understood himself as brother to all people and all creatures.
- Cesar Chavez, who worked to protect those who harvest our food, and all who struggle for just and healthy conditions for farm workers and food processors.
- Sister Dorothy Stang and Chico Mendes, who gave their lives in the pursuit of justice for small farmers, rubber tappers and the landless poor of Brazil.
- Wangaari Mathai, former political prisoner who leads Kenya's Green Belt Movement and the Billion Tree Campaign.
- All who work to protect human life and dignity.

Praised be my Lord for our sister, the death of the body, from which no one escapes; woe to him who died in mortal sin! Blessed are they who are found walking by your most holy will, for the second death shall have no power to do them harm.

We give you praise for:

- All the elements of the earth that form our bodies in our mother's wombs, cycling through us from the plants and animals we eat, returning to the Earth when we no longer need them.

Praise you and bless you the Lord and give thanks to God, and serve God with great humility.

Amen.