
HOPE IN A TIME OF POVERTY: ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

A Reflection from the USCCB Department of Justice, Peace & Human Development



*“I will sprinkle clean **water** over you to make you clean; from all your impurities and from all your idols I will cleanse you. I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of **flesh**.”*

Ezekiel 36: 24-26

Creation is a gift. Creation gives glory to God, and in making wise use of it, the human family is built up. In looking after the environment, we care for our neighbor and pass on a gift to generations to come.

Creation is the great space where we live out our relationship with God and neighbor. As part of a life of gratitude to God for this gift and of justice towards our neighbor, we are called to build communities that are sustainable, respectful of creation and that promote the development of all. Sustainable communities are healthy, safe for our children, and by making prudent use of natural resources, are home to economic development that creates good paying wage jobs.

Today the gift of creation is threatened by excessive lifestyles and a lack of respect for the sacredness of creation and the dignity of our neighbor.

We prize what Pope Francis calls a “culture of waste” over a culture of conservation and virtuous moderation. As Catholics, we should reject an economy that puts profit and unrestrained consumption ahead of the good of communities and the environment. We desperately need to rethink the path we are travelling together.

The consequences of a “culture of waste” and a “more is better” economy are serious. Poor and vulnerable communities shoulder the biggest burden as they are threatened by climate change: drought, famine and other natural calamities take a toll on them. Children, especially those in the womb, are put in danger by pollutants in the environment. Competition for natural resources makes it more difficult for already struggling families to get food on the table and keep homes warm in the winter.

The covenant between human beings and the environment needs to be strengthened. To do this, we should seek the wisdom that comes from prayer and a desire to stand in solidarity with our neighbor. As the bishops have said, first “we need a change of heart to preserve and protect the planet for our children and for generations yet unborn.”ⁱ

By taking a fresh look at our lifestyles and choosing to live simply, we can reduce our carbon footprint and build communities in balance and in harmony with God’s gift of creation. Personal and

societal decisions should always reflect concern for “the least of these.” The development of new, sustainable types of energy holds much promise for contributing to our economy through the creation of “green jobs.” It is also important to support policies that protect human life and dignity through prudent stewardship of the environment.

*“Whenever we fail to care for **creation** and for our brothers and sisters, the way is opened to destruction and **hearts** are hardened.”*

Pope Francis ⁱⁱⁱ

Take up Pope Francis’ challenge to be *protectors* of creation: “I would like to ask ...all men and women of goodwill: let us be ‘protectors’ of creation, protectors of God’s plan inscribed in nature, protectors of one another and of the environment.” ⁱⁱ

For more on how you can help steward the gift of creation, take the St. Francis Pledge below and see our additional resources.

ⁱ USCCB, *Renewing the Earth*, 1991, i-d.

ⁱⁱ Francis, [Homily at Mass for the Inauguration of the Pontificate](#), 19 March 2013.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.



Environmental Justice and CCHD

Tohono O’odham Community Action

Mac and cheese and cholla cactus buds?? Squash pancakes with saguaro fruit syrup?? Of course!

In his quest to introduce healthy traditional foods to young fellow members of the Tohono O’odham Nation, Anthony Francisco is creative, enthusiastic and motivated. “Food is deeply connected to our culture. Teaching children about the traditional foods helps give them their identity as people who come from a long line with a rich history,” he says.

It’s also practical. The Tohono O’odham live in southern Arizona, where the temperature reliably exceeds 100 degrees seven months of the year and rainfall is precious. O’odham squash, sixty-day corn and teary beans, for example, tolerate heat and drought, taste delicious and store well. Non-traditional crops require more water.

Anthony works with CCHD-funded Tohono O’odham Community Action Farmers’ Cooperative to grow and offer fresh local foods to people accustomed to eating diets that promote diabetes and obesity. He overcomes their initial reluctance to try ‘new’ foods by pairing the familiar with the traditional. Anthony and his wife experiment with combinations in their own kitchen, where they are feeding five youngsters. “I want to make sure all the children here get a healthy meal that connects them to who they are as O’odham.”

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Visit www.usccb.org/jphd for the complete series of reflections.

Take the St. Francis Pledge to Care for Creation and the Poor

This is a commitment by Catholics to live our faith by protecting God’s Creation and those most vulnerable to the impacts of global climate change.

(<http://catholicclimatecovenant.org/the-st-francis-pledge/>)

USCCB Environmental Justice Program

Learn more about Catholic educational and advocacy efforts to address environmental concerns in light of Catholic teaching.

(<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/environment/environmental-justice-program/index.cfm>)

Bishops’ Committee Energy Statement, Reflections on the Energy Crisis

This statement highlights moral principles to help guide our response to key energy questions. (<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/environment/upload/reflections-energy-crisis.pdf>)

Summary of Moral Principles from Bishops’ Committee

Energy Statement (<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/environment/upload/moral-principles-from-1981-energy-statement.pdf>)

Bishops’ Climate Change statement This statement highlights a Catholic response to climate change.

(<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/environment/global-climate-change-a-plea-for-dialogue-prudence-and-the-common-good.cfm>)

Bishops’ Renewing the Earth statement This statement is an invitation to reflection and action on the environment in light of Catholic social teaching. (<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/environment/renewing-the-earth.cfm>)

