

**Testimony
Oral Summary**

**Religious and Moral Dimensions of Global Climate Change
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United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Committee on Environment and Public Works
United States Senate**

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I am John Carr, Secretary of Social Development and World Peace of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. We welcome this important and timely hearing on an issue that clearly affects God's creation and the entire human family. The religious leaders here today share an abiding love for God's gift of creation and the biblical mandate to care for creation. We believe our response to global climate change will be a moral measure of our nation's leadership and stewardship.

In their statement, "*Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence and the Common Good*" the U.S. Catholic Bishops insist:

"{A}t its core, global climate change is not simply about economic theory or political platforms, nor about partisan advantage or interest group pressures. Rather, global climate change is about the future of God's creation and the one human family. It is about our human stewardship of God's creation and our responsibility to those generations who will succeed us. If we harm the atmosphere, we dishonor our Creator and the gift of creation."

The bishops' approach to climate change and this statement are nuanced, not alarmist; traditional, not trendy; an expression of faith, not politics. For us, this concern began with Genesis, not Earth Day.

The Catholic Church is focused on these challenges at the highest levels and on a global basis.-at the Vatican, by other bishops' conferences and in the teaching of Pope Benedict XVI and Pope John Paul II who insisted "climate is a good that must be protected." (E.g, the common appeal by seven bishops' conferences to the leaders of the G8.)

In light of the new initiatives in the Congress, the Administration and at the G8 Summit, this is a crucial time to build up the common ground for common action to pursue the common good for all of God's children and creation. This is the time to act with clear purpose, creativity, care and compassion, especially for those who suffer the most from past neglect and, if we turn our back, future indifference.

The USCCB has sought to listen, learn, and discern the moral dimensions of climate change. The bishops accept the growing consensus on climate change represented by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, but also recognize continuing debate and some uncertainties. However, it is neither wise nor useful to minimize (or exaggerate) the growing consensus, the continuing uncertainties and policy challenges in these areas.

The U.S. Catholic Bishops seek to offer a constructive contribution which is distinctive in voicing the principled concerns of a community of faith, not an interest group. We are not the Sierra Club at prayer or the Catholic caucus of the coal lobby. The Catholic Bishops seek to help shape this debate by drawing on traditional moral principles of Catholic teaching.

First, Prudence. This old fashioned virtue suggests that while we may not know everything, we know that something significant is occurring to the climate we share. We do not have to know everything to know that human activity is contributing to climate change with serious consequences for both the planet and for people, especially those who are poor and vulnerable. Prudence is not simply about avoiding impulsive action, but in this case requires taking considered and decisive steps. Prudence tells us that “we know that when a problem is serious and worsening it is better to act now rather than wait until more drastic action is required.”

Second, Common Good. The debate over climate change is too often polarized...and may be paralyzed. Climate is a preeminent example of “we are all in this together.” This ethic of solidarity requires us to act to protect what we hold in common, not just our own interests. This is a time to seek common ground across partisan, ideological and economic lines. The Bishops’ Conference working with a new Catholic Coalition on Climate Change is participating in gatherings promoting dialogue among religious leaders, public officials, and representatives from business, labor, environmental groups and those most affected. (Already in Florida, Ohio, and this past weekend in Alaska.)

Third, Priority for the Poor. We should look at climate change from the “bottom-up.” The real “inconvenient truth” is that those who contribute least to climate change will be affected the most and have the least capacity to cope or escape. The poor and vulnerable are most likely to pay the price of inaction or unwise actions. We know from our everyday experience their lives, homes, children, and work are most at risk. We also know from bitter experience who is left behind when disaster strikes. We all have an obligation to help make sure their voices are heard, their needs addressed, and their burdens eased as our nation and the world address climate change.

This priority for the poor cannot be a marginal concern in climate policy, but rather must be a central focus and clear measure of future legislation and policy choices. Responses to climate change need to provide significant new resources to help overcome poverty and promote sustainable development. If we do not address climate change and poverty together, we will fail both morally and practically. We cannot protect the earth and ignore the “wretched of the earth.” Human creativity, entrepreneurship, and economic markets can help develop the knowledge and technology to make progress and limit the damage. Developed nations should find effective ways to share appropriate technology and knowledge as prudent policy, effective assistance and signs of solidarity and justice.

The Catholic Bishops Conference looks forward to working with this Committee with both modesty and respect. (I submit for the record an appeal to Congress and other national leaders for action along these lines from Bishop Thomas Wenski, chair of the Bishops’ Committee on

International Policy. While there are no easy answers, the religious community can re-affirm our traditional message of restraint, moderation, and sacrifice for our own good, the good of “the least of these” and the good of God’s creation. We are convinced that the moral measure of debate and decisions on climate change will be whether we act with prudence to protect God’s creation, advance the common good, and protect the lives and lift the burdens of the poor. Both our faith and the best of our national values call us to these essential moral priorities. Thank you.