



# Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns Policy Briefs 2024

## Climate Change and Care for Creation

*Inspired by the gospel and Maryknoll missionaries' commitment to stand with vulnerable communities around the world, we offer See-Judge-Act briefs as resources on the intersection of global policy and Catholic social thought.*

### See

The latest UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released a shocking [report](#) on the latest climate data, saying we have reached a “code red for humanity.” These leading scientists say it is indisputable that human activities are causing climate change, making extreme climate events, including heat waves, heavy rainfall, and droughts, more frequent and severe – at a rate unprecedented in the last 2000 years.

These changes are prompting increased crop failure, food insecurity, forest fires, and sea level rise. And these conditions are driving migration, homelessness, loss of livelihoods and biodiversity. Climate change is altering our fundamental relationship with nature and each other.

Climate change touches all of our lives, but some people and places are affected more severely. Both in the United States and around the world, populations marginalized by gender, race, class, caste, religion, ethnicity, and ability are more vulnerable to climate impacts and less able to respond. Also, while high-income nations produce the bulk of emissions, low-income nations, which produce far less emissions, bear the brunt of climate impacts without the resources to respond.

The United States, the world's wealthiest nation and highest historical emitter, has a unique responsibility to reduce emissions and assist low- and middle- income countries to transition to renewable energy and adapt to climate change. Examples include investing in solar panels, sea walls, and drought-resistant crops, as well as financing relocation for some communities.

In the report, scientists tell us that current emissions have made lasting damage but some warming can be reversed if countries work together to make deep and rapid emissions cuts. The best-case scenario is to keep the average global temperature rise to 1.5 °C (2.7 °F) above pre-industrial era levels, the goal set by the Paris Agreement in 2015.

As Pope Francis and more than 40 religious leaders said in their [appeal](#) to world leaders at the UN Climate Talks in Scotland, “We have inherited a garden: we must not leave a desert to our children.”



### Climate Change Alarms

- Climate change in the U.S. is projected to increase inequities, strain infrastructure and the electric grid, cause sea level rise and biodiversity loss, and disrupt agricultural patterns in the next few decades.
- To limit warming to 1.5 or 2 °C, countries will have to cut their greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by around 2050. To reach that goal, emissions would have to start dropping “well before 2030” and be on a path to fall by about 45 percent by around 2030.
- Last year was Earth's warmest year on record, beating the previous record set the year before. Since May 2023, every single month has been the hottest that month has ever been.

# Judge

Concern for the environment has been incorporated into Catholic Social Teaching through the writings of the three most recent popes. In 1990 Pope John Paul II **stated**, “Christians, in particular, realize that their responsibility within creation and their duty towards nature and the Creator are an essential part of their faith.” In 2009 Pope Benedict XVI **wrote**, “The environment is God’s gift to everyone, and in our use of it we have a responsibility towards the poor, towards future generations and towards humanity as a whole.”

In his landmark 2015 encyclical, **Laudato Si’**, Pope Francis explored the spiritual roots of the ecological crisis: “[The earth] now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her.”

Pope Francis has **urged** all people of good will to work together to care for our common home and avert the growing ecological crisis, including through the Paris Agreement: “All governments should strive to honor the commitments made in Paris, in order to avoid the worst consequences of the climate crisis.”

# Act

## Four Ways to Take Action

- **Sign up** to receive our action alerts to tell your elected officials to care for Creation. [www.maryknollogc.org](http://www.maryknollogc.org)
- **Join** the Laudato Si Movement to connect with Catholics around the world. [www.laudatosimovement.org](http://www.laudatosimovement.org)
- **Connect** with U.S. Catholics at the Catholic Climate Covenant [www.catholicclimatecovenant.org](http://www.catholicclimatecovenant.org)
- **Share** this resource with those around you.

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## Maryknoll Experience



People living around Mount Kenya have noticed that the snowcaps on the mountain have almost disappeared. This means less water will be available for farming and other agricultural uses, as well as for downstream cities and urban areas... Kenyan women may need to walk additional miles in search of water for domestic use. People living around Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania are facing similar problems. As rainy seasons are shorter — there has been a 35% decline in total rainfall over the last two decades — climate change has made farming and herding less feasible.

– **Dee Dungy, Maryknoll Lay Missioner**  
**Nairobi, Kenya**

## Pray

Let us pray for the cry of the Earth. Let us pray that each of us listen with our hearts to the cry of the Earth and of the victims of environmental disasters and climate change, making a personal commitment to care for the world we inhabit.

– **Pope Francis, For the Cry of the Earth**  
**watch: <https://mogc.info/Francis-SoC-YT>**