



Catholic Principles and Environmental Policy – A Statement from Washington State’s Bishops

October 4, 2018

The splendor of nature here in the Pacific Northwest provides us with inspiration and is a sure sign of God’s love. Yet while our corner of the world holds much beauty, we know not all is right with our planet. Harm to the environment is hurting people, most significantly our poorest and most vulnerable sisters and brothers.

For decades, the Catholic Church has raised concerns about the increasing threats to the environment and has encouraged ever greater care for God’s creation. In 1970, Blessed Paul VI urged “a radical change” in our approach towards the environment. In 1990, St. John Paul II called the ecological crisis a moral issue. Pope Emeritus Benedict reminded us that “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 2015, Pope Francis issued his encyclical *Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home*, specifically addressing climate change and emphasizing the “urgent need to develop policies so that, in the next few years, the emission of carbon dioxide and other highly polluting gases can be drastically reduced.”

Here in Washington, the state’s Catholic bishops have worked to promote care for creation in our own backyard, including the development of the groundbreaking 2001 pastoral letter “*The Columbia River Watershed: Caring for Creation and the Common Good*.” This important document stated, “the common good demands a proper respect for the land, the air and the water to assure that when we have passed through this land it remains habitable and productive for those who come after us.”

More recently, we wrote in our 2016 pastoral letter *Who Is My Neighbor? The Face of Poverty in Washington State*, that an unmistakable call of the Gospel is to care for “the least” among us – the poor and vulnerable. A foundational principle of Catholic Social Teaching is the sanctity of life and dignity of the human person. People in poverty often suffer the most from any degradation of the environment. At the same time, the U.S. Catholic bishops have long held that action to mitigate global climate change must be built upon a foundation of social and economic justice that does not put the poor at greater risk. In other words, we are called both to care for the environment and to be thoughtful about how proposed public policies will impact those living in poverty or on the margins of society.

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