



From Deacon Mark Miller's Desk

For the next two weeks, Glasgow, Scotland is hosting the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties [COP26]. Over 20,000 delegates and thousands more activists and advocates will converge on Scotland's largest city. The conference's goal is to accelerate action towards the goals of the Paris Agreement and the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change. Pope Francis is an enthusiastic supporter of the conference's goals.



His encyclical *Laudato si'* was the latest in a long line of church documents calling attention to the problems of a changing climate and the disproportionate damage that affects the people who contribute the least to the problem. It was published in 2015, and that same year most nations signed the Paris Agreement – an international treaty on climate change.

Pope Francis has stressed the need to address climate change in major speeches and published documents. Most recently, he signed an unprecedented Joint Appeal calling on people of all faiths to combat the causes of climate change. Pope Francis, Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, and Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew collectively minister to more than 1.5 billion Christians. Their voices were added to those of publishers over 200 of the world's leading medical and health journals who called climate change the biggest threat to public health, not the pandemic.

"Widespread floods, fires and droughts threaten entire continents," the clergy wrote in their statement last week. "Sea levels rise, forcing whole communities to relocate; cyclones devastate entire regions, ruining lives and livelihoods. Water has become scarce and food supplies insecure, causing conflict and displacement for millions of people."

The religious leaders also give special attention to the poor in the statement, who, they note, have made the least contribution to the greenhouse gas pollution that drives climate change but bear "the most catastrophic consequences."

"We call on everyone, whatever their belief or world view, to endeavour to listen to the cry of the earth and of people who are poor, examining their behaviour

and pledging meaningful sacrifices for the sake of the earth which God has given us," the message said.



The Pope also addressed climate change and the importance of COP26 during the "Faith and Science: Towards COP26" meeting in early October. Forty religious leaders, including representatives from Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Zoroastrianism, and Jainism, signed a joint appeal for action presented to Alok Sharma, the COP26 president. Sharma noted, "The faith leaders who have come here today represent around 3/4 of the world's population. That is by any measure a significant percentage of people across the globe and that's why their voice matters so much."

Catholic Social Teaching is Front and Center

Sister Veronica Brand, who represents her order at the U.N., explains why Catholics should care about COP26, "Name a principle of Catholic social teaching — from the dignity of every person, to solidarity and workers' rights — and you will find it relates to the discussions at COP26." Sister continued, "With the impact of climate change, we are talking about action on behalf of justice. ... We are talking about lives being threatened. We're talking about livelihoods and the dignity of those who are most marginalized."

Alistair Dutton, chief executive of SCIAF, the Catholic relief and development agency in Scotland, spoke of "reports from around the world of failed harvests, droughts, unexpected rainfall and unseasonable weather patterns. And in every country, it is the poorest who get hit harder ... who don't have the means or resources to cope or stop themselves being hurt by these climatic events when they happen,"

Cecile Kern, global policy and research advocate with Mercy International Association, said it's important to recognize that "the climate crisis is not simply a climate crisis" but also a social and economic one. Issues related to food security or housing and homelessness or migration are all interlinked with the degradation of Earth. And so issues that are near and dear to people every day, and relevant to their daily life experience, are probably in one way, shape or form related to the changing climate," and with it, decisions made at COP26, she said.