



Contact: Dan Misleh
Catholic Coalition on Climate Change
301-322-1180
danmisleh@catholicsandclimatechange.org

***Catholic Climate Covenant Brings Together Calls for Action to
Protect the Poor and to Care for God's Creation.***

**Unprecedented Initiative Asks Catholics
“Who Is Under Your Carbon Footprint?”**

Broad effort calls Catholic individuals, families, parishes, schools, hospitals and others to take
St. Francis Pledge to Care for Creation and the Poor.

WASHINGTON, DC.(April 21, 2009)—As the nation marks Earth Day, the Catholic community is launching an unprecedented initiative, the *Catholic Climate Covenant*, to bring together in new ways religious obligations to care for creation and care for “the least of these” as a distinctive Catholic contribution to the climate change debate.

Leading national Catholic organizations are calling on Catholic individuals and families, parishes and schools, religious communities, colleges and hospitals and other Catholic organizations to take a unique *St. Francis Pledge to Care for Creation and the Poor.*

Organizational partners and sponsors of the Covenant Campaign reach into every corner of Catholic life here and abroad, including:

- The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
- Catholic Charities USA serving nearly eight million people in more than 1,700 local Catholic Charities agencies and institutions
- The Catholic Health Association of the United States serving one in six Americans in hospitals
- Catholic Relief Services reaching more than 80 million people in more than 100 nations
- The National Catholic Educational Association, the largest professional educational association in the world
- The Conference of Major Superiors of Men and the Leadership Conference of Women Religious representing hundreds of religious communities who lead with a sense of mission and real world examples of how to care for people in poverty and for God's gift of creation.

Participants also include: the Franciscan Action Network, the National Council of Catholic Women, the National Catholic Rural Life Conference, the National Federation of Priests Councils, the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, and many others.

The effort responds to and builds upon the leadership of Pope Benedict XVI, the U.S. Catholic Bishops, and many Catholic religious communities who believe that our response to climate change must be guided by the exercise of prudence, the pursuit of the common good and a priority for the poor. Pope Benedict most recently referenced “troubling climate change” in his Easter message to the world and has insisted that, “Before it is too late, it is necessary to make courageous decisions that can recreate a strong alliance between humankind and the earth. A decisive ‘yes’ is needed to protect creation and also a strong

commitment to invert those trends which risk leading to irreversibly degrading situations.”

Pressing the issue of responsibility for the impacts of climate change, the Campaign asks the haunting and provocative question “Who is Under Your Carbon Footprint?” in mailings to every parish in the nation, posters, and print ads in Catholic publications, and in major newspapers across the country.

In taking *the St Francis Pledge to Care for Creation and the Poor*, Catholics promise to:

- PRAY and reflect on the duty to care for God’s creation and the poor and vulnerable;
- LEARN about and educate others on both the reality of climate change and its moral dimensions;
- ASSESS their participation—as individuals and organizations—in contributing to climate change (i.e. consumption and conservation);
- ACT to change their choices and behaviors contributing to climate change and;
- ADVOCATE Catholic principles and priorities in climate change discussions and decisions, especially as they impact the poor and vulnerable.

Bishop William Skylstad of Spokane, former president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and honorary chair of the Catholic Climate Covenant, explained "What brings all these groups together are the Biblical call to be stewards of God's creation and Jesus' mandate to care 'for the least of these' (Mt. 25:40). This prophetic connection in the life and example of St. Francis has fresh meaning for our response to the crisis of global climate change."

Bishop Skylstad added, “This is not just one more environmental message or one more plea to serve those in need but an urgent call and a different message: how does our Catholic community and our nation care for those most affected by impacts and remedies of climate change and reduce harmful behaviors impacting God’s gift of creation?”

Before Easter, the *Catholic Coalition on Climate Change* sent resource packets (in English and Spanish), including the St. Francis Pledge, to all of the 17,000 Catholic parishes and 6,300 Catholic elementary schools in the nation. The Campaign and Pledge are also being promoted by a wide range of other Catholic organizations to reach deeply into every part of Catholic life.

A new website (www.catholicclimatecovenant.org), offers concrete help in carrying out *the St Francis Pledge* with specific ways for Catholics to learn to “tread lightly and act boldly”, reducing their own carbon footprint as an expression of solidarity with those most impacted by climate change.

“The St. Francis Pledge is at the heart of this effort,” says Dan Misleh, Executive Director of the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change. “By linking prayer, reflection and learning to assessment, action and advocacy, many more Catholics will become aware of the moral implications of climate change, make the connections between their own carbon footprint and their obligation to the poor and take private and public action to address the causes and consequences of climate change.”

At a press conference today, John Zogby, the noted public opinion pollster and analyst, outlined some of the results of a just-completed poll of Catholics and their attitudes on their faith and climate change:

- By overwhelming margins, Catholics see care for creation and care for the poor as religious obligations and moral responsibilities.
- More than two-thirds of Catholics see the impact of climate change on the poor and the vulnerable as a serious moral issue.
- A third of Catholics are already aware of the strong statements of Pope Benedict XVI on the moral dimensions of climate change and Catholics are nearly unanimous in wanting their leaders to speak out on the moral and human aspects of climate change.

- Many Catholics are already acting and many more are willing to reduce their own carbon footprint and advocate for the poor and vulnerable in the climate change debate.
- A strong majority of Catholics see their faith calling them to sacrifice for the common good, to protect vulnerable communities at home and abroad and ease the burden of climate change on future generations.

“The real ‘inconvenient truth,’” according to John Carr of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “is that those who contribute the least to climate change in our own country and around the world will suffer the most and have least capacity to respond. Poor families and vulnerable workers and farmers are most likely to bear the greatest burdens in responding to climate change. We believe an essential moral measure of the debate and decisions on climate change will be how it helps or hurts the poor and vulnerable in the U.S. and abroad.”

Commenting on the campaign’s full significance, Paul Gorman, Executive Director of the National Religious Partnership for the Environment said, "From the strength of its sponsors to the sweep of its outreach, this is not only the broadest such initiative from the faith community but also the deepest recent call for a bipartisan moral consensus throughout all of society."

For more information, call:

- Dan Misleh: 301-322-1180 or danmisleh@catholicsandclimatechange.org for general information or specific questions about the Coalition or the Covenant.
- John Carr: 240-988-6276 or jcarr@usccb.org or Cecilia Calvo 202-541-3188, ccalvo@usccb.org for questions about bishop’s conference engagement and public policy.