



The Catholic Coalition on Climate Change

P.O. Box 60205
Washington, DC 20039
301-920-1442
www.catholicclimatecovenant.org
www.catholicsandclimatechange.org
info@catholicsandclimatechange.org



Catholic Climate Covenant
Care for Creation. Care for the Poor.

Catholic Coalition on Climate Change

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops:

Department of Justice Peace and Human Development

Migration and Refugee Services

The Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities

Carmelite NGO

Catholic Charities USA

The Catholic Health Association of the United States

Catholic Relief Services

The Conference of Major Superiors of Men

The Franciscan Action Network

The Leadership Conference of Women Religious

The National Catholic Rural Life Conference

The National Council of Catholic Women

Catholic Coalition on Climate Change
Interview on the Impacts of the Gulf of Mexico Oil Spill with:
Rob Gorman, Executive Director
Catholic Charities, Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux
June 23, 2010
To hear the interview please dial: 888-203-1112
Replay Passcode: 66764337
or visit http://catholicclimatecovenant.org/?attachment_id=2527

Dan Misleh (DM), Executive Director, Catholic Coalition on Climate Change: This conference is being recorded as you just heard, so it'll be available on the Catholic Coalition website, the catholicclimatecovenant.org website, soon after we're finished. This is our first time with this call, so we're not exactly sure on how all the technology works but we will get it posted as soon as possible and alert you to that fact. So welcome again.

On the call today we have Mr. Rob Gorman, the director of Catholic Charities in the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux in the southeastern part of Louisiana, and Rob has graciously agreed to take an hour or so out of his day today to talk to us about what's going on down in the Gulf and the Catholic response.

Rob, I guess a couple of questions first: How long have you lived in Louisiana?

Rob Gorman (RG): Well, I came down here to school at Loyola University in New Orleans in 1971, moved away, came back in '82, and I've been with Catholic Charities since 1982.

DM: So quite a long time; so you've seen quite a bit in your days.

Second question I guess—and I think I know the answer to this because you and I visited at your home last summer—but is your home or your family or anybody that would be closely related to you in any immediate danger from the oil spill?

RG: Not at the moment. My wife is from down here. She's a Portier from Terrebonne Parish, Louisiana. Her family home is down the bayou, but it's not adjacent to the Gulf or to any of the inner bays where the oil would likely come. Nevertheless everybody's affected, but none of my family or my wife's family have oil in their yard.

DM: Ok, well that's good to know, but I'm sure there are lots of people who are affected. If you're just joining us, we're talking with Rob Gorman, the Director of Catholic Charities for the diocese of Houma-Thibodaux, and I'm Dan Misleh, the Director of the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change. So welcome to the call. We're going to continue, and you'll hear some beeps, and that's other people joining the call. We apologize for not opening this up for questions, but we did get a few questions online, so we'll ask those as we go.

So Rob, thanks for that. I'm glad, again, that no one is in immediate danger in your family. We all have seen the daily pictures and images from the Gulf region: the oil slick, the sickened or dead animals. But as Catholics I think we must recall that this disaster began with human tragedy. Eleven men lost their lives in the explosion and the fire on the Deep Water oil rig. So our first response is one of pastoral concern for those men, for the workers who were injured in the accident, and of course their families and friends. So I know we will continue to remember them in our prayers, as well as those currently being affected by the oil spill.

Rob, when you and I first corresponded about this by email a couple of weeks ago, you said to me very cryptically—obviously because you were in the middle of efforts down there—you said that this was worse than Katrina and Rita, which I know was a serious blow to your diocese and to many diocese around the Gulf Coast. Can you tell me what you meant by that? How is it worse than Katrina and Rita?

RG: In Katrina and Rita, and then after that Gustav and Ike—primarily for us it was Rita and Ike—many homes flooded. That level of damage has not occurred in the oil spill. What is different about the oil spill is that unfortunately us folks down here in south Louisiana have become fairly adept at recovering from hurricane damage. Because the storm comes into the Gulf, we know it's there; we know what category it is; we know when it's going to hit; it hits; we start rebuilding and recovering. That's all very predictable and so we all get anxious at the beginning of hurricane season, but the disasters follow a very predictable pattern.

With the oil spill, the difference is we just don't know. This thing is going on every day; we don't even know how much oil is being pumped out into the Gulf. So the level of anxiety is incredibly high. If you're a trawler, you don't know if you will not only be able to trawl sometime this year, you don't know what's going to happen to the juvenile shrimp for next year's crop, or the year after that, or the year after that. The same if you're a crabber or an oysterman—the oysters can't move, they can't go anywhere.

And we've all heard about the underwater plumes that are miles and miles long and with the dispersant are not one solid blob—they're hundreds of thousands of little smaller blobs. Connected together they can pretty much go in any direction and we don't know if they're sneaking under the booms we've tried to put up; if they'll start showing up next year, the year after that, tens years after that- we just don't know. So it's worse in the sense that we just haven't a clue as to how this is going to play out. Even the scientists will tell you, they just don't know. So that's the way it's worse than hurricanes.

DM: Yeah, so just the unpredictability and the uncertainty about the future is what is kind of the cause and that certainly would give many, many people a real anxious feeling, if not dread. That's helpful to hear kind of what the difference is. There seems to be at least two primary impacts of this tragedy that continues to unfold: one is environmental and one is economic. Can you try to take both of those on? Can you tell a little bit more about what it's like living in the

middle of the spill? For instance, I know that the Barrier Islands they keep talking about- I know those are going to be impacted. What else do you expect in the short term and for the months and years ahead in terms of the environmental impacts? Can you respond to that a little bit?

RG: Sure. Anything that has a sandy beach is going to be impacted and it's a concern; but it's not the level of concern that we have with the marshes that are part of the mainland behind those barrier islands. When oil washes onto a beach and gets into the sand that sand can be removed and disposed of and new sand placed there. The problem is when it gets behind those barrier islands and starts hitting the marsh grass and the wetlands. If the oil stays on the surface of the water and only impacts the marsh grass, then that marsh grass may turn brown, it may discolor, it may even die at the top--the leaves may die--but the roots will remain intact and will be okay.

Our concern is with the continuation of this oil coming. Those stalks and stems and leaves are impacted and cleaned, impacted and cleaned, and impacted and cleaned over and over again; and the scientists are not confident that they can stand that kind of repeated degradation. Then, the second concern, which is even of greater concern, is the underwater oil, or when the tide gets low and the oil seeps down onto the mud, and then begins to permeate through the mud and get down to the rhizomes underneath and kills the roots of the plants. That's when they cannot recover.

The important thing for folks on the call to know is that it's those wetland grasses that hold the soil together that creates the marsh. And without those vegetative plants, without that vegetation, then the soil just washes away, and it's pretty much lost forever. This is a very organic soil that has come down through the Mississippi River, draining 40% of the continental United States and is deposited through floods and high water events over centuries and centuries and eons and has built up all of south Louisiana. And so it's very fragile. When the plants that hold it are gone, the soil's gone and we don't get it back. So that's a tremendous concern right there.

DM: Okay, so then as the barrier islands become degraded and the plants can no longer hold them in place, then of course another hurricane like Katrina, or something similar to Katrina, would find its way further inland and perhaps have an even bigger impact than we saw in 2005. Is that right?

RG: That's right; the barrier islands are speed bumps for hurricanes. They reduce the impact of a hurricane tremendously. The next level of protection in a hurricane is the marsh grass. They figure for every one to four miles of wetlands, storm surge is reduced by a foot. So if you've got four miles of healthy marsh grass and a hurricane comes in and if you've got twelve miles in front of you, you reduce the storm surge by three feet. That's incredibly important! Now if this oil kills that marsh grass, and then the soil washes away, then we've got that much less hurricane protection.

Now that's only hurricane protection. The other thing, of course, is these wetlands, these marshes, are the nurseries for all of the seafood in the Gulf of Mexico--the majority of it. I mean, the best nurseries in the entire Gulf are here in Louisiana because the juvenile fish, the larvae, can get up into that grass and be protected from predators. If you have a sandy beach, as most of the other states have--they have sandy beach-line as their coast--there's no place for the young fish, and shrimp and crabs and oysters to hide--or fish, crab, and shrimp--to hide, and so they don't go there. Thirty percent of the seafood in this country comes from Louisiana. So those wetlands are incredibly important to the whole seafood industry in the United States of

America, and that's another impact.

So we've got storm surge, we've got the economy, and then also of course all of Creation that relies on those wetlands as part of the food chain. Everybody's seen the pictures of the pelicans covered in oil, the birds. They all rely on those fish, shrimp and crab and plankton that live in those wetlands. Ducks--everything. When birds are migrating back north from South America, the wetlands of Louisiana are some of their first stops. They're critically rich.

DM: So there's a real ripple effect overall. One more environmental question. I'm sure there are plenty more, but let's just ask this one. I've heard some commentators say that if a hurricane enters the Gulf sometime this season and there's enough of this oil still around it could be a positive development or it could be a negative development: positive, meaning that it would help disperse the oil; negative because it could potentially drive some of that oil inland and do many of the things that you were just talking about, especially with the marsh grasses and things. Is there any definitive answer to that question? Is this still being batted around by scientists? What can you tell us?

RG: It's still being batted around; they just don't know. I think there's growing concern on the part of Louisiana scientists that even a tropical depression, let alone a hurricane, will pick up this oil from the surface of the water, and also the oil that's underneath the water, and deposit it inland and that is a tremendous concern. But at this point, they really, they just don't know.

DM: It's never happened before.

RG: It hasn't ever happened before.

DM: On this size.

RG: And here we've got--you know--in Louisiana, first we had Katrina, which was the costliest natural disaster in US history; now we've got this oil spill, which is becoming the costliest man-made disaster in US history. So it's...

DM: Five years apart.

DM: It's just unbelievable.

DM: Yeah. This isn't, of course, the first time that our country has dealt with a natural disaster--or, I'm sorry, a man-made disaster--like an oil spill. We all remember the pictures of Prince William Sound up in Alaska and they apparently are still dealing with some of those impacts, and that's been over 20 years. Have you been in conversation with folks who experienced that Exxon Valdez spill? What guidance have they offered? Are they talking to those people about lessons learned?

RG: Oh yes, a number of folks. We've had conference calls with folks from Alaska; some folks have come down to visit. They've made a couple points: One is to take the health concerns seriously. Everyday in the papers down here we're seeing stories about trawlers, which are shrimp fishermen, who have turned their vessels into this Vessels of Opportunity program. They've turned their vessels into boats that lay the boom. And so these trawlers are going out into the oily waters, laying boom, and then having to pick it up, and so they're in constant

contact with the oil.

Up until now--and even still now--there are very few people with respirators out there. They'll wear boots and gloves, in some cases goggles, in some cases protective suits, but a lot of times they don't like to do that because it gets hot on the boat. The folks from Alaska are saying, "Folks, you are really putting yourself at risk; you're putting your health at risk. These are long-term effects." Folks listening have to realize: first of all, we've got the oil. Secondly, we've got the dispersant, the chemical dispersant, and that's present. But third, remember when they tried that top-kill procedure, where they put in drilling mud down the pipe?

A lot of people were saying, "Oh, it's just mud, so there's nothing wrong with that." Well, that's a misnomer. It's really a toxic lubricant. And it's a mixture of heavy metals and volatile organic compounds. That drilling mud is just very dangerous stuff. So now we have this toxic soup in the Gulf that's a combination of oil, drilling fluids, and the chemical dispersant. And the folks from Alaska are saying, "Do not take the health concerns lightly. You should be issued respirators, you should be using them, and the canisters in the respirators are only good for 24 hours." And there's still a lot of folks...I would say most of the folks doing the cleanup...don't realize that, don't know it.

The other thing they told us is to look for is a spike in mental health concerns: alcoholism and drug abuse, domestic violence, depression, suicide. That as folks feel an on-going sense of anxiety and then hopelessness, that these mental health issues are going to become much more prevalent than we expected, much more prevalent than we've seen for hurricanes- again, because hurricanes follow predictable patterns and are fairly specific in their length of time that they occur.

The other thing they've said is that we need to look at, from a justice perspective...they set up in Alaska citizen trustee councils where they...they develop regulations to deal with the, in their case, the transportation of oil, and how local communities can have some power and some voice in that regulatory process. So they've encouraged folks in Louisiana to do the same thing. Now we're really...there's not been much talk of that; we're still in the crisis phase at this point. But the folks from Alaska have told us to keep that in mind.

The other thing that's a little different--and it's to our benefit in Louisiana--is that our waters in the Gulf are, of course, much warmer than the waters in Alaska. So we have microbes that are much more active and will naturally attack that oil in a much more aggressive way than microbes in the cold water of Alaska because it's not such a hospitable environment for the microbes. Of course the problem is--they were just saying in the paper today--that we are experiencing the equivalent of four Exxon Valdez spills...what'd they say...four tankers every few days...or a tanker every four days, something like that. So the scale is just much greater.

DM: Much bigger, yeah. Well, you went from the environmental to some of the economic and human impacts, and of course that's where, I think, Catholic Charities in the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux and other places can have an impact. Can you tell us a little bit about what some of the economic impacts are? You've talked about fishermen out of work, obviously there's an impact on the tourist industry, and then there's all of the services and businesses that support those two primary industries such as restaurants and hotels and shipping services and the like. What are the estimates of the number of people who could possibly be put out of work because of the spill?

RG: Well, let me give you, just to start small, just in our diocese. We have 3,500 resident commercial fishermen. So those are crabbers, oystermen, and trawlers. I'm sorry; those are oystermen and trawlers. We have 1,100 crabbers- guys who fish the blue crabs. We have 232 seafood dealers; we have 375 seafood transporters; and we have 135 recreational charter fishermen who take people out to fish. So that's just in our diocese and we're a small diocese.

You know here in Louisiana we call our civil boundaries parishes; the rest of the country calls them counties. We're two and a half civil parishes: that is our entire diocese. So we're one of the smallest dioceses in the country. But the spill has hit primarily our diocese and the Archdiocese of New Orleans. That's where the greatest impact is. And then of course now--as folks have seen the news it's spreading to Alabama, Mississippi, Florida, and it may well get to Texas. Then on top of that we've got not only the people who lost jobs from the spill but the moratorium now on deepwater drilling.

The governor's office is saying when all this is said and done, we could lose 12,000 jobs permanently. But in the short term, for instance, there are 8,000 workers immediately affected by the moratorium on drilling. So those are men and women who work on the rigs who are now out of work. Then, the supply companies that work with them, and the caterers who provide food to them. That brings it up to 40,000 jobs. And then some estimates range it up to 75,000 jobs--and that's just on the moratorium. On the oil spill overall we're looking at 140,000 restaurant workers, 300,000 jobs tied to recreational fishing, and then again you've got all the attendant industries that will be impacted.

And it's not just us. I read yesterday a professor at Loyola University in New Orleans was saying that this is going to have ripple effects throughout the country. He said, for instance, if we lose marsh, you're losing plankton that lives in the marsh. If you don't have that plankton, you don't have a little fish called a menhaden. Menhaden...the biggest port in the country for landing fish is here in my diocese, in Dulac. And most of that tonnage is a little fish called menhaden. Menhaden is a hugely important fish for chicken feed. Then if you don't have the menhaden, you don't have chicken feed; you don't have the chicken feed, then we've got a crisis with chicken growers all across the country. So he was, again, just pointing out the ripple effects of this. So it's a...it's a real concern. Again, we go back to the anxiety factor: folks just don't know what the impact will be. But we are seeing more and more people out of business.

DM: That's very sobering. So there seems to be a fairly immediate, short-term economic impact with all of the workers out of business because the oil rigs are shut down, and then there could be much longer-term implications not just for the region, but for the nation.

Barbara Beckwith, who is the managing editor of St. Anthony Messenger Magazine in Cincinnati, Ohio, was asking kind of a similar question. I don't know if you can answer this--I can certainly answer for the Catholic Coalition--but the question is whether or not the six-month moratorium on drilling for new wells which President Obama had ordered by executive order (and then just yesterday that was overturned by a Federal judge)—what are the many social and moral implications; what are people saying about that down there? We're not getting into weighing whether or not this is a good idea, but just kind of what's the mindset of people who depend on that industry versus the need to kind of step back and say we really do need to consider how we're extracting this oil and what the implications could be and the safety concerns and all of that. Can you comment a little bit about that?

RG: Sure. I just came out of a volunteer agency meeting where that was a topic. And most folks down here are saying, “You know what? It makes sense to step back and inspect these rigs and make sure that they’re drilling safely, and then force them to adopt the same safety standards that countries like Brazil or Scotland have.”

Most folks are saying, though, at the same time, don’t put a set time on that. If it can be done faster than six months, then let them get back to operating. The concern is that a lot of these rigs are mobile and will just be contracted in other countries, and then those jobs will be lost for three, four, five years, because contracts typically run two to five years. So that when those rigs go, the jobs go with them.

So whether you think the moratorium is a good idea or a bad idea, if it holds then everybody agrees that we will lose a significant number of jobs--again somewhere between 8,000 and 75,000 jobs--for a period of three to five years. And then, of course, the concern is with the jobs that rely on the fisheries, will those ever come back? Some of them in Florida...in Alaska... never did come back. But anyway dealing with the moratorium, it is going to cost jobs, and there’s no doubt about that. The question is how many?

DM: Ok, well, that’s helpful, but it’s...I mean it’s helpful to hear that people do kind of see both sides of this. We also have to consider kind of our own complicity in all of this. A couple of weeks ago when I was reflecting on this, I wrote in one of our weekly email blasts that we all have... we all ought to feel a little bit of a sense of contrition because we’re obviously--all of us--burning the oil that’s being drilled there and in many places around the world. How do we square our own appetite for energy with the need to protect the planet, and then the complicating factor of also ensuring that people have a livelihood--the people who are dependent on that industry for their livelihood?

So there’s nothing easy about that and there’s no ready answers and there’s probably no short-term solutions. Do you have thoughts on that, Rob? I mean, how are people in Louisiana, particularly the Catholics in Louisiana, thinking about that in terms of balancing all of those different needs?

RG: As folks are talking about it, first: it’s not only are we burning oil, but petroleum is in almost everything. I mean, they keep pointing that out on the talk shows on the radio. It’s in our clothing, it’s in our plastics, it’s in...you know...just virtually everything we touch on a regular basis. And so certainly what we’ve been saying, just in conversations among ourselves, is first of all the whole notion of stewardship is something that we clearly haven’t embraced very well and that we really do need to start taking stewardship a lot more seriously.

How much could we save if we just got serious about conservation? You know it is the little things you always read about and on up to the much more ambitious efforts. I know personally we had a big discussion in my house when we needed another car and trying to decide whether to go with a Prius or with something bigger. And we wound up with a Prius and I’ve been real happy ever since. But, you know, it costs a little more when you start it. But my wife was the one who said, look Mr. Environmental, put your money where your mouth is. And I said, “Okay, you’re right.”

DM: Right, right. Yes well, again, I think there are no easy answers. But you’re right, we do as

a community...as a Catholic community...we do have to get back to thinking in terms of stewardship. And possibly even sacrifice, which is not something that society in general is very willing to talk about in terms of there may be some...not pain and suffering...but at least some inconvenience that we all may need to experience in order to recapture those ancient notions of stewardship and care for Creation. But I think we also, in this society--and certainly with the reports that you've been giving us this afternoon--need to begin to think about the people who are impacted by this: the people who have lost their jobs, the people who have lost their lives, and the people who have lost their livelihoods. I mean, I think we need to think about all of that and consider our own contributions to that.

I know that your Bishop, Bishop Jacobs, has begun...or established...an Oil Spill Relief Fund and Catholic Charities USA is encouraging donations, as well as the Catholic Apostleship of the Sea. So there are all of these different agencies locally and nationally that are responding to the needs of the people in the Gulf. How is this being coordinated with other relief efforts including those of like BP and those from the federal, state, and local government? How is all that happening, how are people getting the aid that they need? If you could talk a little bit about that.

RG: Sure. It started...BP started setting up relief centers right away on all the different bayous. Even before they set up their relief centers, Catholic Charities in the Archdiocese of New Orleans, where the spill first impacted the communities, Catholic Charities was on the ground, in the communities, talking to people, working with folks who needed food and had power bills coming up, or mortgage notes, needed some counseling.

BP recognized that Catholic Charities was there and was present and gave them about \$1 million for food, rent, utilities, medicine, counseling in that area. Some of that, \$82,000 of that, was used in my diocese for the community of Grande Isle, which is Louisiana's only inhabited barrier island, for the same purposes. And then BP came into Terrebonne Parish, which is to the west of New Orleans, where I am, and did a community meeting. The parish president...or the country supervisor, or county manager as some of y'all might call him...said that he wanted some BP money to help with those kinds of human needs in Terrebonne Parish. So BP said, "Well, we'll give you \$100,000, who do you want it made out to?" And he said, "Catholic Charities, because they're on the ground doing this work and is coordinating with the other churches and agencies."

And so that's what we're working with right now and what the Archdiocese of New Orleans continues to work. They just gave BP a proposal from 23 or more different non-profits and different churches for work for the next six months, and we are part of that. And so the agencies and churches are working together. We have, as you mentioned, Bishop Jacobs set up a relief fund. It has \$27,000 that's been donated so far. The perception around the country is that BP's paying for everything, so there's no immediate need to donate. And BP is putting out major money at this point. We just, it's clearly not going to meet all the needs that are out there. But again, we're still in the crisis phase, so folks are still running around trying to identify fishermen who are too proud to come forward and ask for help. I mean, fishermen are an independent lot; they're not used to asking anybody for anything. And so it's a whole different ballgame now, where fishermen, I think as the months come, and as it sinks in that they're not able to go back out fishing; the Fall season for trawling isn't going to happen. The crabs are not there. Right now 30% of the entire Gulf of Mexico is off limits to commercial fishing or recreational fishing.

That's 1/3 of the entire Gulf of Mexico. So it's just going to be huge. I mentioned that my wife was from down here. Her dad grew up speaking only French. He did not speak English growing

up here in south Louisiana. As a matter of fact, when the first oil companies came from Texas to drill oil in Terrebonne Parish, the local folks said...called them, "Les Americans; the Americans." That's how isolated this community, these communities have been. And folks always knew that they didn't have to rely on anybody. If times got bad, they'd just hop in a boat and go fishing. Well that's not happening and we don't know when, or if, that's going to come back. And that's why this is so different and so huge. And I don't know if folks around the country appreciate that, or understand it.

And so I guess that's one of the messages I'd like our listeners to hear: that this is a community and a culture that's unique. We have Native Americans, we have French-speaking people, we have Yugoslavs who do a lot of the oystering, who came over generations ago: a whole melting pot down here. But they all rely on making a living off the land. Again, I said we have parishes, not countries. Terrebonne Parish... "terra bonne" means "the good Earth," and that's what folks have relied on.

DM: That's helpful to hear, Rob, and I'm going to ask you one...well, a couple of final questions, but let me ask this one. When he announced the oil spill relief fund, Bishop Jacobs said that, "When facing dire circumstances, we depend first of all on God, then on each other, and then on the government." What type of policies and legislation should we Catholics be considering in light of this catastrophe? What are the things that could maybe help, maybe particularly set this right; what should we be looking at in the future? What kinds of things should we thinking about in terms of our own Catholic advocacy on this issue?

RG: Okay. Well, first of all, we definitely have to advocate for safe energy from the moral point of view of good stewardship. So there's no reason why we shouldn't be leading the world in the technology and the regulatory practices that lead to the safe production of energy. And that's a growing economic field as well.

So, first of all, pushing one specific thing is for instance, as I mentioned, drilling mud is now classified as non-hazardous--the drilling fluids that oil companies use. That's a semantic detoxification; it actually is extremely toxic. It's just that the oil companies had it classified as non-hazardous material back in the 70's or 80's. Also, looking at just general pollution: we need to tighten up in this country on the way in which we regulate pollution.

We also need to be serious about coastal restoration. Again, I mentioned that the Mississippi River drains 40% of the continental United States; the majority of the wetlands in America are in south Louisiana. We have been pushing for years for funding for coastal restoration to protect and restore the wetlands and barrier islands of Louisiana and we'd ask all folks listening to this call to join us in that effort.

The other thing is climate change and the fact of the matter is that the seas are rising. And in south Louisiana we have two processes going on: we're sinking, and the seas are rising. So we are the canary in the coalmine, along with several nations around the world like Bangladesh that are the harbingers of things to come. And so we're going to have to get serious about climate change legislation in this country because most of the people in this country live close to a coast of some kind, to a body of water. So we have to focus on that.

So those are the things I'd say as Catholics we have to advocate for: safe energy, and safe and renewable energy sources; not only regulating the fossil fuels that we deal with right now--and

the minerals--but advocating for the alternatives. We need to get serious about controlling pollution; we need to focus on coastal restoration; and we need to continue as--as your group has done, Dan--with the climate change legislation.

DM: That's really helpful, thanks for summarizing that.

RG: And again, what this oil spill does is just brings it home that these are not head trips; these issues are not like something you do, as John Carr (*of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops*) says, just because we're not the Sierra Club at prayer; it's not just a kind of cool thing. We see the impacts of this and we're seeing them more and more in everybody's daily life down here right now.

DM: Well it certainly does highlight kind of the twin goals of the Coalition--and I hope for all of us--which is we want: to care for Creation and care for those most impacted by environmental degradation--oil spills, the climate, whatever that might be. So it's both/and: it's both caring for Creation and caring for people who are impacted. So we will continue to advocate that. This oil spill brings both of those issues into high relief. I don't think anybody can escape that image of both the impacts on the people and the place.

We've gotten a couple of people asking about what can they do as the days and months roll along. Maybe you can talk a little bit about that. Not just in terms of money, which is always needed and obviously we can all donate today something to one of these relief funds either to your diocese in New Orleans or Catholic Charities USA. But are there other things that you would ask us to do in the weeks and months and perhaps years ahead?

RG: Well, I mean you've summarized it pretty well with the St. Francis Pledge: you know, Pray, Learn, Assess, Act, and Advocate. I think it's very often that folks fail to take the time to learn what is behind all this and what the issues are. It's just amazing to me--and I know I'm preaching to the choir, so I won't take long on this--but how many people come to me and say, "you know... I got an email saying that this whole climate change is a joke because it snowed a lot somewhere." And so we can, I think, be prophets, or be prophetic in the sense that we can challenge people to actually take a little time to learn about the issue and then challenge people to actually act on it and advocate.

So the take away here is that Catholic social teaching has a principle of solidarity and we've got to really start to live that out because it's not just south Louisiana, although we're now poster child for it. I think Catholic Charities said that they're dealing with eighteen different disasters around the country right now, from tornadoes, to rock slides, to flooding in Arkansas, to flooding up in the Northeast. Everybody is impacted some kind of disaster and some of those are the direct result of human action. And so it becomes imperative that we not only talk the talk but walk the walk. We've got to get folks involved; we've got to get our kids involved; we've got to get our neighbors involved.

And we've got to be willing to stand up to people who want to just dismiss this stuff as some sky-is-falling-type, easy to dismiss scenario and say, "No wait, there is some truth to this; here's the consensus." You can't just listen to Fox News, and go, "Hey, no problem." And then you can't just listen to MSNBC, and say, "Well, we've got to quit working, we've got to shut the oil industry down." We have to be the folks who say, "It's not going to be easy, but we have to do it." We have an obligation to protect not only the planet--the planet's going to continue whether

we're here or not. So we've got to keep going and focus on, "How can we be good stewards and good neighbors?"

DM: Rob, thank you so much. This is has been enormously helpful: very, very enlightening to hear from someone who's on the ground, understands the complexity of the issues, understands the needs that are happening and that are real for people in the Gulf region--in your diocese in particular. I would encourage everyone who's on the call to do what you can to learn more about this.

We are trying to keep up to date on our website. You can go to www.catholicclimatecovenant.org and on the front page we have links for places where you can donate. I would certainly echo what Rob has said and encourage people to take the St. Francis Pledge, to live it seriously, to expand this network so that the whole of the Catholic community in the United States can get behind this effort, and really begin to care for Creation and care for those most impacted by our use of fossil fuels and other environmental issues.

So again, Rob, than you so much. This interview has been recorded and will be posted on our website. We'll send you a notice when that happens. And we hope you will then share this conversation through our website with many, many others. So God bless you, Rob, and all of the people down there. We will continue to pray for you and your family and certainly all of those impacted. Thanks for the time.

RG: And thank you all for listening.

DM: Okay. Bye everyone.