



COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE

As part of a Creation Care Team (CCT), you might be challenged by a fellow community member who doubts that humans are causing climate change or that the Church should address the issue. Though talking with people who disagree with us may be uncomfortable, each of us holds pieces of the truth. We all have stories and experiences that shape who we are. And each of us is beloved by God.

By conversing openly and honestly with all members of your community, your CCT will be stronger and more vibrant. Engaging in empathetic dialogue with those who disagree with us, rather than in confrontation or outright dismissal, is how Christian community grows. We must ask: How can we turn a confrontation into an opportunity for finding common ground?

1. **Start with prayer.** Take a moment to pray for love and humility. Remember that in loving kindness we serve God and our vulnerable sisters and brothers.
2. **Be in conversation, not confrontation:** As a CCT leader or member, always demonstrate humility, kindness, and love in your conversations with other members of your parish or school. You are part of a community of faith and should always stay within the boundaries of respect and love.
3. **Listen to gain understanding:** The key to success when engaging in difficult conversations is to maintain respectful and empathetic listening. Listen to the other person's perspective. Understanding his or her perspective is the first step in moving the conversation forward.
4. **Prepare for common arguments against working on climate change.** To better understand the other person's perspective, it might be helpful for you to know these that arguments have been intensively perpetuated through the media:

Scientists don't agree about whether the planet is getting warmer.

They do: 97% of scientists agree

Any observed global warming is not due to human activity.

Human causes are clear and scientifically measurable.

The costs of solving global warming are too high, so we should do nothing.

The cost of inaction could be far, far greater.

God will not let bad things happen to us.

This negates free choice: that we must choose to do the right thing. God is counting on it.

5. **Approach potentially controversial issues through dialogue rather than debate to make everyone feel respected.** Allow everyone to learn about climate science and Catholic teaching in a non-threatening setting, and provide a venue to freely discuss ethical perspectives on climate change.

Provide a time and place for a community dialogue. This should be in a non-threatening setting, and is an opportunity for people on both sides of the issue to ask questions. Set up this encounter as a two-way conversation, rather than as instruction from one side to the other. This is especially helpful if you encounter strong resistance to any work on climate change within your parish or school.

Invite the person(s) you are having a difficult conversation with to pray with you. Invite God into the conversation. We are first and foremost members of God's human community.

If appropriate, invite experts to address the particular arguments that the climate skeptics or deniers expressed to you in your initial conversations. These might include local university professors or science teachers, a [Catholic Climate Ambassador](#), or even experts within your own parish or school. The dialogue should promote understanding rather than be seen as a lecture.

Use shared stories as a way to personalize your point of view and be open to your dialogue partner's story. If possible, invite people who be affected by climate change to speak. Finding stories to share on video is a good alternative. Catholic Climate Covenant has videos about the [Everglades](#) and [Florida oystermen](#).

You are part of a community of faith. Build on the strength of the common values of your parish community. Concentrate on those shared faith values including what the Church says about caring for Creation and climate change.

6. **Seek common ground:** After you understand where people who disagree with you on climate change are coming from, you can focus on discovering "shared values." Do they value protecting children and the poor? Do they have a common interest in seeing our economy improve through more "green" jobs? Is everyone interested in learning what Church authorities have to say on climate change? (The [USCCB](#) and [Climate Catholic Covenant](#) have excellent links on the Church's climate positions.
7. **Concentrate on solutions instead of problems:** Rather than getting bogged down in endless debate, invite those who may not agree with you to collaborate with your CCT on finding win-win solutions. For example, they might agree to work together with the CCT on increasing energy efficiency in your buildings for cost savings. These savings can be used to increase the capacity for other ministries of the church or school. Perhaps they have family members who suffer from asthma, and they see how reducing carbon pollution has public health benefits. Your job is to seek this common ground and build upon it.
8. **Be prepared to not win:** Sometimes, no matter how good our arguments or how much we try to engage in dialogue, we are not able to find a path forward together. That is all right. People of good will may have different opinions.

However, what if the person you can't convince is your pastor, principal, or someone with power within your community? Though it might seem that this could stop the CCT in its tracks, you may be able to continue with your work. In the most extreme scenario, you may need to function within the parameters of an already existing social justice group. Or you may need to work harder to find other allies within the leadership circle to help you convince the pastor or

other leader. Most likely, you will be given the go-ahead to create a CCT and to work on climate change. You will need to remain cognizant about addressing expressed concerns and not being seen as trying to circumvent people and processes.

Contact us at programs@CatholicClimateCovenant.org if you need more ideas and strategies to work productively with those who don't recognize climate change. We are always available to help!