

The Paris Climate Agreement: Why Should Catholics Care?

On June 1, President Trump announced that the U.S. would (1) withdraw from the Paris Climate Agreement and (2) stop payments to the Green Climate Fund.

What is the Paris Climate Agreement?

The Paris Climate Agreement was signed by 197 nations in Paris on December 13, 2015 to undertake ambitious efforts to combat climate change and adapt to its effects.

Specifically, the agreement aims to:

- Reduce carbon dioxide emissions to keep global temperatures "well below" 2.0C (3.6F) above pre-industrial times and "endeavour to limit" them even more, to 1.5C above pre-industrial times
- Review each country's contribution to cutting emissions every five years so they scale up to the challenge. Each country crafts their own program to meet carbon reductions.
- Place particular focus on helping nations especially vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

The withdrawal process by the U.S. will not be finalized till November 2020. Halting future payments to the Green Climate Fund, which is uniquely focused on helping vulnerable nations adapt to climate change, could begin immediately.

Why tackle climate change?

Climate change is already harming vulnerable people throughout the U.S. and around the world. Communities in Louisiana and Alaska are being displaced by rising sea levels caused by melting glaciers and thermal expansion. Across the globe, families are being devastated by crushing drought amidst some of the hottest years on record. Entire islands in the South Pacific are at risk of disappearing. The World Health Organization warns that "between 2030 and 2050, climate change is expected to cause approximately 250,000 additional deaths per year from malnutrition, malaria, diarrhea and heat stress." Both at home and abroad, climate change unjustly and disproportionately harms poor and marginalized people who contribute least to the problem.

What does Catholic Social Teaching say about climate change?

Care for Creation is one of the seven themes of Catholic social teaching as outlined by the US Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), who have stated: “We show our respect for the Creator by our stewardship of creation. Care for the earth is not just an Earth Day slogan, it is a requirement of our faith. We are called to protect people and the planet, living our faith in relationship with all of God’s creation. This environmental challenge has fundamental moral and ethical dimensions that cannot be ignored.”

What do the US Catholic Bishops say about the Paris Climate Agreement and the GCF?

“The USCCB, along with Pope Francis and the entire Catholic Church, have consistently upheld the Paris agreement as an important international mechanism to promote environmental stewardship and encourage climate change mitigation. The President's decision not to honor the U.S. commitment to the Paris agreement is deeply troubling.” (June 1, 2017 statement of Bishop Oscar Cantú of Las Cruces, Chairman of the USCCB Committee on International Justice and Peace).

“From the perspective of Catholic social teaching, adaptation ranks among the most important actions we can take. The poor and vulnerable disproportionately suffer from hurricanes, floods, droughts, famines and water scarcities. Climate change is one more good reason for Christians to live up to what we should be doing in the first place: ‘For I was hungry you gave me food, I was thirsty you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me’ (Mt 25, 35). Globally, the Green Climate Fund (GCF) furthers the cause of adaptation by supporting developing nations in building resilience and recovering from the impacts of climate change around the world. Such resilience improves lives and promotes stability and security.” (Feb. 17th letter from CRS and USCCB to Secretary of State Rex Tillerson)

What can you do?

Go to www.catholicclimatecovenant.org/pledge and pledge to act, live, and advocate for creation care and the poor. Sign the St. Francis/*Laudato Si'* Pledge to act, live, and advocate for creation care and vulnerable people.



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