

**God's call?**  
**Faith can't be passive in the face of climate change.**

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God's call?

Faith may be common ground in battle over global warming

John L. Carr laughs at his own title. That's a good sign for a man with the title of Secretary for Social Development and World Peace for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

A sense of humor, humility and the need to act on one's religious faith were a major part of the message Mr. Carr and some colleagues brought to A Catholic Conversation on Climate Change, held last weekend in Anchorage. Previous conferences were held in Florida and Ohio.

Anchorage Archbishop Roger Schwietz said the church here has been talking for some time about a greater role in environmental issues, and mentioned the church's involvement in the subsistence debate. The goal is not to leap into politics but to act morally, with care for creation and human dignity.

The meetings were neither exclusive to Catholics nor conclusive about all the causes, effects and right responses to global warming. The emphasis was on conversation, and why faith drives action on climate change.

"For us this didn't start with Earth Day, it started with Genesis," Mr. Carr said, referring to traditional teachings about humanity's obligations as stewards of the Earth.

Three principles drive the church's increasing activity on global warming: prudence, common good and protection of the poor.

• Prudence: As Mr. Carr pointed out, prudence is a classic conservative virtue. Even if scientists haven't yet precisely nailed all the scope of and reasons for climate change, obviously something is going on and human activity is contributing. Prudent people will try to scale back emissions, learn more, conserve energy.

• Common good: The Rev. Sally Bingham, who attended the conference for Interfaith Power and Light, pointed out that climate change is no respecter of parties, faiths or philosophies. Everyone has a stake in a climate that sustains life and makes prosperity possible.

• Protection for the poor: Climate change may hit everyone, but the poor are likely to be hit first and hardest, being the least able to endure or escape failed harvests, floods,

drought and economic dislocation. Both preventive and reactive measures need to take that into account.

These are Christian principles, and although Christians don't own the franchise, faith can provide a common ground for bringing hostile sides together. Dan Misleh, who heads the recently formed Catholic Coalition on Climate Change, told of one meeting that included energy industry representatives. Afterward, he saw one of them approach him with an angry expression. Uh-oh, he thought, here we go.

But she told him that while she disagreed with almost everything he'd said, if even 5 percent was true, we should be doing something about it.

Along with common ground, faith can be the honest broker. The idea of conversation is to get everybody to the table, to stop casting one another as the enemy and to pull together.

It may be easier for some environmentalists to rail at the energy industry and other businesses, but it's industry that's likely to create the technologies to wean us from fossil fuels. It may be easier for some in the energy industry to dismiss environmentalists and church do-gooders, but as global warming evidence mounts it's time to act.

Mr. Carr warned of a "long Lent" for both believers and nonbelievers unless good science and good will carry the day. Amen to that.

**BOTTOM LINE:** Faith can't be passive in the face of climate change.