

Bishop Matthew H. Clark

Protecting All of God's Creation

(Publication Date: 01-02-2008)

In our parishes over the next few weekends, you will likely hear and read about the issue of global climate change, which will be the subject of our annual Public Policy Weekend on the first weekend of February this year.

During that weekend, I encourage you to support and take part in our diocesan-wide effort to create more awareness about this crucial issue facing our world. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has described global climate change as no less than “at its core...about the future of God’s Creation and the one human family.”

The issue, of course, is not only global, but also local. New York state is working with neighboring states in the northeastern United States to reduce carbon dioxide emissions, which affect our environment. Beginning in 2009, power plants will be required to reduce emissions or pay a fee. The fee will provide a new source of revenue, but the state has not yet determined how it will spend that additional revenue.

We are asking people to sign petitions, which will be available in our parishes on Public Policy Weekend, urging our state officials to spend this new revenue in ways that will enhance and protect our environment -- and help people in need.

“As stewards of God’s creation,” the petition reads, “we call on Governor Spitzer and our New York State Senators and Assembly members to use this income to foster energy efficiency/conservation, fund renewable energy initiatives, help poor/low-income New Yorkers pay utility costs and urge New York State leaders to move quickly to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from all other sources (in addition to power plants).”

Why are we devoting so much energy to this issue? Why is global climate change a problem we need to talk about in church?

For one, it is a pressing problem. While scientists are by no means unanimous in their beliefs about the future impact and the issue is still under study, a recent report from the

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change -- a synthesis of scientific findings from more than 100 countries, including the United States -- found that the warming of earth's climate is unequivocal. The report cites human factors as the likely cause. It further warns that continued emissions at or above current rates would spark further warming and will induce many changes in the global climate system during the 21st century.

According to widely available materials researched and prepared by our Diocesan Public Policy Committee, which is coordinating our petition drive, the potential impact on New York state residents is serious. In the future, this could include huge shifts in climate and weather patterns; heat waves, heat-related illnesses and severe effects on vulnerable elderly; as well as high water levels; agricultural failure and a wide range of negative environmental effects.

As Catholics, we are taught that the Earth and everything in it is a gift on loan from God. Further, we are all in this world together and for each other. We are called by our faith to work together to nurture and care for our planet and work toward a common good.

While global climate change is a complex issue and one about which we do not yet have all the answers or solutions, the evidence thus far suggests it would be imprudent to wait. We must act now.

As followers of Jesus, we must be concerned about the poor, those in struggling nations, who would suffer most and be least able to combat the effects of global climate change.

I joined my fellow bishops in issuing a statement on the issue in 2001, titled Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good. We addressed our need to be concerned about climate change and the poor.

“Working for the common good requires us to promote the flourishing of all human life and all of God's creation,” we wrote. “In a special way, the common good requires solidarity with the poor who are often without the resources to face many problems, including the potential impacts of climate change. Our obligations to the one human family stretch across space and time.”

I encourage you to learn more about the issue of global climate change at the public library or by visiting our diocesan website, www.dor.org, for resource materials.

And please, if you agree with our cause and concern, sign the petition when the opportunity presents itself.

Peace to all.

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