

Faithful Voting and Global Concerns:

Global Issue Briefs for the 2020 U.S. Elections



Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

Issue 3: Climate Change

Climate Change and Care for Creation

In a series of two-page briefs, Faithful Voting and Global Concerns, the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns addresses key global issues for voters to consider for the 2020 U.S. elections. Inspired by the gospel and Maryknoll missionaries' commitment to stand with vulnerable communities around the world, we urge U.S. citizens to consider these issues and vote to advance the cause of peace, social justice, and the integrity of creation.

See

Life on earth is facing a serious threat due to human-induced climate change. A [solid scientific consensus](#) indicates that global warming is due to greenhouse gas emissions primarily from burning fossil fuels for more than 200 years. While high-income nations produce the bulk of emissions, low-income nations are most vulnerable to its impacts.

We already see the [impacts](#) of a changing climate: loss of sea ice and accelerated sea level rise; extreme and erratic weather patterns, prompting devastating wildfires in Australia and California; increased frequency of extreme storms and floods, and rapidly changing agricultural patterns in many parts of the world.

Based on what the world's leading climate scientists said in a [report](#) in 2018, we have about [ten years](#) left to take the necessary steps to prevent irreversible damage from climate change. Doing so will require that we keep the average global temperature rise well below [2 °C](#) (3.6 °F) above pre-industrial era levels, and ideally below 1.5 °C (2.7 °F).

No country can expect to escape the effects of climate change. Because greenhouse gas emissions and ecological degradation in one place affect the entire earth's climate, global cooperation is necessary to address this crisis. The most recent and successful cooperation effort is the [Paris Agreement](#) of 2015, a landmark accord signed by all 197 countries in the world.

The Paris Agreement requires each signatory nation to offer a [plan](#) to reduce greenhouse gas emissions every 5 years. It also creates a [fund](#) for countries to contribute to mitigation and adaptation projects, particularly in impoverished countries.

However, most countries [have failed](#) to lower their emissions or pledge enough to avoid catastrophic climate change. Frustrated with their governments' inaction, in recent years youth all over the world have taken to the streets to demand their leaders act to protect their future.

Facts About Climate Change

- Climate change [in the U.S.](#) is projected to increase inequities, strain infrastructure and the electric grid, cause sea level rise and biodiversity loss, and disrupt agricultural patterns in the next few decades.
- To limit warming to [1.5 or 2 °C](#), countries will have to cut their greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by around 2050. To reach that goal, emissions would have to start dropping “well before 2030” and be on a path to fall by about 45 percent by around 2030.
- The earth has already experienced [1 °C](#) of warming due to human activity and is on track to reach 1.5 °C by about 2040.

Coronavirus Connection

“Some people used to think that they would be immune to global crises like climate change unfolding ‘on the other side of the world.’ [With the COVID-19 crisis,] I think that bubble has burst,” said [Christiana Figueres](#), former executive secretary of UN Forum Convention on Climate Change. COVID-19 demonstrates the ways we are inextricably linked and the urgency of working together on global problems.

Judge

Concern for the environment has been incorporated into Catholic Social Teaching through the writings of the three most recent popes. In 1990 Pope John Paul II [stated](#), “Christians, in particular, realize that their responsibility within creation and their duty towards nature and the Creator are an essential part of their faith.” In 2009 Pope Benedict XVI [wrote](#), “The environment is God’s gift to everyone, and in our use of it we have a responsibility towards the poor, towards future generations and towards humanity as a whole.”

In his landmark 2015 encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis explored the spiritual roots of the ecological crisis: “[The earth] now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her.”

Pope Francis has [urged](#) all people of good will to work together to care for our common home and avert the growing ecological crisis, including through the Paris Agreement: “All governments should strive to honor the commitments made in Paris, in order to avoid the worst consequences of the climate crisis.”

Act

Climate change is no longer a problem only facing future generations. We should urge our leaders to take strategic action at every level to mitigate the effects of climate change and assist those who suffer from its effects. We can call on our candidates to support the following policy commitments:

- Re-enter the Paris Agreement, the most successful international cooperative agreement on climate so far. The U.S. plans to [formally leave](#) the agreement on November 4, 2020, but can initiate the process to re-enter at any time.
- As part of its participation in the Paris Agreement, the U.S. should reinstitute and increase its [financial commitments](#) to help all nations mitigate and adapt to climate change, particularly those which are impoverished and more vulnerable.

- The U.S. should reinstitute and increase national polices to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and pursue clean energy solutions. It should reinstate regulations to protect natural resources in the U.S. which have been [rolled back](#) in recent years.

Maryknoll Experience



“...[We] study and discuss *Laudato Si'* in the rural parish [in El Salvador] where I live and we implement what we can through our agricultural and environmental ministries... The main effects of climate change here are the abnormally extreme wet and dry seasons and catastrophic storms that result from altered weather patterns. Insufficient or excessive rainfall leads directly to hunger among the poor...”

– [Peg Vamosy](#), Maryknoll Lay Missioner

Pray

All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of your creatures. You embrace with your tenderness all that exists. Pour out upon us the power of your love, that we may protect life and beauty. Fill us with peace, that we may live as brothers and sisters, harming no one.

– Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*

Faithful Citizenship

Research how your candidate measures up on climate change by viewing the [League of Conservation Voters](#) candidate scorecard. If a candidate’s position is unclear, reach out to the campaign and ask. Let candidates know you are concerned about the climate crisis and vote to protect our common home.