

Climate ambassadors conference
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1. **Why Catholics care: God loves all creation.** Pope John Paul II: "Ecological awareness, rather than being downplayed, needs to be helped to develop and mature, and find fitting expression in concrete programs and initiatives."¹
 - a. God's love is revealed through our sacramental universe (Renewing the Earth). Catholics have a sacramental worldview. God communicates love to us through the created world. The created world can draw us more deeply into the mystery of God (Bonaventure), into God's love (Pope Benedict). This is at the heart of what it means to have a "distinctly Catholic" contribution to environmental ethics. The book of nature (Augustine, Bonaventure) includes human beings (Pope Benedict).
 - i. A Catholic vision of the human person, and of human dignity.
 - ii. A Catholic vision of society, or social ethos expressed through Catholic social teaching. God is revealed through our fellow human beings. Our consistent ethic of life shapes our view of the individual, families, communities, the state, and creation. This orients us toward expressing a special concern for the poor (solidarity), and sacrificial charity in service of the common good (Pope Benedict).
 - Catholic cosmology or worldview. A sacramental cosmology frames our understanding of the relationship between human beings and creation. The Catholic worldview is religiously, intellectually, and morally coherent. It provides a coherent view of God, faith, human society, and the Earth. This is traditional, not novel! It pre-dates science. It has been "forgotten" or "abandoned," and we should retrieve it. Contrast this with scientism, consumerism, post-modernism.
 - c. Our worldview is intellectually consistent. Unlike some other Christian groups, we recognize the value and authority of scientific knowledge.
 - i. Science is an authoritative source of knowledge, but is not the only one. Science does not have much to say about how to live a good life.
 - ii. Attend to the "is / ought" gap. Distinguish between scientific data and ethical norms.
 - d. **Reflection questions:** Have you ever had an experience of growing in ecological awareness? How has this happened in your life? Reflect upon this experience with one other person, someone you don't know, during the break. Describe the experience. Solitude? Or social? What was the shift in your awareness, and how did it grow?

2. **Core Catholic principles: stewardship and solidarity.** Pope John Paul II: "Human beings are appointed by God as stewards of the earth to cultivate and protect it. From this fact there comes what we might call their 'ecological vocation,' which in our time has become more urgent than ever."²
- a. **Stewardship** caring for something or someone on behalf of its ultimate owner, God. "The *Book of Genesis* clearly shows (stewardship) was not a simple conferral of authority, but rather a summons to responsibility."³
 - b. **Virtue of Prudence:** the virtue which tells us what needs to be done today in view of what might happen tomorrow (Thomas Aquinas). "The virtue of prudence is paramount in addressing global climate change. . . . In facing climate change, what we already know requires a response; it cannot be easily dismissed. Significant levels of scientific consensus – even in a situation with less than full certainty, where the consequences of not acting are serious – justifies, indeed can obligate, our taking action intended to avert potential dangers. In other words, if enough evidence indicates that the present course of action could jeopardize humankind's well-being, prudence dictates taking mitigating or preventative action. This responsibility weighs more heavily upon those with the power to act because the threats are often greatest for those who lack similar power, namely, vulnerable poor populations, as well as future generations."⁴ Who has the power to act?
 - c. **Technology ethics.** In Silicon Valley. The size of the human family and the scale of our fossil fuel burning (chiefly) have enormous power, and dominate the earth's ecosystems. We have power, through our technology, as a human family beyond that imagined a century ago. We have grown technologically, but not morally. We can describe this as a "moral gap" between our technologically enhanced human actions and our ability to practice stewardship, solidarity, and prudence.
 - d. The Catholic social teaching value of solidarity is rooted in the Catholic vision of society. The Catholic communitarian social ethos. God is revealed through our fellow human beings, and in a special way, through the poor. Solidarity is practical expression of love and compassion for those who are in some way unable to meet their own needs.
 - e. Those who are being harmed now, and will be most harmed in the foreseeable future, are NOT those who have benefited from the enormous burning of fossil fuels. International solidarity is broken by the advanced industrial countries retaining the right to continue their CO₂ pollution levels, even as the most severe impacts are being observed in the tropical and the arctic regions. Those who are paying and will pay the greatest price have not generally benefitted from the massive burning of CO₂.
 - f. **Reflection questions:** Describe an experience in which your faith shaped your ability to hear the call to stewardship and solidarity. Does the expression ecological vocation apply to this experience? How have you helped another person to hear a call to grow in ecological awareness?

3. **Responses and solutions: faith formation and moral development.** Pope John Paul II: "It is necessary, therefore, to stimulate and sustain the 'ecological conversion' protecting the radical good of life in all its manifestations and preparing an environment for future generations that is closer to the plan of the Creator."⁵
- a. This points to a real challenge: how do we summon people to responsibility? Scientism does not help.
 - i. **Share:** how do we engage fear but foster responsibility?
 - b. Experts in humanity (Benedict). We confront fear, sin, hypocrisy, and resistance. We want to stimulate faith, hope and love.
 - c. We want to foster faith formation and moral development. The importance of empathy, compassion, humility, moral imagination.
 - i. **Share:** what was your experience of helping another grow in ecological awareness?
 - d. Extending the common good to include creation and future generations. We want to invite people to "sacrifice" and to express their faith and values at whatever scale they can (subsidiarity). Some strategies:
 - i. Frame the problem as religious and moral.
 - ii. Explain the harms we do to the poor, future generations, the earth.
 - iii. Invite Catholics to recognize our duties flow from our worldview.
 - iv. Describe what needs to be done, and explain why.⁶
 - v. **Share:** which of these do you feel most comfortable doing? Least?
 - e. **Reflection questions:** How have you helped others grow in responsibility? To grow in their ecological awareness? To undergo an "ecological conversion"? What was the role of the head and the heart? What role did other human beings and creation play?



St. Francis pray for us!

¹ Pope John Paul II (1990) *The Ecological Crisis: A Common Responsibility*.

² Pope John Paul II (2002) *Angelus*, 25 August.

³ Pope Benedict XVI (2010) *If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation*, Vatican City.

⁴ U.S. Catholic Conference (2001) *Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good*, Washington, D.C., United States Catholic Conference.

⁵ Pope John Paul II (2001) *General Audience Address*, January 17.

⁶ Best resource on this: Uhl, Christopher. (2004) *Developing Ecological Consciousness: Paths to a Sustainable World*, Lanham, Maryland, Rowman & Littlefield. Also pretty good: Ilia Delio OSF, Keith. Douglass Warner OFM & Pamela Wood. (2008) *Care for Creation: A Contemporary Franciscan Spirituality of the Earth*, Cincinnati, St. Anthony Messenger Press.