

# Environmental Stewardship and Ecological Conversion

## Position Statement of the

National Council of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul USA,  
The Society of St. Vincent de Paul Canada, and  
The Society of St. Vincent de Paul Mexico

## A Message from Our Presidents

Dear Brother and Sister Vincentians,

In our daily ministry as Vincentians, we actively respond to the Cry of the Poor in our communities. In his June 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis points out that the Cry of the Poor and the Cry of the Earth are intimately connected. You cannot respond to one without also responding to the other. Environmental degradation by pollution and the effects of climate change have dire consequences on those living in poverty. Thus, we as Vincentians have a responsibility to respond concurrently to the Cry of the Earth so that our response to the Cry of the Poor is more effective.

Pope Francis said that we cannot hand this problem over to future generations. We have to solve it now. Destroying God's creation is not just a pity. It is a sin. The duty to address climate change is a moral obligation based on the sanctity of all creation and the dignity of all people—present and future—and their equal claim to lives of decency and justice.

This Position Statement addresses the urgent need for environmental stewardship and ecological conversion. It requires of us a recognition that our relationship with God, our neighbor, and our earth has become fractured. The only way to restore the harmony that is meant to be by God is to recognize that we are called to "till and keep" (*Gen. 2:15*) the earth as good stewards, not as persons who exercise reckless and selfish domination over resources that, in the long run, benefit only the few while causing many persons and the created world significant harm.

We are well aware that climate change is a controversial topic in our countries. Our position bases itself only on love of neighbor and creation as reflected in Sacred Scripture and the principles of our Catholic faith.

Yours in Christ,

<i>Sheila Gilbert</i>	<i>Jean Noel Cormier</i>	<i>Luz María Ramírez González</i>
Sheila Gilbert	Jean Noel Cormier	Luz Maria Ramirez Gonzalez
National President	National President	National President
United States	Canada	Mexico

## Environmental Stewardship and Ecological Conversion

From Pope Francis  
*Laudato Si'*,  
*On Care for Our Common Home*

"The climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all. At the global level, it is a complex system linked to many of the essential conditions for human life. A very solid scientific consensus indicates that we are presently witnessing a disturbing warming of the climatic system. In recent decades, this warming has been accompanied by a constant rise in the sea level and, it would appear, by an increase of extreme weather events, even if a scientifically determinable cause cannot be assigned to each particular phenomenon."

(Paragraph 23, *Laudato Si*, 2015)

"The Eucharist joins heaven and earth; it embraces and penetrates all creation. The world which came forth from God's hands returns to him in blessed and undivided adoration: in the bread of the Eucharist, 'creation is projected towards divinization, towards the holy wedding feast, towards unification with the Creator himself'. Thus, the Eucharist is also a source of light and motivation for our concerns for the environment, directing us to be stewards of all creation."

(Paragraph 236, *Laudato Si*, 2015)

# The Society Supports Responsible Environmental Stewardship and Ecological Conversion Initiatives that Reflect Guiding Principles of our Faith

*"The Church recognizes that care for the environment is part of care for the common good."  
Saint Pope John Paul II, 1991*

## OUR GOVERNMENTAL, CORPORATE AND INSTITUTIONAL POLICIES MUST BE FOUNDED ON THESE KEY PRINCIPLES:

- **All people have a moral and inalienable right to access affordable clean water; healthy, non-contaminated food; and safe, sanitary shelter free of environmental hazards.**

More frequent devastating weather events and pollutants conspire to threaten all people from accessing these basic necessities. More than 525,000 people have died as a result of approximately 15,000 extreme weather events between 1995 and 2014. (Global Climate Change Index, 2016)

- **The most economically vulnerable communities are inordinately susceptible to the negative effects of climate change and environmental degradation, and thus worthy of special attention and protection.**

They do not have the means to relocate out of harm's way and cannot easily replace local sources of food, water and enterprise that are destroyed or tainted due to weather events or pollution. They are often powerless in trying to have their voices heard when raising the alarm about these issues. (UNICEF 2016)

- **Environmental stewardship and justice are important concepts in closing the growing gap between the rich and the poor.**

As access to appropriate resources declines, so does the health and fortunes of our poorest brothers and sisters, thus exacerbating the gap between the haves and the have nots. The 2013 UN Report on Human Development states that inaction on climate change will plunge another 3 billion people into extreme poverty by 2050, reversing any progress made to date in combating global poverty.

- **Inaction is not an option.**

We are compelled by our Christian faith and love for our fellow neighbor to recognize the problem and act accordingly. We must do this as individuals, communities and nations. The costs, in terms of the health of humankind and the planet itself, rise exponentially for every day, month and year that we delay.

## WHAT CAN BE DONE?

**HOLD OUR THREE NATIONS ACCOUNTABLE** for meeting the targeted emission reductions they pledged to in the 2015 Paris Agreement. The goal is to limit global warming to well below 2° C (3.6° F) above pre-industrial levels.

**ACKNOWLEDGE A COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY** to bear the cost of fighting climate change. The Developing World's efforts should be subsidized by the First World's contribution to programs such as the UN Green Climate Fund. Displaced workers in oil, coal and other polluting industries should be compensated and redeployed with jobs in new, green industries.

**DEMAND AND SUPPORT GOVERNMENT POLICY** designed to protect the environment. Nationally, demand programs and incentives that encourage the development and utilization of alternative renewable energy sources. Regionally, see that laws and regulations are in place and enforced that monitor industrial effluents, emissions and other threats to the climate and environment. Locally, demand smart urban planning principles that protect agricultural land and provide housing densities that support mass transit versus car dependency.

**JOIN LIKE-MINDED FAITH AND COMMUNITY GROUPS.** Pray, act and spread the understanding that our faith requires us to protect God's creation. Promote local efforts to educate our communities and promote recycling, renewable energy sources, mass transit, safe drinking water and community gardens for a more sustainable lifestyle.

**AS ADVOCATES, BE INFORMED** on science and policy. Stand fast on the issues but be compassionate and understanding of those who resist changes they believe unwarranted.

**AS INDIVIDUALS,** change our practices to demonstrate a commitment to live in harmony with the created world, protecting the vulnerable among us from the effects of climate change, and preventing a great wrong to future generations by our failure to act. Recycle, buy environmentally-sensitive products, practice conservation, and encourage the institutions where we live, work, play, study and worship to do the same.