

Climate Change

What is climate change?

Climate change is about large-scale, long-term changes to the earth's climate. In the past, it has happened naturally. But recent warming of the climate is being driven by human activities like burning fossil fuels. These release 'greenhouse gasses' which trap energy from the sun and warm the earth.

Climate change affects our health, our homes, our heritage and our beautiful landscapes. Our community centres where we meet, our sports fields where we play and our places of pilgrimage where we reflect. Climate change also ruins the work we do to fight poverty and to lead better lives.

We know that to avoid the worst effects of climate change, we must limit global temperature rise to 1.5°C. Going above 1.5°C warming could multiply hunger, migration and conflict.

FACT

The **423 million people** who are most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change **are already living in extreme poverty**. That's more than the populations of the USA and UK combined.

Case study

West Yorkshire

Hebden Bridge in West Yorkshire was affected by the 2015 Boxing Day floods. Researchers found that climate change made the UK's record December rainfall in 2015 more likely. Father John Gott, 75, was in the kitchen of the presbytery next to the church. As the flood barrier broke, the priest suddenly found himself up to his waist in freezing floodwater but could not escape from the kitchen because the refrigerator



had fallen against the door. Rescue workers heard his cries for help and managed to rescue him by boat. He said, "It was very frightening at the time and also heart-breaking to see everything swept away, but a joy to witness the resilience and strength of the people, during this testing time."

Case study

Pacific Islands

Communities in the Pacific Islands are on the front lines of climate change. Many are being forced to adapt to ever-changing and dangerous weather conditions or flee their lands. Joseph Moeono-Kolio, a climate activist in the Pacific, said, "Rising sea levels erode our coastlines and homes. Extreme weather keeps destroying our infrastructure. Rising acid levels in the ocean are ruining our coral



and fish stocks – I could go on and on. Our most vulnerable communities feel these impacts the most." Pacific Islanders are leading the call for global climate action.

We have the power to make a difference

We have already made huge progress on climate change. Scientists know more than they ever have. We have technology we couldn't imagine. We have come so far.

> The Paris Agreement

In 2015, 195 countries signed a ground-breaking deal called the Paris Agreement. This agreement was a turning point for action on climate change. It commits countries to limit temperature increase to well below 2°C, and ideally below 1.5°C.

To limit temperature rise, countries need to urgently reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. Each country has agreed to submit a plan to show how they will do this and these will be reviewed every five years to take account of scientific and technological breakthroughs.

> UK climate law

The UK was the first country to legally respond to the threat of climate change. The Climate Change Act is a pioneering piece of legislation brought into force 10 years ago in 2008. It commits the UK to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 80% of 1990 levels by 2050.

We need to go further, faster

Despite this great progress, we know that we need to go further, faster with our emissions cuts to limit global temperature rise to 1.5°C.

Even if countries met all their plans to reduce emissions, we would still have 3.2°C of warming.

Net Zero

To stand the best chance of keeping temperature rise below 1.5°C, we need to reach global net zero emissions before 2050. This means making sure that the emissions we put into the atmosphere are no greater than the ones we remove (e.g. by protecting and planting more trees, which take in carbon dioxide as they grow). Several countries have already committed to reach net zero emissions before 2050. The UK should join them.

“The UK’s Climate Change Act was a ground-breaking achievement – one of the first comprehensive climate laws to be passed. But in those ten years we’ve developed a better understanding of climate change. For the UK to keep its place as a global leader we need to increase our ambition. We need to commit to reaching net zero emissions as soon as possible.”

Neil Thorns, Director of Advocacy and Education, CAFOD

Did you know?

- 20 out of 22 Catholic dioceses in England and Wales buy renewable energy
- 50 of the world’s poorest countries have already pledged to move to 100% renewable energy by 2050
- Renewable energy sources, like wind and solar power, now generate almost a third of the UK’s electricity



Useful websites

ourcommonhome.co.uk

Resources by Catholic Faith Exploration (CaFE)

theclimatcoalition.org

100 UK organisations including CAFOD

ipcc.ch

International scientific body on climate change

Our lifestyles

In order to reach net zero emissions, we will all need to make bold and positive lifestyle changes that reduce our own carbon footprint. This could include:

- Switching to renewable energy
- Committing to eat less meat
- Reducing the amount we consume

Pope Francis

It seems like a lot to ask. But as Catholics, we know we can turn the tide. Our faith encourages us to work for fairness and to be responsible stewards of our Earth.

In 2015, Pope Francis wrote *Laudato Si*, a letter to the world urging us to take care of our common home. He describes the climate as “a common good, belonging to all and meant for all”. He calls us to an ‘ecological conversion’ and encourages us to make a fresh start:

“Yet all is not lost. Human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start”

#205 *Laudato Si*



We can work together to restore our beautiful home. You can join CAFOD by:

- Exploring Pope Francis’ message in *Laudato Si*’ with your parish or school. Find resources to help you do this at cafod.org.uk/encyclical
- Calling on the government to make sure that it sets a net zero emissions target before 2050. Doing so would show strong international leadership and send a signal to countries, businesses and civil society that we need to go further and faster with our emissions reductions. Find out how you can get involved at cafod.org.uk/climate
- Taking steps in your own life to reduce your carbon footprint and care for our beautiful home. Find suggestions for how you can get involved at cafod.org.uk/climate

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