

Missionary Society of St. Columban

JUSTICE, PEACE, AND INTEGRITY OF CREATION

Climate Change should be a top priority for the Catholic Church if the church really believes that its mission is for the flourishing of the life of the world.

Sean McDonagh, SSC

Climate Change

Columban Missionaries are called to heal, reconcile, build bridges and create mutual understanding through dialogue which is expressed through our solidarity with marginalized people and the exploited Earth.¹ We are called to both safeguard ecological biodiversity as revelation of God and to listen to Creation as it speaks to us through ecological crisis such as Climate Change.

Our mission experience of living with communities and the natural world that have been marginalized and exploited, Scripture, Catholic Social Teaching, and science impel us to seek ways to restore right relationships with all of Creation. In particular, we see that Climate Change threatens to bring about changes of a geological order of magnitude which will make life difficult for hundreds of thousands of species, including our own. The reality of Climate Change invites us to ongoing personal and communal ecological conversion which leads to both personal lifestyle and structural change.

As a result of insights gained from creation-centered theology, we realize that ethical behavior must no longer be confined solely to our relationship with God and other human beings. It must also extend and include our relationship with all creation.

Columban Concerns

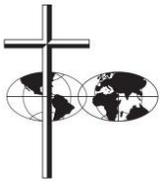
Human induced Climate Change is the most serious and pressing ecological challenge facing the world today with far reaching impacts on both the human and natural world. Climate Change raises serious moral and ethical concerns about the distribution and use of our planet's finite resources and the destruction of biodiversity and the web of life.

All of Creation is under threat as a result of human induced Climate Change created largely by an over consumption of and dependence on fossil fuels which is driven by an economic model that places profits over the common good. Of particular concern to Columbans is the centrality of Extractive Industries to the exacerbation of Climate Change as well as the impacts Climate Change have on access to safe water and healthy food.

Failure to see Climate Change as a moral issue

The threatening reality of Climate Change - which is advancing and will bring pain, suffering and death to millions of humans and other creatures, which are facing huge levels of extinction particularly due to habitat loss - has yet to impinge seriously on our church communities worldwide. Political and economic decision makers and church leaders hardly appreciate the extent to which the insatiable demands of our global economy are thoroughly tearing apart the web of life, with disastrous consequences for future generations.

¹ Acts of the Columban 2012 General Assembly, *Called to Communion*, p.6



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A Threat to Peace

Increasingly communities are in conflict as a result of Climate Change which is a growing threat to global security. Diminished access to basic human rights like clean water, viable food sources, and suitable living conditions, and reduced access to land because of large-scale mining, are all conditions that exacerbate the vulnerability of countless communities around the world which often leads to violence in the struggle for access. These conflicts often cross boundaries of ethnic and religious divide which can lead to even more intense violence and war.

A Threat to Health

Medical groups are describing Climate Change as ‘the greatest global health threat of the 21st century’ and its contribution to several million deaths from air pollution. A transition to a less carbon-intensive society, meanwhile, would promote health ‘co-benefits’ including cleaner air, increased active transport, healthier diets and many others.

Sustainable Economic Models

Pope Francis says in *Evangelii Gaudium*, “In this system, which tends to devour everything which stands in the way of increased profits, whatever is fragile, like the environment, is defenseless before the interests of a deified market, which becomes the only rule.” – 56 Climate Change raises major difficulties for the current neo-liberal economic paradigm which is based on continuing economic growth. Climate Change makes it clear that continuous economic growth in a finite world is not possible without enormous damage to the fabric of life on planet Earth.

Climate Migrants

Migration and displacement due to Climate Change continues to grow in its magnitude and importance. Extreme weather, desertification, sea-level rise, reduced access to quality food, are all factors in pushing people to migrate. An international legal framework such as UN conventions is needed to provide proper protection for climate migrants.

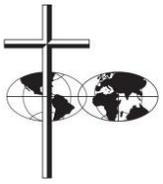
False Energy Solutions

In a search for additional energy sources, often alternatives such as nuclear, biofuels and fracking are promoted as sustainable and renewable solutions. However, these alternatives raise serious ecological concerns. We would like to see policies towards a rapid transition to a sustainable low carbon energy system, which will put the world economy on an economically sensible and beneficial pathway to meeting Climate Change challenges. Columbans support disinvestment from fossil fuels.

Food and water availability

Rural communities throughout the world are struggling with changes in the seasons – in some countries the rains are coming at the wrong times to germinate crops, or crops aren’t receiving enough rain to flourish; in other countries pastoralists are having to travel miles to find watering holes for their livestock, and the extent of livestock deaths from dehydration and starvation is often too burdensome for families to continue this way of life. Food and water price rises will hit poorest communities the hardest in rural and urban areas.

Adaptation and Mitigation



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While all people are impacted by Climate Change, our global sisters and brothers living in poverty and at the margins of society are the most vulnerable and least able to adapt, yet they have contributed the least to the greenhouse gas emissions causing global warming. We believe that those countries and industries which have contributed most to Climate Change have a responsibility to reduce carbon emissions through policy change which prioritizes clean, non-fossil fuel technologies, and making it available to the Global South. Adaptation and mitigation measures which assist economically poor countries to deal with the worst impacts of Climate Change have a place, but the focus should be on addressing root causes of global warming, such as super-development, and unsustainable consumption and lifestyle in the more affluent countries.

Subversive Discourse

Columbans are concerned about the role subversive discourse like the denial of Climate Change plays in undermining commitment to tackle Climate Change. It is important to be aware that the hijacking of many academic and government institutions and powerful media outlets by the corporate world has meant that corporate interests gain priority over the common good.

Columban Response

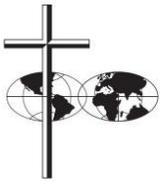
Climate Change is an unprecedented issue in recent human history, affecting every aspect of life on Earth. The magnitude, severity, and urgency of Climate Change are difficult to appropriate. We are called, as in the words of Pope John Paul II, to an *ecological conversion*. Our response to the crisis of Climate Change must be prophetic, that is good news for the poor and the planet. In particular Columbans are committed to and call for the following key responses to restore right relationship with the whole of Creation.

Ecological Conversion

We believe that our missionary vocation contains within it an ecological vocation to be in solidarity with the poor and with Creation which impels us to continually review and renew our option for a simple lifestyle and make choices that bring us in to right relationship with all of Creation. We recognize that ecological conversion and the creation-centered theology that underpins it is an ongoing commitment that occurs both personally and communally and strive through our actions and spirituality to offer a prophetic witness to the Integrity of Creation.

Education

Columbans strive to help society and particularly the Catholic Church understand the magnitude of the Climate Change issue and its consequences, also its links with other issues. We develop and provide education materials utilizing a See-Judge-Act methodology for Catholic parishes, schools, institutions, and to individuals and families as to what can be done to counteract global warming, grounded in our faith and Catholic Social Teaching. This involves awareness raising, advocacy in the political and corporate spheres, lifestyle change and worship ideas. It means challenging false information and bias in the media.



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Sustainable Economic Models

Columbans support sustainable economic models that value the dignity of all life. This will involve endorsing organizations working towards alternatives to the blind pursuit of economic growth as an end in itself. We will work towards an economy with energy and material flows kept within sustainable limits, fairer distribution of wealth, reform of the monetary system and promotion of social enterprises.

Renewable Energy Sources

We believe that the natural world by its relational and regenerative nature can teach us how to live sustainably. When we understand our relationship with the natural world as mutually interconnected, we begin to see the elements of life not as resources to use for human consumption but expressions of communion with God. As such, our relationship with Creation becomes one of respect inviting us to seek energy alternatives such as Wind, Solar, Geothermal, Hydro and Wave power that honor the cycles of life and teach us to live with less and in harmony with the natural world.

Inter-Religious Cooperation

We join with people of other faith traditions in a spirit of respectful dialogue and prophetic witness, knowing that Climate Change has universal impacts. We believe through dialogue with people of other faith traditions including indigenous spirituality, the fullness of God's story is revealed and in that mutual listening we hear the wisdom on truth of other peoples. Currently, people of other faith traditions are working on the issue of Climate Change inspired by the resources of their faith traditions. By working together, the potential of greater effectiveness and a wider awareness leading to joint action could be achieved.

Socially Responsible Investing

As a Society we are called upon to use the resources entrusted to us for the life of the world². Through the ethically and socially responsible use and investment of financial resources, we commit to a variety of approaches including positive impact investing and the divestment of our financial resources in companies that exploit the natural world and disrespect the dignity of human life, such as fossil fuel companies, extractive industries, and arms companies. We develop ecumenical and interfaith partnerships so that the voices of people of faith who see Climate Change as a moral issue can be heard.

Simple Lifestyle

Our option for the poor and Creation, invites us to live intentionally in relationship with communities and the natural world that are most vulnerable. We are challenged to examine our lifestyle of over consumption and dependency on fossil fuels and opt for a lifestyle that is guided by our ecological vocation to be in right relationship with all of Creation.

² *Called to Communion*, p. 17. General Assembly 2012.



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Columban Founded and Sponsored Projects:

Peru

- [Happy Earth Worm Ecological Center](#)

Philippines

- [Negros Nine Foundation](#)
- [Center for Ecozoic Living and Learning](#)

Columban Centers for Advocacy and Education

Australia

[Columban Peace Ecology and Justice Center](#)

Chile

[Centro Misionero Columbano](#)

USA

[Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach](#)

Columban Authored and Sponsored Resources

Australia

- Fr. Charles Rue, SSC - [Let the Son Shine](#)
- [Grace of the Earth](#)
- [Grace of the Forests](#)
- [Stations of the Forest](#)

Britain

- [Conflict and Climate Change DVD](#)
- [Stations of the Rainforest](#)

Ireland

Fr. Sean McDonagh, [Climate Change: The Challenge to All of Us](#) and several other titles on faith and ecology.

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