

The Story of Climate Change

Its impacts around the world
& what you can do about them



ColumbanCenter
for Advocacy & Outreach

Introduction

I consider that the suffering of this present time are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed for us. For creation was made subject to futility, not of its own accord but because of the one who subjected it, in hope that creation itself would be set free from slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God.

-Romans 8: 18-21

To know creation is to know the Creator.

-St. Columban, Sermon 1.5

Human actions that damage God's creation, like climate change, do not impact the Earth alone - they also make life more difficult for vulnerable communities and people living in poverty. As a "poor church for the poor," our faith calls on us to organize prayer and practical initiatives to combat the environmental crisis facing our common home and our neighbors.

This resource helps in that effort. Our goal should not be "to amass information or to satisfy curiosity, but rather to become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it" (*Laudato Si'*, #19).

This resource is meant to be used over a period of five weeks. Perhaps you will want to complete its exercises during the five weeks of the Season of Creation (September 1 to October 4) or the five weeks leading up to Earth Day (April 22).

Each week in this resource, you will "travel" to a different country to learn about how climate change is impacting the vulnerable communities living there. After you read the story for the week, we provide three activities: one to learn, one to pray, and one to act.

For more than 30 years, Columban missionaries have been at the forefront of protecting the environment from destructive practices and addressing the urgency of climate change. Our mission experience of living with the natural world and with communities that have been marginalized and exploited impels us to seek ways to restore right relationships with all of creation.

For more information on the Columban perspective on climate change, please read our "[Statement on Climate Change](#)" by clicking [here](#).

As Columban priest, Fr. Sean McDonagh remarks, "climate change should be a top priority for the Church if the church really believes that its mission is for the flourishing of the life of the world."

Week 1

Just days after Fiji became the first country in the world to formally approve the Paris climate agreement, Cyclone Winston devastated the island. The most intense storm in the Southern Hemisphere left tens of thousands homeless. In the village of Veidrala, most residents make their living through coconut farming and fishing. In Veidrala, the cyclone left only five homes standing and destroyed all the coconut trees. Columbans accompanied the community in the aftermath to help rebuild homes, farms, and lives. The people of Veidrala continue to recover. Climate change increases the severity and frequency of storms such as Winston, which in turn increases the threats that islands such as Fiji are forced to face.



LEARN

Lani Tamatawale of Fiji is a Columban lay missionary. “You may think living in Fiji is like a tropical paradise, but we are affected by climate change,” she says. In [this podcast](#), Lani describes the experience of one village that was hit by two floods in a short period of time. Listen to this podcast by [clicking here](#) to hear how climate change is destroying Lani’s home.

PRAY

Find some time this week to go into nature. Maybe some woods or a nearby lake. As you center yourself in the presence of God in creation, call to mind the island of Fiji and the story you heard this week. How does it make you feel? What is it calling you to do? You may choose to write these reflections down in a prayer journal. End your time by reciting [this prayer](#) to yourself three times.

ACT

The carbon emissions we each produce, our “[carbon footprint](#),” contribute to human-caused climate change. We can reduce our carbon footprint by reducing our consumption. This helps lessen the future impacts of climate change.

But before you can reduce your carbon footprint, you have to know what it looks like. Calculate your carbon footprint by [using this free carbon calculator](#).

Week 2

Water is a life and death issue in the Thar Parkar desert of Pakistan. The Parkari Kohlis are a low caste Hindu tribal people whose homeland is in this desert, located in southeast Pakistan, just 3 miles from the border with India. Many Parkari Kohlis own their land but an insufficient water supply makes a viable living difficult. The desert region is dependent on rains during the monsoon season. If the rains do not come, life is even more precarious than usual. Rising temperatures due to climate change and an increasingly erratic rainy season mean rainwater storage is crucial. Columbans work with the Parkari Kohlis to construct large water tanks to store water and reduce water-borne illnesses. As Pakistan's populations grows, however, access to water will grow ever more difficult.



LEARN

Read more about how "[water is a life and death issue](#)" in Pakistan.

PRAY

Whether it's a Pakistani desert or our own backyard, "our friendship with God is always linked to particular places which take on an intensely personal meaning" (*Laudato Si'*, 84). Take some time this week to pray [this imaginative exercise](#), which is designed to help you renew your friendship with creation.

ACT

The impacts of human-caused climate change take many forms, like severe storms in Fiji or water scarcity in Pakistan. By [reducing your contribution to climate change](#), you can help reduce its future impacts.

Last week, you assessed your own carbon footprint. This week, develop a plan to reduce it. The Catholic Health Association of the United States has a handy "A-Z guide" to help you do this. Pick two ideas from the list to implement into your daily life this week. You can access the guide by [clicking this link](#).

Week 3

The Subanen People of Midsalip, Philippines have traditionally grown upland rice and corn as crops. Columban missionaries carried out agro-forestry programs in seventeen villages with 600 families. But even with farmers tending to the land, agricultural crops are affected by climate change. Seasonal temperatures aren't following the correct patterns: warmer winters, spring becoming very short. These factors are causing crop seasons to occur earlier. The villages continue to fight for good agricultural conditions by persuading people to stop chopping down trees and mining in surrounding areas.



LEARN

Learn more about how deforestation contributes to climate change by [reading this article](#) from Columban priest Fr. Shay Cullen.

PRAY

Take some time to pray the "[Stations of the Forests](#)," a Columban adaption of the "Stations of the Cross," in which we discover that Christ's journey to Golgotha is a paradigm for all journeys of suffering. This prayerful resource laments the stages in the death of a part of God's creation. Pray the "Stations of the Forests" by [clicking here](#).

ACT

Solidarity is the faithful and persistent determination to act as each other's keepers (cf. Gen. 4:9). Just as Mary and a few courageous disciples stood in solidarity with Jesus by staying with Him at the foot of the cross, so too does God call us to live in solidarity with others, especially with those who live in poverty or are marginalized.

The story of the Subanen people and the dying forests of the Philippines is one example of a marginalized community. How can you stand in solidarity with them?

One way is to "give witness" to their experiences. Share their story with a friend or family member this week, or write something on one of your social media profiles. Use the hashtag #Faith4Earth so we can share your post!

Week 4

During the month of March, 2017, Peru experienced unprecedented levels of flooding. Driven by exceptionally warm ocean temperatures (caused by greenhouse gases preventing surface heat from escaping into space), torrential rainfall hit the South American west coast. Dry river beds became torrential rivers of water mixed with soil and rocks and whatever else they picked up. Muddy landslides destroyed houses and cut off entire villages, including Columban parishes, from the outside world. One Columban father described the enormity of the situation: "In all my 32 years in Peru, this is the most devastating disaster we have seen."



LEARN

Pope Francis has called the Amazon region (which Peru is a part of) one of the "richly biodiverse lungs of our planet," and crucial to "the entire earth and the future of humanity." The Amazon is under threat from the consequences of human activity like climate change and deforestation. REPAM is a Latin American, faith-based, and transnational network responding to the challenges facing the Amazon. Learn more about their work [here](#).

PRAY

Each religious tradition has a deep body of wisdom on the environment and our duty to care for it. What does your faith have to say? Visit [GreenFaith's website](#) to find out, and spend some time this week prayerfully reading the documents listed there.

ACT

Around the world, people are standing up for an ecologically just world, urging us to address the climate-crisis and transition away from a fossil-fuel economy. However, many of these environmental human rights defenders are persecuted by government or corporate security forces and in extreme cases this has resulted in their murder.

One way we can [stand in solidarity with these courageous people](#) is to bring their stories to Congress. Ensuring that Members of Congress hear from environmental human rights defenders will help them understand the impacts of the policies they create.

[Contact your Senators today](#) and urge them to support Senate Resolution 80 (S.R. 80), which would establish a human rights commission in the U.S. Senate.

Week 5

As our five-week period comes to a close, we return to the Philippines to see how people of faith are responding to the needs of those impacted by climate change.

Climate change causes rising sea levels and higher surface temperatures of the ocean. These two factors contribute to more frequent and intense typhoons and hurricanes. The people of the Philippines are very familiar with the impacts of these events. In 2011, a typhoon hit the Philippines, displacing tens of thousands of families from their homes and killing many others. Many of the most affected were the poorest, whose simple homes by the seaside were destroyed. The Columbans and other religious orders in the area recognized the need for housing in the typhoon's aftermath. From there began a joint project to provide low cost housing for families displaced by the typhoon. Now known as Mother of Divine Mercy Village, the project is in constant development.

Religious organizations are often on the front lines of responding to the needs of communities trying to rebuild after extreme weather events. Columbans working with Mother of Divine Mercy Village are forming a new and vibrant community among those whose lives were destroyed.

LEARN

Learn more about the [Mother of Diving Mercy village](#) by clicking [here](#).

PRAY

Take some time this week to pray the "[Ecological Examen](#)," an adaption of St. Ignatius of Loyola's examen. As you pray this examen, contemplate the ways you can continue to care for creation and stand in solidarity with vulnerable communities in the weeks and months ahead.

ACT

What now? You may have finished this resource, but God's call to care for creation continues. There are many ways to stay involved. You can join a [Creation Care Team](#) if there's one in your area, or start one if there isn't. Or you could become a [Laudato Si' animator](#).

No matter what you decide, consider using the "[Columban Creation Covenant](#)" as a "roadmap" or "accountability buddy" for your on-going ecological journey.

You can check out our other ecological resources [here](#). We also offer [ecological workshops](#), and other workshops on social justice issues and advocacy skills, for faith communities.

What is CCAO?

CCAO is the [Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach](#). We believe that policies and decisions should be informed by the experiences of the people most impacted by those policies and decisions. We advocate for peace and justice, and are guided by the Gospels, Catholic Social Teaching, and the experience of Columban missionaries and the communities they serve.

Our advocacy priorities are:

- [Economic Justice](#)
- [Environmental Justice](#)
- [Migration](#)
- [Peace and Demilitarization](#)

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