

HEALING THE NATIONS

Number 1
in a Church World Service series
on climate change

“... and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.”

Revelation 22:2

Healing the Nations

Climate change is a justice issue.

The painful television, web and newspaper images of some disasters we see illustrate ways global warming is dramatically reshaping life on this planet, particularly for the poorest among us.

We live in a world where the greed of prosperous nations—bolstered and legitimized by self-serving public policies—often overshadows the immense need of impoverished nations. Yet it is within our power to create a new earth where all of God’s children share in the abundance of this magnificent creation.

In the face of the challenges posed by climate change, we are being called to grapple with the question “How much is enough?”

Church World Service believes that the path to the answer lies in our recognition and repudiation of the mindset and the policies that allow the social, industrial and economic demands of wealthy nations to overshadow the needs and aspirations of less prosperous ones.

The simple truth is that it is the poorest people in both industrialized and developing countries who suffer the very worst effects of climate change. This injustice must be acknowledged and addressed by those countries that most benefit from the kinds of activities that contribute to climate change.

Top: Cambodian children celebrate a new water tap.
PHOTO: © Annie Griffiths Belt for CWS

Bottom: Large beech tree, Shizuoka, Japan.
PHOTO: Keiichi Hiki



CHURCH WORLD SERVICE

The “Enough for All” series grows out of Church World Service’s vision of a world in which we breathe life into Biblical imperatives through collective action. It is an extension of our advocacy in support of the human right to adequate access to food, water, security and peace. It is an attempt to confront the monumental challenge presented by climate change.

These resources will examine how climate change is affecting people’s lives, particularly their ability to grow food, secure and sustain livelihoods, and improve community health.

This is a topic filled with science and statistics. But for CWS, those facts and figures translate into living, breathing human beings, especially the women, children and other vulnerable people who have always been a particular focus of Church World Service’s ministry. People rioting in Haiti, Egypt, Indonesia and the Philippines after severe weather affected food production and prices, and a poor family in a drought-stricken rural village forced to sell their last goat for just enough to make it through another day, are graphic signs of what may lie ahead. Already some Arctic Alaskan villages are falling into the sea because of climate change, according to official U.S. national security reports. These pictures of human misery, resilience and need are the science and the statistics come to life.

In its latest *Human Development Report* the United Nations Development Program stated, “Collective action is not an option but an imperative.”

Church World Service agrees.

We *can* work together to create a new earth by preserving and restoring creation. We *can* promote economic, environmental and social justice for all the people who share this beautiful gift from God. And in doing so, we *can* affirm that there indeed is enough for all.



Rare circular rainbow at sunset caused by ice crystals in clouds.

PHOTO: Don Bayley

“CLIMATE CHANGE” OR “GLOBAL WARMING”?

Many people use these terms interchangeably in everyday conversation. However, **climate change** technically refers to any long-term significant shift in the average weather of a region or the planet, as measured by changes in average temperature, precipitation and wind patterns. According to the World Meteorological Organization, in order to apply this term, the change has to be evident for at least three decades. **Global warming** refers specifically to the increase in the average temperature of the Earth’s near surface air and oceans, due to natural or human activity. According to the U.S. National Academy of Sciences, **climate change is growing as the preferred term** because it helps to convey the point that there may be other changes in our weather besides rising temperatures.

SOURCES: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, climate change – basic information webpage; and “Climate Change: a glossary by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change”, 1995.

The environmental challenge

Several types of gases contribute to warming the earth’s surface – carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane, water vapor, ozone and nitrous oxide, among others. They trap the energy from the sun so it can’t escape into space producing “the greenhouse effect”. As a result of the increased concentration of these gases, our atmosphere is now on average about 1 degree Fahrenheit hotter than the mid-1970s, according to U.S. government scientific agencies. In turn, this creates all kinds of shifts in weather patterns, including ocean currents and acidity.

Scientists and advocates are concerned that we will soon reach a dangerous tipping point where global weather changes become irreversible and trigger further global warming. Thus, the current emphasis on taking dramatic measures to cut greenhouse gas emissions like carbon dioxide.

These gas emissions have been increasing since the Industrial Revolution. One of the primary ways human activity contributes to this problem is through CO₂ emissions created by burning fossil fuels like coal, petroleum and natural gas. The cutting down of forests has worsened the situation because trees remove CO₂ from the air.

The World Resources Institute calculates that 80 percent of the carbon dioxide build up in the atmosphere to date has come from industrialized nations. The U.S. has been the largest contributor, emitting about 25 percent of the total while representing only 4 to 5 percent of the world’s population. To put this in perspective, the lifestyle of the average American produces 20 times the greenhouse gas emissions of the average Tanzanian or Ethiopian, 15 times the average Indian, 9 times the average Egyptian and 5 times the average Chinese!

In the United States, more than three-quarters of our greenhouse gas emissions come from burning fossil fuels, with the leading source being electricity and heat generation. More emissions presently are being generated by residential electricity use than by electricity use in commercial buildings. The second greatest source of the harmful emissions is transport, according to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Industrial creation of CO₂ emissions ranks third.



and economically just, as well as ecologically sustainable.

Changing weather patterns, rising sea levels, water shortages and countless other related changes occurring around the globe are not equal opportunity events. The foremost international experts who comprise

the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) clearly state that “the impacts of climate change will fall disproportionately upon developing countries and poor persons within all countries.”

The moral challenge

Why should Christians care about climate change?

Climate change offers us a powerful example of the interconnected Biblical call to co-create a new earth that is socially

For example, according to the United Nations Development Program’s *Human Development Report 2007/2008*, people living in developing nations presently have a 79 times greater chance of being hit with a climate-related disaster than do

The ENOUGH FOR ALL Campaign

CWS’s “Enough for All” campaign utilizes the challenges and opportunities presented by climate change to promote just and ecologically sustainable development. Church World Service participates in a national coalition which has adopted the following principles as the basis for advocacy on climate change legislation:

Climate Change Advocacy Principles....

- The U.S. agrees to substantial, time-bound commitments to cut greenhouse gases.
- U.S. policies to cut emissions are equitable and ensure that adaptation costs are borne by those most responsible for the emissions.
- The U.S. provides substantial assistance to enable developing countries to adapt to the serious consequences of climate change; this assistance will be above and beyond current responsibilities and financial commitments for development assistance.
- Adaptation funds are distributed through channels that are open, accountable, and fully responsive to the needs of affected communities in developing countries.
- The U.S. works collaboratively with other nations to address climate change and the critical linkages between global warming and global poverty.



....and what CWS is doing

- **EDUCATING** members and supporters about climate change, particularly its impact on access to water, and the opportunities climate change presents to create a more just and ecologically sustainable world.
- **SUPPORTING** partners to take proactive, community-led approaches to addressing how climate change will affect their emergency relief, humanitarian and development work.
- **PROVIDING** a collective ecumenical voice in national and global public debates about addressing climate change and its consequences.
- **ADVOCATING** for timely and sufficient foreign assistance to help developing nations adapt to the consequences of climate change, and for the U.S. to do its part in curbing greenhouse gas emissions.
- **BUILDING** grassroots support for federal legislation that takes a human rights-based approach to addressing climate change.

Top: Coal-fired power plant.

PHOTO: Christopher Stokes

Bottom: Cambodian children celebrate a new water tap.

PHOTO: © Annie Griffiths Belt for CWS

Next page: Ethiopian farmer on the road.

PHOTO: Alessandro Lippi

people who live in a highly industrialized nation, such as the United States.

Whether they result from a disaster or from long-term changes, climate-related problems also can exacerbate the cycle of intergenerational poverty in developing countries. Education is a good example: In times of crisis and hardship, many poor families pull children out of school to help earn income for the family or to help with household maintenance and production tasks. Girls often are the first to be pulled out of school and the impact on their lives is profound. The lack of formal education seriously reduces children's later earning potential and can have negative social, economic and health effects on their subsequent family.

Many of the most affected and vulnerable countries are those that have contributed least to the problem. The world's poorest one billion people are responsible for just 3 percent of the world's total carbon footprint! The United States has disproportionately produced greenhouse gases contributing to climate change. As people of faith in the United States, our ethical response to these facts clearly needs to be rooted in justice when it comes to making the necessary changes in our lifestyles, institutional practices and public policies.

This means, for example, that we have to name and live out the truth. Standing with developing countries grappling with climate change is not an optional response that depends on how generous we feel. U.S. financial assistance to help countries plan for and adapt to the changes now occurring and those forecast for the future because of climate change should be viewed as compensation for damages incurred, not as charity.

As Christians, we often use Genesis and the Psalms to inspire us to be good stewards of Creation. The Bible's message, however, goes beyond just managing natural resources wisely. It calls us to restore right relationships. We can use passages such as Mark 16:15, John 3:17, and Romans 8: 18-21 as our foundation for this. There we read that Jesus has the vocation to restore right relations with the land, and in fact, all of non-human Creation, as well as to liberate the poor and suffering.

Differential effects

The rise in the average global temperature triggers many problems, which are aggravated in developing nations because of the number of people living in poverty and the limited financial capabilities of governments. Some examples are:

- **Increased hunger, malnutrition and disease.** In addition to changing rainfall patterns, farmers worldwide also will have to deal with shifts in the ranges of destructive and disease carrying insects. The IPCC predicts that 20 to 30 percent of plant and animal species are at heightened risk of extinction with modest changes in temperature. For example, the tropical zone in Latin America could see a significant loss of biodiversity, according to the IPCC, and a reduction in crop and livestock production, which would threaten food security in more temperate areas of the region.
- **Access to water and food will be threatened.** Increases in the frequency of droughts and floods will threaten agriculture, particularly for subsistence farmers. The effects may be most harsh in sub-Saharan Africa where 90 percent of the subsistence agriculture is rain-fed. Within 12 years, the IPCC predicts that 75 – 250 million Africans will experience water “stress” caused by climate change. The IPCC foresees that this could greatly harm agricultural production, with rain-fed crop yields falling by half in some countries by 2020.

At the other extreme, melting glaciers are expected to increase flooding and avalanches in the Himalayas in the short term, but then lead to rivers receding in the long term because the frozen reservoirs that feed them will be gone. The IPCC predicts that fresh water availability will be a challenge for one billion people in Asia by 2050. Climate change underscores the importance of working to ensure the human right to water as advocated in Church World Service's “Water for All” campaign.

- **Greater frequency and intensity of “extreme weather events”** like hurricanes, floods, mudslides, and cyclones will mean that people living on marginal land like hillsides



and low-lying coastal areas will find their homes and livelihoods at even greater risk. Communities will need to incorporate climate change into **disaster preparedness** strategies, which may involve permanently resettling people to safer areas, thereby raising questions about resettlement assistance and rights. In addition, **humanitarian relief** agencies like CWS will face a greater demand on financial and physical resources.

- **A rise in sea level** will mean that all or some portion of many nations will be permanently under water. Entire cultures and nations as we now know them could become extinct. The Maldives – where 65 percent of the land is less than one meter above sea level – already has permanently evacuated residents from four of the lowest lying islands while the government of Tuvalu has negotiated an agreement with New Zealand to allow phased relocation of its entire population to that nation.



A hurricane Katrina survivor with her 81st birthday cake, Mississippi.

PHOTO: © Annie Griffiths Belt for CWS

Church World Service's partner, the Pacific Conference of Churches, has called for regional **resettlement rights**, which would require that citizens most affected by climate change be allowed to relocate to another Pacific nation. This illustrates the need to prepare for a new category of displaced people – environmental refugees. In fact, the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA estimates that climate change could cause an additional 83,000 **refugees** to enter the United States annually at a cost of \$278 million, thereby increasing the demand on non-profits with extensive refugee programs, such as CWS.

Opportunities before us

While the threats of climate change are real and challenging, addressing them creatively offers opportunities to heal other long standing problems as well.

Developing countries can choose to “leapfrog” in their energy development. We can support them in their efforts to go from

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

- **LEARN MORE.** Consult the sources recommended in the box on the back page.
- **MULTIPLY THE LEARNING.** In church, suggest that your Sunday School classes, men's or women's groups, Vacation Bible Schools or other groups study this topic together.
- **MAKE CONNECTIONS.** Explore what is known about the likely impact of climate change where you live. If your church or city has a “sister” congregation or city in another part of the world, or supports a missionary overseas, investigate the impact of climate change there. The IPCC and UNDP websites described on the back page are good places to find information; also consider asking representatives from that “sister” or mission connection about what they know and share information about what each location is experiencing.
- **CONTACT** your elected officials and urge them to do more to address climate change. Join the CWS Speak Out network to receive Advocacy Alerts. www.churchworldservice.org.
- **CONTRIBUTE** to Church World Service's climate change work by supporting the CROP Hunger Walk in your community (888-297-2767) or by direct contribution (800-297-1516).
- **CONSERVE** energy at home and in your church. Begin by conducting an energy audit. Re-evaluate your transportation habits and purchase more locally-produced food. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Energy Star Congregation tools can help.
- **GO GREEN.** Interfaith Power and Light helps congregations move to renewable sources of energy and take other carbon-reduction efforts. There are programs in many states and metro areas. For a directory and other resources, consult www.theregenerationproject.org.

a state of energy poverty in which people do not have access to electricity, to a state of sustainable energy use. They can learn from and avoid problems experienced by developed nations with non-renewable sources. Many renewable forms of energy can be produced locally and designed to promote community development and control. In some instances, these solutions actually may be less expensive than more traditional forms.

The demand for cleaner energy and the need to capture CO₂ emissions, as well as to engage in more sustainable agricultural and manufacturing methods, can translate into new



Left: Church World Service CEO John McCullough examines a partner's biogas project in Yunnan Province, China.
PHOTO: Rick Santos/CWS

Right: Samburu child in Kenya
PHOTO: Michel de Nijs

industries, livelihoods and jobs, both in developing countries and in our own. These new businesses may be less polluting and healthier for workers, consumers, and surrounding communities.

Carbon emissions present the possibility of new sources of development funding through mandatory trading or auction credits and voluntary carbon emission off-sets.

According to the UNDP, if all the world's people generated greenhouse gases at the same rate as some developed countries now do we would need nine Earths to absorb the pollution.

Our current way of living and consuming is not spiritually, economically, socially or environmentally viable. An alarm bell is sounding and calling us to cooperate in the creation of a new earth.

We in the United States owe a large carbon debt to the world, although we recognize that not everyone in the U.S. has reaped the benefits of this debt. The prosperity and abundance generated by our fossil fuel-based economy has not been shared equally, in the United States or abroad. As we work to establish a greener economy we also must work to establish a more just economy that includes all people—in the United States and around the world—in the benefits to be had from the natural resources that are our gifts from God.

God intends for all of us to live with justice and joy. In the words of an old spiritual, "We all got a right to the Tree of Life." As we confront the challenges of climate change we also are challenged to reexamine our view of how we will live on this earth. Our fates are interconnected – with our brothers and sisters around the globe and with non-human creation. The healing of the nations begins with us.

Our responsibility is to ensure that justice informs both our policies and our actions so that from the great abundance of Planet Earth spills forth enough for all.



Printed in a carbon neutral process without greenhouse gas emissions, using wind power and vegetable-based ink, on 100 percent post-consumer recycled, process chlorine-free paper.

Design by CEDC, www.cedc.org

FOR MORE INFORMATION...

Visit the **Church World Service** website for updates and information on climate change. To explore further how climate change threatens the human right to water, see "*Poisoned Waters, Troubled Skies*" and "*A River in their Veins*" in the Peace & Justice Resources section. www.churchworldservice.org.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) website offers the latest consensus scientific analyses and assessments of the impact on development. Their most recent report is *Climate Change 2007*. See especially the summary for policy-makers in: *Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability: Contribution of Working Group II to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*. www.ipcc.ch.



The United Nations Development Program's Human Development Report 2007/2008: Fighting Climate Change – Human Solidarity in a Divided World is an excellent educational resource. The report, posters, interactive maps, tools, and helpful cross-country data comparisons are available for free downloading on their website in English, Spanish and French: <http://hdr.undp.org/en>.

Advice for individuals, families and congregations on how to save energy as well as educational materials geared to children are available on the **U.S. EPA's** website: www.epa.gov. This site includes information for churches in the "Energy Star Congregations" section.



CHURCH WORLD SERVICE

Church World Service is a cooperative ministry of 35 Protestant, Orthodox, and Anglican denominations providing sustainable self-help and development, disaster relief, and refugee assistance in some 80 countries.

PO Box 968
Elkhart, IN 46515
800-297-1516

www.churchworldservice.org
You can download this and companion resources from www.churchworldservice.org
To order printed copies of this resource, call 800-297-1516 and ask for resource EA0833