



Catholic Climate Covenantsm
Care for Creation. Care for the Poor.

Pope Francis's Encyclical on Ecology

Media Toolkit

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How to use this toolkit

This toolkit helps you amplify the likely messages of the encyclical and respond to it publicly.

What is an encyclical?

An encyclical is a letter from the pope that, in recent decades, has typically been addressed to “all people of goodwill.” Pope Francis’s encyclical on ecology and climate change draws from the deep well of Church teaching on these issues. St. John Paul II spoke about human-caused climate change in [1990](#), and Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI spoke about climate change and sustainability many times. The US Conference of Catholic Bishops synthesized teaching on the issue and issued a full statement on climate change, as well as a wealth of complementary resources, in [2001](#). Even before that, US bishops wrote about the threat of climate change in [1981](#) in a statement on energy.

Pope Francis’s encyclical will build on what has come before. What is most significant, however, is that this is the first time top-level papal teaching has been exclusively devoted to ecology. An encyclical is one of the highest levels of papal guidance to the Church and to people of goodwill more broadly. The pope is fulfilling his role as a pastor to teach Catholics about this opportunity to care for Creation and for our vulnerable sisters and brothers. We have a chance here to **witness to our faith**.



Encyclical pre-release messages

Working in collaboration with communications experts and our national Catholic partners, the Catholic Climate Covenant has identified the following themes as likely to be central to Pope Francis's encyclical on ecology and climate change. These **three broad messages** would be useful when discussing the upcoming ecological encyclical with the media and with the public. Adapt these themes for your own organization.

Climate Change is a Moral Issue

Pope Francis is speaking as a pastor offering moral guidance rooted in central Catholic teachings about care for others and care for God's creation.

- **Care for others:** The poor suffer the most when we don't responsibly care for God's creation, and it's up to us to help them.
 - Pope Francis knows that more fully caring for God's creation will help real people, right now—especially the poor and vulnerable.
 - This is about helping our kids and grandkids. Responsibly caring for the natural world will help families just like yours and mine. Every day, environmental impacts affect the lives of countless people right here at home and around the world.
- **Care for God's creation:** God gave us this world, and asks us to protect and care for it. The natural world is a gift. Let's stop and think about what kind of world we want to leave our kids and grandkids.

CLIMATE CHANGE IS A MORAL
ISSUE.

Catholics Have an Important Perspective

Catholics bring a distinctive and important voice to this conversation.

- These are longstanding Catholic teachings, and we're called to respect them. Care for God's creation is woven throughout the Bible, and has been emphasized by recent popes and the U.S. bishops.
- We're called to live a life rooted in what Pope Francis calls an **"integral ecology."**
 - We're called to cooperate with God's design in our relationship with the natural world and with one another. When we get these intertwined relationships right, we grow closer to God. We understand that our individual decisions have social consequences.
 - We recognize the strong link between [respecting](#) human dignity and care for the natural world. Population isn't the problem; throwaway culture is.

CATHOLICS HAVE AN
IMPORTANT PERSPECTIVE

- Catholics are **called to participate** in public life and work for the common good.
 - We're called to cooperate with God's design in our relationships with the natural world and with one another.
 - Invoking the role of prudential judgment here doesn't give you a free pass. The U.S. bishops have [said](#) that prudence is "intelligence applied to our actions." This is at its root a moral issue. Catholics are called to make prudential judgments prayerfully, humbly, and with open hearts and minds.
 - We're a global church with experience with what's going on in communities around the world.
 - Faith and reason go hand in hand. The Church respects the role of science. Scientific knowledge should be used to promote human flourishing and to protect the poor.
 - Our unique perspective means we need to be a part of this conversation.

The Time to Act on Climate is Now

Pope Francis is offering hope and encouraging us all to care for others and for the gift of God's creation by addressing climate change. He's touching people's hearts and moving them to action. It's **time to work together** to better protect the gift of God's creation. Let's build a **culture of stewardship**.

- The scientific consensus on the link between human activity and recent climate change is strong – as strong as the scientific consensus on the link between cigarettes and cancer. The US military and the business community agree that climate change is happening, and they're preparing for it.
- What can we do? This is a teaching document, not a set of policy proposals. First, let's prayerfully respond to Pope Francis's call for a change of hearts. Let's try our best to live rightly within the world we've been given, and with each other.
- Our "throwaway culture" drives many of our environmental problems. We can resist this by taking small steps toward simpler, fuller lives. This will help us grow closer to God and each other.
- Small everyday actions matter. We can all take action at home and in our communities.
- Our businesses and communities can work together to find sustainable energy solutions. This will foster innovation and create tens of thousands of jobs. This is a challenge we can meet.
- Protecting the environment need not compromise legitimate economic progress. Sustainable development means that economic prosperity, protection of the created world, and inclusion of the poor and vulnerable should be pursued together.
- At the end of the day, responsibly caring for the natural world is a global challenge and it needs a global response. The UN isn't perfect, but it's all we've got. These conversations are already happening and they'll be improved if we're part of them.

THE TIME TO ACT ON
CLIMATE IS NOW

We have a chance here to **witness to our faith**.



Responding to criticism

There is a lot of confusion about climate change and there has been a concerted effort to create doubt in the minds of the public about it. Below are suggestions for responding to criticism. Remember: **When asked an oppositional question in an interview, do not repeat a negative statement.**

Science

Q: Isn't climate change made-up?

No. I, along with the Catholic Church, trust the consensus from scientists and credible agencies. I trust groups like the U.S. military, NASA, and National Academy of Sciences, all of which agree with the scientific consensus. The U.S. military continues to warn us that we need to be prepared for climate change, calling it a "threat multiplier." Opponents of climate action cherry-pick certain years or regional phenomena to try to discredit what the scientists agree to be a global trend. Climate change is real and is already happening. Climbing temperatures, rising sea levels, melting glaciers, and worsening droughts were all predicted results of climate change, and all are happening now.

Q: Do we know that humans contribute to current climate changes?

Yes. The scientific consensus on the link between human activity and climate change is as strong as that on the link between cigarettes and cancer. In particular, scientists know several things: greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide trap heat; human-related greenhouse gas emissions have increased dramatically since the Industrial Revolution; non-human factors alone do not account for the observed increase in global temperatures. See more information from [NASA](#) or [Union of Concerned Scientists](#).

Social Justice

Q: Doesn't it cost too much to transition to renewable energy, and what will that mean for the poor?

Clean energy technology is cost-competitive, and it is a practical solution to rising energy costs. Solar installations are [doubling every two years globally](#). Developing countries are installing renewable energy projects at [nearly twice the rate of developed nations](#). Fossil fuels are expensive to find and produce: the subsidies for fossil fuel consumption in developing countries alone were estimated at [\\$544 billion in 2012](#). The poorest are often located in remote locations, areas that benefit the most from renewables because renewable energy doesn't demand the huge power plants nor the extensive, expensive network of transmission lines required by fossil fuel power. 84% of those living without energy access throughout Africa and India [live in rural and remote areas](#), which are far from power plants or transmission lines. And it is still important to be diligent in protecting the poor; the Catholic Church insists that [steps must be taken](#) to assist

those who are impacted by a shift to renewable energy sources, including those currently working in the fossil fuel industry.

Another reason to ensure that the poor are not stuck with dirty energy is for public health. Action on climate change will help the health of poor communities greatly, both now and in the long run. Fossil fuels make it hard to breathe, particularly for the poor who live in cities and neighborhoods with the worst air pollution. Air pollution from cars, factories and power plants is a [major cause of asthma](#). According to the [World Health Organization](#), air pollution killed about 7 million people worldwide in 2012—that is one out of every eight global deaths. Air pollution is the single biggest environmental health risk. Furthermore, poor communities are disproportionately affected by the threats of climate change, which include severe heat, extreme weather, health problems, and food and water shortages.

Q: What about job losses?

Investing in renewable energy creates many more jobs than fossil fuel-based energy. In the U.S., there are twice as many [solar workers as there are coal miners](#). There are many financial and health benefits of clean energy. We still need strong measures to help workers who are negatively impacted by our transition to renewable energy sources, and the Catholic Church insists on such economic justice measures.

Faith

Q: Why would the pope be concerned about climate change?

Because climate change impacts both people and creation, it has moral dimensions. Therefore, responding to climate change is responding to God's call to love our sisters and brothers. The pope has a powerful voice for the underrepresented and vulnerable around the world. Taking climate action will be a positive step towards addressing many other issues, including poverty and sickness, that the Church prioritizes, as they are threats to the life and dignity of the human family.

Q: In speaking about climate change, is the pope going beyond his competence?

Pope Francis is speaking as a pastor, not as a scientist or politician. He is looking at the modern problem of climate change and offering moral guidance for addressing it. The encyclical is an exercise of Pope Francis's teaching authority. It affirms core Catholic moral teachings on care for others and for God's creation. It offers prudential judgments on particular issues, like climate change, in light of those core moral teachings. Catholics are called to consider such prudential judgments prayerfully, thoughtfully, and humbly. Prudence is "intelligence applied to our actions," in the [words](#) of the US bishops. This is at its root a moral issue. Our faith also interacts with science. As the Catholic Church teaches, faith and reason complement and inform one another.

Q: Doesn't addressing climate change mean embracing population control measures that contradict Church teaching?

No. Although the Church recognizes climate change as an urgent moral issue, the Church also insists that any efforts to address climate change must be consistent with its moral teaching on human life and dignity. The Church affirms that population isn't the problem; the throw-away culture is the problem. Additionally, it is important to remember that climate change is a pro-life issue: the [World Health Organization](#) estimates that

climate change already causes 150,000 global deaths annually. See [these resources](#) from the Catholic Climate Covenant on the population question.



Social media

Hashtag

Prior to the encyclical's release, we suggest the use of the #encyclical hashtag.

After the encyclical's release, we suggest the use of the #[EnglishNameOfEncyclical] hashtag.

These hashtags can be used on both Facebook and Twitter.

Content

In general, content that emphasizes the above messages will resonate with the likely themes of the encyclical.

Sample Tweets

Pope Francis @Pontifex's #Encyclical will show that climate change is a human rights issue.

Every life is precious. Climate change hurts our vulnerable sisters and brothers. #Encyclical

Addressing climate change will help protect the precious planet and people we love. #Encyclical

We stand with Pope Francis @Pontifex — Protecting God's creation is our responsibility. #Encyclical

Sample Facebook posts

We must protect creation for our children and grandchildren. It's a simple moral responsibility. Thank you, Pope Francis, for sounding this call. We hear you! #Encyclical.

Climate change is a human rights issue. People all over the world are suffering from climate change's impacts. Kids get respiratory diseases, whole communities must move as seas rise, families hurt. Thank you, Pope Francis, for calling us to change. #Encyclical

God has called us to be the stewards of the Earth. Our role is to protect it and our sisters and brothers from the effects of climate change. We have a moral responsibility to protect the planet and people we rely on.

Protecting human life means protecting the planet that sustains us. Pope Francis's #Encyclical calls us to care for creation in order to care for the human family.

General guidance for Facebook

To get people talking, a few types of content stand out.

- Interesting images, such as funny cartoons or beautiful photos, get attention. [Facebook reported](#) that photos, photo albums, and videos get 120%, 180%, and 100% more engagement than links and text-only posts.
- Discussion-worthy topics start conversations. Don't shy away from asking your followers to engage with a question or poll.

Engage fans further by highlighting their submitted content, as well as maintaining variety of content.

- Overuse of specialized lingo such as abbreviations and jargon can turn fans off.
- Posting too frequently results in content getting pushed off the page before people have a chance to engage with it.

Write short, engaging posts.

- [Facebook found that](#) posts with 100-250 characters receive 60% more interaction. That's only about three lines of text.
- Asking fans to share, comment, and like a post has been found to result in 7 times, 3.3 times, and 3 times the activity, respectively.

General Guidance For Twitter

Maximize your visibility.

- Answer all of your @ mentions.
- Publish your Twitter handle in other forms of media (in an email signature or on Facebook, for instance.)

Retweet your favorite tweets from your audience.

- Find tweets related to your topic and favorite them; this helps people notice your engagement and encourages them to follow you.
- Answering and retweeting will make your audience feel appreciated.
- Try to leave enough characters at the end of your tweets for your audience to RT and @ you.

Use hashtags to place your tweet in the context of a specific, larger narrative, such as a breaking news story.

- Be judicious. [Studies show](#) that readers dislike an excess of hashtags.
- [Trending hashtags](#) can get a large amount of people to notice a specific cause or event.

Tweet throughout the day.

- According to one [study](#), tweeting at optimal times of day can double your number of clicks.
- Around 1-4 tweets per hour is an optimal rate of tweeting.



Letters to the editor

Writing a letter to the editor (also known as an LTE) is the perfect way to offer a rebuttal, add another perspective, or just express your appreciation for an already-published article or commentary piece.

Please let us know if your letter to the editor is published. We'll deliver it to elected officials. Completing this final step in the letter to the editor process helps ensure that your letter's impact is even greater. Email us at organizing@catholicclimatecovenant.org with a link to your published LTE.

General Tips

- Keep it short (150-250 words) – If you don't edit your LTE, the news outlet might edit it for you. Since they could cut out your main point, it's best to write something both punchy and brief.
- Follow the rules – You should be responding to a specific article or op-ed, so include the title and date of the piece you're responding to in your LTE. Send your LTE in the body of your email, not as an attachment. Include your full name, contact information, location, and profession or expertise in the email as well.
- Be timely – Try to get your LTE in on the same day the relevant article is published.
- Look into alternate ways to respond – If you watch a newsmagazine show that solicits viewer responses or interactions, send them a concise, pithy email or tweet. Look to see if your news outlet has interactive discussions with reporters, or if reporters are active on social media, and consider getting involved on those platforms.

5 Easy Encyclical-Specific Tips

- Start by referring to an event that has recently made headlines in your area. Include the headline of the story in the first sentence or two in your letter.

Example: Last week's story Flu Season Hits Home for Area Families (October 1), discussed a major health issue for Virginians.
- Connect climate change to that event. Climate change causes health issues, raises food prices, and leads to more extreme weather, among other things.

Example: But climate change is affecting our families' health even more. It's been linked to a rise in respiratory diseases and heart attacks.
- State a personal reason why you care about this issue.

Example: As a teacher, I care about the sick kids in my classroom.

- State that you stand with the pope and that you want action on climate change.
Example: That is why I'm standing with Pope Francis to support action on climate change.
- Sign your name and write the name of your city.
Example: Sincerely yours, Joan Brown, Manassas, Virginia



Op-eds

For your op-ed to reach people and educate them about the encyclical, it needs to find a home in some sort of news outlet. You can get it published by pitching it to an editor, usually over email, and briefly explaining what makes your op-ed different, important, and timely. Here are some tips on how to first write and then pitch your op-ed.

Steps to writing an op-ed: a sample framework

Who are you, and how do you connect to the moral cause for climate action?

- This could be your faith background, your work on justice or moral issues, your personal experience with climate change, or just a wide body of knowledge on the need for climate policy.

How do you see the encyclical as being part of something larger?

- A connection to the Paris climate talks in December is helpful here, so that outsiders can understand the relationship between the timing of the encyclical and broader momentum around climate action. The encyclical is a key document in a series of moments that are driving the conversation around the imperative for a strong international agreement on climate change.

Why do you specifically support climate action?

- Draw from your own background, or the general background of the group you represent. Of course, there are a multitude of reasons to support climate action, but it's most impactful to focus on one or two, rather than listing off a large number. Don't just take the 30,000-foot view; find a reason why this is deeply personal to you and explain why it should be deeply personal to others.

What are you calling for?

- Now is the chance to make a connection to broader actions. The pope is an incredibly powerful figure to millions of people across the world, and his message resonates to more people than just Catholics. The papal encyclical will ask leaders to take strong stance on climate action at the 21st Conference of Parties, and you can urge them to hear the moral call and seize the moment to protect people across the world through an international deal.

Quick tips for pitching your piece

- Submit wisely, but have backup plans
- Explain the news hook and your connection to it
- Keep it brief
- Follow up

Steps to pitching an op-ed

- *Pitch thoughtfully* – First, don't submit your op-ed to more than one newspaper at a time. Second, think about where your ideas will be most relevant and where you might be most likely to get published. Some outlets, like *USA Today* and *The New York Times*, are much more selective than others. So while you can and should aim high, make sure you have backup plans for smaller or more subject-specific publications that might be more interested in case major outlets aren't interested.
- *Write an effective pitch* – Editors want to keep their news fresh and interesting for their readers. What makes this issue relevant right now? How is your hook or angle different from something readers might have seen before? What makes you the best person to write the op-ed? If you've got a well-written op-ed with an unexpected point of view, the pitch is the place to explain that. Explain why their outlet is the very best place for your op-ed, even if it's your third or fourth choice.
- *Be brief* – This point keeps coming up, but it's important. The pitch should be comprised of your idea (a few sentences), your relevant credentials, your contact information, and the finished piece, pasted into the email. Don't attach it, and don't explain the whole piece—they'll read it.
- *Follow up* – No matter whether the editor responds or not, you'll want to follow up with them. If they respond, thank them regardless of whether they said "yes" or "no." If they don't respond, send them an email politely explaining that, since your hook is time-sensitive, if they don't get back to you by a certain time you'll assume they've passed on it and will be submitting it elsewhere. The amount of time depends on exactly how timely your news hook is.



Interviews and public speaking

Public speaking and interviews can seem intimidating, but they're both critical avenues for bringing your message to a wider audience. The key to acing an interview or speech is preparation: know your messages, know your facts, and know your audience. The better you know who your target audience is, the better you can shape your messaging to appeal to that group of people through whatever medium you're using. Here are some general tips on how to talk about climate, faith, and the moral argument for climate action to reporters or public audiences around the papal encyclical.

Identify your key messages

- Identify the two or three points or messages you want to convey during your interview **before** your interview. Start with the messages in this toolkit.
- **Match** message with the medium. A long-form print feature, news brief, TV interview, or radio show will all require different approaches to preparing and giving a speech. If a reporter is involved, try to understand what level of background knowledge they might have: are they a seasoned climate reporter, or a faith reporter trying to understand a new and complex topic? This understanding will help you deliver critical information in a time-sensitive manner.
- **Lead** with your key message point. Given deadline pressures and people's attention spans, you may only have time to deliver one point.
- **Don't equivocate.** If you have to use qualifiers to discuss something, return to your core message before moving on.

Reinforce your message points with key data

- Start with what you **know** and what the latest research reveals. We all recognize there are plenty of unknowns and degrees of uncertainty in this research; however, you won't likely be given time to discuss many qualifiers in great detail during the interview.
- Begin with the **strongest** climate-justice connections.
- Use persuasive **data points** to support your argument. You can play off name recognition to provide support, as institutions like the UN, the pope, and the World Bank are perceived as credible among the general population.
- Don't leave it as just numbers, though. If possible, link data and research to phenomena you've **personally experienced**.

- Emphasize breadth of evidence: Describe the broad body of research across various disciplines that support your point. Express your values and use appropriate **emotion**, as messages resonate when they match a reader's or viewer's values. Act as though you're speaking person-to-person. What would you say to a parent/neighbor/policymaker affected by climate change?
- Use **metaphors** that your audience can visualize and paint a picture for your intended audience. Compare climate impacts on communities around the world to concepts with which the average person can identify.
- Employ historical examples, like comparing the link between smoking and lung cancer to the link between coal-fired power plants and rising cases of respiratory illness.

Stay positive and factual

- Don't engage with leading questions about whether climate change is "real." Make it clear that the science is settled, and emphasize that climate change **impacts are here now** and will get worse without action.
- **Emphasize consensus** among different communities. Faith, labor, business, science, social justice, and health groups have all come together on this issue and asked for climate action.
- Focus on the **positive momentum** in states and local communities in the US, as well as in countries around the world. While there may be setbacks, adopting a narrative of inevitability and scientific surety will help move the conversation from talking about the science and climate impacts to talking about solutions.