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by Barbara Fraser

Freelance journalist based in Peru

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Editor's Note: *EarthBeat Weekly is your weekly newsletter about faith and climate change. Below is the Feb. 19 edition. To receive EarthBeat Weekly in your inbox, sign up here.*

We are not on good terms with the planet.

The coronavirus pandemic should have been enough to tell us that. Viruses that normally exist in wild animals without making them sick can make the jump to humans when the hosts' habitats are destroyed. That disturbance happens constantly in parts of Asia, Africa and Latin America, as forests are razed to make way for farms and ranches.

But in case we need a reminder, a deadly winter storm left dozens of people dead and millions without electricity this past week, in Texas especially, but also in places like Oklahoma and Louisiana.

Scientists don't link specific storms to climate change, but there are some indications that rising temperatures in the Arctic — which is warming at twice the average rate for the rest of Earth's surface — are destabilizing air currents in the atmosphere, making severe weather like the recent storms more likely.

Experts have warned about the risk of pandemics, especially in a warming world, and the risk of more frequent and more extreme weather, but both caught the U.S. unprepared. We are paying the price for ignoring the warnings and failing to take steps to detect and protect against a pandemic virus and to winterize and modernize electricity-generating equipment.

In Texas, faith leaders called out the state government for a lack of preparation that they said amounted to "sheer negligence," as NCR environment correspondent Brian Roewe reports. And Dennis Sadowski at Catholic News Service describes the emergency measures adopted by Catholic Charities in Texas and Oklahoma to

provide aid to those affected.

The world is awash in studies that describe the impact of climate change on flora and fauna, oceans, rivers, cities — virtually all ecosystems and all aspects of life. A new report, issued Feb. 18 by the U.N. Environment Programme, urges us humans to change our relationship with the rest of the natural world.

The steps recommended in the report, called "Making Peace with Nature," are not really new. Like preparing for a pandemic and protecting vulnerable energy systems against extreme cold, we know what we need to do to turn down the heat on the planet and protect future generations against the worst impacts of a disaster they did not cause.

Among the top recommendations:

- Recognize that climate change, land degradation, loss of biodiversity and pollution of air and water are related and must be tackled together.
- Start factoring the true environmental and social costs of our activities into the prices of goods and services.
- Stop subsidizing fossil fuels and invest instead in low-carbon, nature-friendly technologies.
- Use water more efficiently, clean it up and restore watersheds and the natural flow of rivers and streams.
- Produce food in ways that work with nature, instead of destroying forests and degrading soil, and which adapt to climate change.
- Realize that human health cannot be unlinked from the health of the planet's ecosystems, and behave accordingly.

"Reducing inequalities and the risk of social conflict requires the minimization and reversal of environmental degradation and declines in natural resources," the report states. "It also requires structural changes to the economy, including steps to promote equity and address individual and community rights to property, resources and education."

We've long known that to make peace with the planet, we must change our patterns of consumption and our economy — and that for those in wealthy countries who are accustomed to having more than we really need to live, this will mean giving up some things so that all may live decently within the planet's limits.

Nevertheless, the report warns, "The costs of inaction on limiting environmental change far outweigh the costs of action."

Or as Pope Francis once said, "If we destroy creation, then creation will destroy us. Never forget this."

Here's what else is new on EarthBeat this week:

- For Lent this year, Fr. Emmet Farrell, of the Diocese of San Diego's creation care ministry, is drawing a clear connection between faith and climate change in a series of daily reflections. Roewe talked with Farrell about why climate change is one of the world's most pressing moral issues, and EarthBeat is publishing selections from the series three times a week from Ash Wednesday through Good Friday.
- In opening the series, Farrell invited readers to reflect on "hothouse Earth," while today he considers the exponential increase in the human population and in our consumption of fossil fuels. You can sign up here to receive the reflections in your inbox.
- Writing for the Global Sisters Report, Sr. Sue Paweski, a Sister of Providence of St. Mary of the Woods, describes the lesson in resilience that she learned from a tree in her neighborhood.
- In Canada, country music stars, conservationists and tens of thousands of Albertans came together to force the government to roll back plans for mountaintop-removal mining in the Rockies. Sharon J. Riley has the story for The Narwhal, a member of the Covering Climate Now consortium.
- Last November, youth climate activists helped elect President Joe Biden. Now, many are demanding a say in U.S. federal climate policy, reports Ilana Cohen at Climate Tracker, also a Covering Climate Now partner.

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And here's some of what's new in other climate news:

- A nonprofit organization and a tea company are teaming up to create jobs and plant trees in formerly redlined neighborhoods that still struggle with poverty and a lack of green space, writes Adele Peters for Fast Company. The idea echoes Biden's plan for a Climate Conservation Corps, which the Los Angeles Times editorial board notes could help combat global warming and mitigate its effects while providing job training for a greener economy.

- The U.S. is officially back in the Paris Agreement, as the required 30-day waiting period ended on Friday, write Ellen Knickmeyer and Seth Borenstein at the Associated Press. Biden told European leaders, "We can no longer delay or do the bare minimum to address climate change. This is a global existential crisis, and all of us will suffer if we fail."

- A new bill in the California state senate, which would ban fracking near schools and homes by next year and in the entire state by 2027, is likely to trigger a hard-fought battle in the legislature, according to The Guardian.

- As California's deserts grow even hotter, there are climate change winners and losers, with burrowing mammals apparently adapting by going underground while birds, which can't escape the heat, are on the decline, reports Deborah Sullivan Brennan for The San Diego Union-Tribune.

- And in Mexico, a study found that genes from genetically modified cotton crops that escaped into wild relatives hundreds of miles away apparently changed the way the wild cotton interacts with insects that pollinate the flowers and ants that protect the plants from hungry herbivores. Emiliano Rodríguez Mega has the story for Science News.

Upcoming events:

The Bernardin Center at Catholic Theological Union and the Parliament of the World's Religions will sponsor a Buddhist-Catholic dialogue on climate change on Saturday, Feb. 20, from 9 a.m. to noon Central Time. It is the second in a series of interfaith dialogues that grew out of a new guidebook on implementing *Laudato Si'*.

The retreat, titled "Deepening our Awareness of Love, Compassion and Joy for the Healing of the World," will be facilitated by St. Joseph Sr. Pat Bergen and Ven. Dhammadipa Sak. You can find more information about this and other upcoming

events on the EarthBeat Events page.

Closing beat:

There's a lot of food for thought packed into Farrell's "Reflections on the Care of Creation," which EarthBeat is excerpting during Lent. Do they spur you, your family or your faith group to action? If so, we'd like to know. Tell us in 150 words or less in a Small Earth Story, or drop us a line at earthbeat@ncronline.org.

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