News
EarthBeat



(Denys Nevozhai/Unsplash)

by Fr. Emmet Farrell

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

March 10, 2021

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Editor's note: *In his Lenten "Reflections on the Care of Creation," Fr. Emmet Farrell examines our impact on the planet and our responsibility, as people of faith, for our common home. You can sign up here to receive Fr. Farrell's reflections in your inbox every Monday, Wednesday and Friday from Feb. 17 to April 2.*

See:

"We are approaching a dual tipping point of social and environmental systems that will arguably determine the future of life-support systems on Earth," wrote members of Earth League, a global network of eminent scientists, in 2019. On the one hand, they said, young people are mobilizing for action on climate change at an unprecedented level. On the other, humans continue to push Earth's natural systems toward a cascade of potentially disastrous effects. Cities play a large role in this process.

Just over half of the world's population — about 4.2 billion people — is now urban. That's nine times as many city dwellers as there were a century ago. And by 2050, the number is expected to increase by another 2.5 billion, with 90% of that growth occurring in Asia and Africa, according to the U.N. Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

Large cities have large carbon footprints — they consume about two-thirds of the world's energy and create more than 70% of total greenhouse gas emissions. So local government policies matter. According to C40, a network of large cities around the world that are committed to tackling climate change, "city mayors are directly accountable to their constituents for their decisions, and are more nimble than state and national elected officials to take decisive action — often with immediate and impactful results."

Many cities are addressing emissions by increasing mass transit, switching to electric vehicles and making buildings more efficient. But a C40 report indicates that a significant amount of emissions results from the goods and services consumed by urban residents, such as food, clothing, electronic items, construction, airplane flights and delivery trucks. Finding ways to reduce that consumption will be crucial for meeting greenhouse gas emission targets.

Advertisement

Judge:

> [W]e are conscious of the disproportionate and unruly growth of many cities, which have become unhealthy to live in, not only because of pollution caused by toxic emissions but also as a result of urban chaos, poor transportation, and visual pollution and noise. (*Laudato Si*', 44)
>
> More precious still is the service we offer to another kind of beauty: people's quality of life. (*Laudato Si*', 150)
>
> Lack of housing is a grave problem in many parts of the world, both in rural areas and in large cities. (*Laudato Si*', 152)
>
> Saving the Earth and its peoples from dangerous climate change is an economic, social and environmental issue — and a moral and ethical one too that goes to the core of many if not all of the world's great faiths. ... It is time for faith groups and religious institutions to find their voice and set their moral compass on one of the great humanitarian issues of our time. (Christiana Figueres, former executive secretary of the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change, in The Guardian)

Act:

- Study the climate action plan for your diocese or your city or county.
- Check to see if the plan focuses on affordable housing and cleaner, affordable and more accessible mass transit.
- Make suggestions and communicate them to diocesan, city or county planners.

This story appears in the **Reflections on the Care of Creation** feature series. View the full series.