Opinion
EarthBeat



The main gate of the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 27) in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, Nov. 6-18. (Unsplash/Matthew TenBruggencate)



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The causes of and solutions for climate change are vast, complex and multi-dimensional. What comes out of every United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference of Parties, or COP, is and will likely always be a mixed bag of results, possibilities and disappointments for which definitive conclusions are elusive.

What is clear is that COP27 failed to yield commitments that make substantive progress toward the three goals of the Paris Agreement: to limit global temperature increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels; to increase the world's ability to adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change; and to make financial flows consistent with a pathway toward low greenhouse gas emissions and climate-resilient development.

The breakthrough moment of COP27 — the creation of a "loss and damage" fund for countries most impacted by climate change after decades of advocacy — was muted by the reality that the final text did not include a call and timeline for a phaseout of all fossil fuels, and the financial flows remain a trickle relative to the trillions of dollars needed.

In light of the scientific consensus, the continuing cascade of climate exacerbated weather events causing unprecedented human suffering, and the inadequate responses, many young adults have expressed anxiety about the world they are inheriting.

Our faith in God, and in our neighbors, is surely tested. And yet, hope abides. Changes are afoot, from shifts of the arrows of moral compasses to broader interpretations of "self-interest."

For example, at COP27:

- An expanding group of world leaders, building off of the Bridgetown Initiative by Mia Mottley, the prime minister of Barbados, called for major overhauls of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank that could attract trillions of dollars to help nations and the world meet the three goals of the Paris Agreement in scales commensurate with the need.
- The United States and China — the world's largest greenhouse gas emitters — thawed a months-long diplomatic impasse over Taiwan by expressing a

commitment to direct cooperation on climate change.
- The Vatican participated as a formal party to COP negotiations for the first time and has committed to net-zero emissions by 2050.

And it is important to remember that in August, the U.S. passed the Inflation Reduction Act, the most significant climate legislation in U.S. history that will help the nation pivot toward a clean energy future.

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What explains these pivots by some of the most powerful political, economic and moral forces in our world? Perhaps the realization that a climate-catastrophized world neither uplifts the life and dignity of the human person, creates stable and peaceable societies, nor ensures thriving and sustainable marketplaces.

Perhaps humanity is coming to appreciate the origin of the word "economy." which rests in "oikonomia," the ancient Greek word meaning "management of a household." Applied to the global context, the "economy" — moral, political, social and economic — can be defined as "care for our common home" — part of the title of Pope Francis' encyclical on faith and ecology, Laudato Si'.

In these steps we see indications and actions in key places of humanity's collective conscience that signal recognition of the profound nature of the climate crisis. While they themselves are not the actual transformation, within them are the seeds.

After decades of calls to action, we are now compelled to shift some of our energy to firm commitments and to roll up our sleeves and act, for actions are tangible contributions to the Paris Agreement goals and to a sustainable future.

For example, as the Vatican has committed to net-zero emissions by 2050, the Catholic Climate Covenant is in dialogue with several U.S. dioceses to chart out net-zero pathways. As the USCCB's National Synthesis for the Synod on Synodality stated, "Young people also want the Church to speak out about issues that matter to them, especially justice, race, and climate change."

The Covenant is creating structures and programs that will provide youth and young adults tangible opportunities to work with the church in addressing these issues. To ensure effective implementation of the Inflation Reduction Act, the Covenant is

helping U.S. Catholic institutions benefit from provisions enabling them to reduce their carbon footprints.

And we will continue to bring together voices advocating for the reduction of debt burdens upon vulnerable nations to free up financial flows for climate solutions that directly benefit their peoples.

Finally, though deep divisions exist within U.S. society and within our church, we as "church" have more than 2,000 years of theology, ministry and community we can use if we so choose, to sow hope where there is despair, light where there is darkness and love where there is hate.

We can build bridges across difference, strengthened by the prayer intoned at every Mass, that God grant our church peace and unity. And by steadfast commitment to the life and dignity of every human person, we can continue with spiritual strength and fellowship in this work. For with God, everything is possible.

This story appears in the **COP27 Egypt** feature series. View the full series.