Opinion
EarthBeat



People walk through the venue for the COP28 U.N. Climate Summit, with the Al Wasl Dome in the background, at Expo City, Nov. 29, 2023, in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. (AP/Joshua A. Bickel)

Joseph W. Tobin

View Author Profile

RNS
Religion News Service

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

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

December 1, 2023
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

As world leaders convene in Dubai for the annual United Nations climate change conference, or COP28, a new advocacy group will be on hand to influence the negotiations. For the first time in its history, the conference will host a faith pavilion, where faith groups and leaders from across the religious spectrum will gather to demonstrate the pivotal role of faith communities in tackling the climate crisis.

COP28 presents the faith community with an opportune moment to come together to influence climate negotiations. Rising global temperatures and the undeniable signs of environmental distress are manifestations of our negligence. More than just harming our planet, the climate crisis jeopardizes human life. It already impacts all facets of society.

Serving on the board of trustees of Catholic Relief Services, the global aid organization, I have learned about how extreme weather events have made life nearly impossible for those living on the fringes of society. The Horn of Africa, for instance, is only starting to recover from its worst drought in 40 years, one that decimated livestock and wiped out people's ability to earn a living.

Advertisement

In 2022 in Pakistan, catastrophic flooding left a third of the country under water, a calamity that the Pakistani government says links directly to climate change. In 2020, back-to-back hurricanes Eta and Iota — the most severe natural disasters to hit Central America in more than 20 years — destroyed the livelihoods of tens of thousands of families, leading to massive humanitarian needs, including forced migration.

How predictable it is that the countries and people who are the poorest in the world and have contributed the least to the crisis are the most affected. The most vulnerable populations are again paying the price for choices made by wealthier and

more powerful nations. In my work as the leader of the Archdiocese of Newark, I listen to the stories told by immigrants from various corners of the globe who are arriving at our parishes and church institutions. They come seeking refuge from situations imposed on them by others, decisions that undermine their ability to sustain themselves on their land or support their families.

The faith community, with its vast reach and moral authority, has a pivotal role to play in engendering the kind of change we need to see. Pope Francis has shown the way as a staunch advocate for the environment. In his 2015 encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, and its companion document, *Laudate Deum,* released earlier this year, he called for a profound ecological conversion in which we align our spiritual beliefs and our actions toward the planet and each other.



Floodwaters surround homes in Sohbat Pur city, a district of Pakistan's southwestern Baluchistan province, Aug. 29, 2022. (AP/Zahid Hussain)

The Holy Father had planned to speak at COP28 but canceled his plans due to illness. But his message on the environment will be loud and clear in Dubai. As

Francis wrote in "Laudato Si'," "Our relationship with the environment can never be isolated from our relationship with others and with God."

At COP28, world leaders, including the U.S. delegation, must listen to developing countries, which need immense help to adapt to climate change, even as they recover from the losses they have already sustained. World leaders must keep their promises to provide more financial support for these communities.

The clock is ticking. We must act soon and with unity. The COP28 summit must signify a profound transformation, ensuring support for those disproportionately affected by the climate crisis while enacting just policy changes that ensure a better future.

When our children and grandchildren look back at this moment, they will judge us by our actions and decisions. As people of faith, we must rise to the occasion, ensuring that our legacy is one of unity, pursuing shared prosperity and equality, and unwavering commitment to the preservation of our common home.

This story appears in the **COP28 Dubai** feature series. View the full series.