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Take the pledge, asks Catholic climate group

Brian Roewe | Dec. 8, 2011 Eco Catholic

On Monday, *NCR* presented part one of an interview with Dan Misleh, executive director of the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change [1]. He responded to the current United Nations climate talks in Durban, South Africa, and spoke to the Catholic response to the international talks and climate change.

Today, *NCR* provides part two of our interview with Misleh. Among the topics are the efforts of the Coalition in regard to climate change, the impact on developing countries and ways individuals can limit their carbon footprint.

On the Coalition?s efforts

The Catholic Coalition on Climate Change takes its cues on climate policy priorities from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, which has emphasized the protection of human ecology and natural ecology.

In that regard, one of the main efforts of the Coalition is the St. Francis Pledge to Care for Creation and the Poor [2], launched through its Catholic Climate Covenant campaign.

The pledge calls its partners to pray, learn, assess, act and advocate, on behalf of God?s creation and climate change. Individuals, parishes, organizations and schools have all taken the pledge, with the University of Notre Dame recently joining the initiative.

Misleh admitted having a tough time making progress reaching out and raising awareness on the climate issue, citing current economic struggles of many and a lack of political leadership.

?In the absence of any leadership on climate change from Congress or the Obama administration, we have no clear policy hook to help Catholics appreciate the need for our nation to get serious about addressing climate change and its impact on poor people,? he said.

Outside the pledge, the Coalition has worked to document and spread the impact and importance of climate change. In the past year, it has trained 24 Catholic Climate Ambassadors [3].

Misleh described these ambassadors as ?faithful Catholics from around the country who are now sharing Catholic teaching on the environment with parishioners, educators, diocesan staff, high school and university students and others.?

The Coalition also provided a grant to Catholic Relief Services, who use it to document the impact of climate change on its relief and development work in over 100 countries.

These stories have told of the damage stronger storms and rising sea levels have had on rice and other crop fields in Cambodia.

?For these people ? and a billion subsistence farmers and villagers around the world ? climate change is not

some theory: It is real,? said Misleh.

In the coming months, the Coalition will also sponsor a joint conference with the bishops? conference and the Catholic University of America. Bringing together top theologians and ethicists, it will explore Pope Benedict XVI?s teaching on environmental justice and climate change.

On Developing Countries

?It is imperative that the international community continues to recognize the plight of the most vulnerable,? said Misleh.

Delegates at the U.N. climate conference set a goal of creating institutions to support developing countries as they deal with climate change.

As negotiations continue in Durban, Misleh emphasized that talks must consider the needs of developing countries in addition to powerful nations, especially in terms of new energy sources.

In 2009, poorer countries made themselves heard at COP 15, in Copenhagen, Denmark, with the establishment of the Green Climate Fund. Through it, developed countries would provide up to $100 billion annually to developing countries, who will use it for climate change adaptation projects.

?Dozens of poorer countries demanded a voice, and that voice was primarily responsible for securing commitments by wealthy nations to fund international adaptation and energy technology transfers,? said Misleh.

The Fund is at the center of negotiations in Durban [4], as countries wrangle with the details of source funding and its ultimate division among receiving nations.

For Misleh, setting aside such funding for the globe?s poorest countries is a small cost, relative to the risks of doing nothing at all. Without aiding developing nations, he says, there could be greater need of emergency relief efforts, as well as an increase in mass migrations of environmental refugees.

?These impacts on the poor and vulnerable are directly related to our work, since drawing attention to the plight of poorer people is one of two primary contributions of the Catholic community to the ongoing debate about climate change: It is about both caring for Creation and for poor people most impacted.?

On what Catholics can do

?One of the first things I tell people when talking about the Catholic approach to climate change is to make a commitment to get outdoors,? said Misleh.

By taking a walk in the woods, or even sitting in one?s backyard, he says, Catholics can observe nature and ?appreciate the great Gift God has given us in all its variety, complexity and integrity.?

?This is our planet and our home,? he said.

Through such reflection, he encourages people to act with gratitude toward God in their daily lives by adopting many of the ?go green? mantras. Walk or bike; drive less; turn off your computer when not in use; air dry laundry and recycle what you can.

?There are a hundred ways to lower our carbon footprint. The key to all of it, though, is to be more mindful of why we do it ? because we love the Creator, and we love one another.?

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