

# Catholic coalition to unveil ‘St. Francis Pledge’ on climate change

WASHINGTON - During the Easter season, the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change plans to publicly unveil a “Catholic Climate Covenant,” a new initiative to make U.S. Catholics more aware of what they can do to stem climate change and its effects.

It will be unveiled with a public event on Earth Day, April 22.

The covenant includes “The St. Francis Pledge to Protect Creation and the Poor,” modeled after St. Francis of Assisi, whose “Canticle of the Sun” praised God’s creation in the form of, among other things, earth, water and creatures.

The pledge is “a solemn commitment made by Catholic individuals, groups and institutions to honor God’s creation and serve the poor,” according to the pledge’s preamble. The pledge’s five points ask Catholics to:

- Pray and reflect on the duty to care for God’s creation and protect the poor and vulnerable.
- Learn about and educate others on the causes and moral dimensions of climate change.
- Assess “how each of us – as individuals and as organizations – is contributing to climate change,” both in terms of consumption and conservation.
- Act “to change our choices and behaviors contributing to climate change.”
- Advocate for Catholic principles and priorities in discussions and decisions about climate change, especially their impact on the poor and vulnerable.

Last year, the Senate considered a bill that would have sent public proceeds generated by a “cap and trade” approach to emissions to poor people in the most vulnerable developing countries to help them adapt to a changing climate, but there was not enough support to cut off debate and allow a vote on the measure itself.

Under cap and trade, a ceiling – or cap – is set on greenhouse gas emissions in a particular geographic region. Firms that cannot meet the ceiling pay others whose emissions fall within the ceiling for, essentially, the right to pollute. This is the trade. Governments, though, can get a share of the cost of the trade.

“The solar panels on the Paul VI Conference Center at the Vatican means that the Vatican is very close to being the first carbon-neutral state,” said Dan Misleh, executive director of the coalition. “In many ways we are playing catch-up” compared to the Vatican, he added.

Organizations in the coalition were urged at a Jan. 16 conference to get their own member institutions to sign on to the covenant and pledge in advance of Earth Day so that there would be a large number of signees at the time it is made public.

The National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry plans to use the “St. Francis Pledge” as a starting point in developing an online resource for youth ministry leaders to encourage youths and families to develop skills to protect creation and serve the poor.

Other coalition members include the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Migration and Refugee Services and Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development; the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities; the Carmelite Nongovernmental Organization; Catholic Charities USA; the Catholic Health Association; Catholic Relief Services; the Conference of Major Superiors of Men; the Franciscan Action Network; the Leadership Conference of Women Religious; the National Catholic Rural Life Conference; and the National Council of Catholic Women.