



Catholics and Climate Change

We Catholics, observant and cultural, live throughout the world. We cherish our common home, this magnificent Earth, as well as all its peoples. We treasure all creation. “The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change.” (Pope Francis’s *Encyclical, Laudato Si*¹)

A third of us live in Canada, Europe, and the United States. Two thirds of us live in the global South—including Central and South America, Mexico, the Caribbean, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. Those in the global South are feeling the worst impacts of climate change. Severe weather (such as flooding and drought) and water and air pollution are destroying the land and people’s health and economic survival. Similarly, in the dominant nations of the North the impact of the climate emergency is falling most heavily on Indigenous people and people

of color—primarily women, young people, poor people, and migrating people.

To play a significant role in ending and healing from climate change, we need the biggest picture of who we are and the broadest understanding of our people’s history. This means looking directly at genocide, colonization, enslavement, imperialism, and male domination and sexism. We European Catholics and our descendants were oppressed and then reenacted our oppression on other peoples and lands. Catholicism became interwoven with imperialism. Patterns of greed and power seeped into our culture and exploited the planet.

No matter how much we may have suffered from oppression, climate destruction requires us to prioritize the needs and interests of those who are currently the most severely impacted by it: women, young people, Indigenous people, people of color, and people of the global South.

We must listen to those who have wisdom about the land—people whose voices have been deliberately marginalized. We need to

¹ *Laudato Si’: Caring for Our Common Home* is the title of the formal letter, or Encyclical, on climate change and the environment addressed by Pope Francis to all the peoples of the world; published on May 24, 2015.



understand the Doctrine of Discovery² and its role in robbing Indigenous peoples of their natural resources; polluting their lands, water, and air; and attempting their genocide.

We must face and understand the destructiveness of our economic system and its social institutions. Patterns of greed and

² The Doctrine of Discovery is a set of documents that established a spiritual, political, and legal justification for colonization and seizure of land not inhabited by Christians. It has been invoked since Pope Alexander VI issued the Papal Bull, *Inter Caetera*, in 1493.

exploitation now affect all parts of the world. Some of us consume too much and waste resources while others lack even the basic resources they need to survive.

We must listen to women. As primary caretakers, women can be counted on [relied on] to fight to preserve the planet for their children.

We can reclaim our humanity and our deepest connections with each other—which have been central to our Catholic religion and culture across time and among all nations and races—no



Sustaining All Life (SAL) is an international grassroots organization working to end the climate emergency within the context of ending all divisions among people. *United to End Racism* (UER) is a group of people of all ages and backgrounds, in many different countries, who are dedicated to eliminating racism in the world and supporting the efforts of all other groups with this goal. UER and SAL are projects of and use the tools of Re-evaluation Counseling. Re-evaluation Counseling (RC) is a well-defined theory and practice that helps people of all ages and backgrounds exchange effective help with each other in order to free themselves from the emotional scars of oppression and other hurts. By taking turns listening to each other and encouraging emotional release, people can heal old hurts and become better able to think, to speak out, and to organize and lead others in building a world in which human beings and other life forms are valued and the environment is restored and preserved. Re-evaluation Counseling currently exists in 95 countries.



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matter how distorted they may have become in societies motivated by “profits over people.”

We must reject and end the separation that keeps dominant groups ignorant about the impact of climate change on Indigenous people and people of color. We must listen to and follow the lead of those most impacted.

Our historical experiences have injured us emotionally, and our work to stop climate destruction will go best when we heal from the hurts. Healing from them will include the following:

- Understanding that we are good and that we love the world
- “Learning to accept [our] body, to care for it and to respect its fullest meaning” (Pope Francis’s *Encyclical, Laudato Si’*)
- Becoming increasingly compassionate and acting in solidarity with others
- Making sure that no one gets left behind
- Challenging any and all denial that climate change is real
- Challenging despair with the hopefulness of community

- Understanding that our struggles are rooted in the past
- Interrupting our attempts to “escape,” especially stopping overconsumption
- Ending our personal reliance on fossil fuels, pesticides, and plastics; ending our wasteful energy practices
- Recognizing that exploitative systems are the problem and that people are powerful enough to transform them
- Having the courage to be vulnerable
- Remembering that we are healing the planet for the sake of the world’s children
- Reclaiming our fearless integrity
- Understanding the Doctrine of Discovery well enough to end its impacts
- Reaching out with pride to all Catholics

Catholic-heritage people are exactly the right people to play a key role in repairing our beloved world.





The Work of *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism*

It is possible to limit the effects of human-caused climate change and restore the environment—and some very large changes in our economy and the lives we live are needed for this to happen. *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* believe the environmental crisis cannot be resolved without ending racism, genocide toward Indigenous peoples, classism, sexism, and other oppressions. The impact of environmental destruction and climate change falls most heavily on people targeted by these particular oppressions. Making the changes needed will require a massive movement, spanning the globe, of people of every background fighting the effects of both climate change and racism.

In *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* we believe that the barriers to building a sufficiently large and powerful movement include (1) longstanding divisions (usually caused by oppression, and especially racism and classism) between nations and between groups of people, (2) widespread feelings of discouragement and powerlessness, (3) denial of or failure to engage with the escalating damage to the earth's climate, and (4) difficulties in effectively addressing the connections between the environmental crisis and the failures of our economic system. *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* work to address these and other issues.

The role of oppression

The economic and political forms of our societies demand growth and profit with little regard for people, other life forms, or the earth. This results in exploitation and oppression. Oppressions (such as racism, classism, sexism, and the oppression of young people) target everyone, inflicting tremendous injustices, limiting access to resources, and damaging the lives of billions of people. Once targeted by oppression, we tend to act toward others in ways that repeat the hurts that we have experienced. Much of the mental and emotional damage done to humans is the result of this passing on of hurt. Though humans are vulnerable to acting in oppressive ways, oppressive behavior is not inherent, but arises only when a human has been

hurt emotionally. Oppressive societies manipulate this vulnerability to establish and maintain economic exploitation.

The importance of healing personal damage

The mental and emotional harm done to us by oppression and other hurtful experiences interferes with our ability to think clearly and sets groups of people against each other. This makes it difficult for us to think about and respond effectively to the climate emergency. People would not cooperate with a society that exploits people and damages the environment if they had not first been hurt.

Healing from the hurts that help to hold oppression in place and lead to other damaging behavior is not quick or easy work. Many of us resist this work. We may have survived by numbing ourselves to the damage done to us by oppression. Some of us assume that we will never be free of this damage.

In *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* we have learned that it is possible to free ourselves from these hurts and address barriers to effective organizing. We can heal from hurtful experiences if someone listens to us attentively and allows and encourages us to release the grief, fear, and other painful emotions. This happens by means of our natural healing processes—talking, crying, trembling, expressing anger, and laughing. By releasing distressed feelings in a supportive network, we can stay united, hopeful, thoughtful, joyful, and committed. This in turn strengthens us in building our movements to stop the effects of climate change and racism.



Sustaining All Life



For more information, see:

www.sustainingalllife.org or www.unitedtoendracism.org
or **write:** Sustaining All Life/United to End Racism
719 Second Ave North, Seattle, WA 98109, USA
Email: sal@rc.org Tel: +1-206-284-0311