

Climate Change and Mission Impact

Climate change isn't just an environmental issue; it is a social justice issue. And here's why: because of their close connection to local resources, the poor in developing countries are disproportionately affected by the consequences of climate change. As the faith community seeks to address global warming, it must be aware of the needs climate change causes for many of the people who the faith community serves through mission and outreach.

Theology:

- As people of faith, we have a responsibility to care for God's creation. We are also called to care for marginalized peoples. For these reasons, the impact of climate change on the environment and people groups should be of great concern to the faith community.
- Responding to our faith assertions to serve others, love our neighbors, and protect that which is beautiful, faith communities serve people and places all over the world. If global warming continues, faith-based mission and outreach will face a growing need for resources.

Mission and Outreach

Refugee Resettlement:

- Because of rising rates of famine, drought, natural disasters, expanding deserts, and flooding, more and more people have become refugees. In 2006, there were 8.4 million refugees in the world.
- Refugee resettlement is an expanding mission area of the faith community. In 2006, faith organizations helped settle over 17,000 refugees. Refugee resettlement is both a financial and a time commitment. The World Health Organization estimates that the initial resettlement costs for a refugee is \$8,000.
- In 2005, there were 19.1 million environmental refugees, more than those displaced by war and persecution. If refugee acceptance rates remain static, the United States will accept 245,700 environmental refugees in 2010. In order to address the growing need, faith communities will have to drastically increase the number of refugees they help resettle.

Eliminating Hunger:

- Global climate change affects food production through drought, flooding, and rising temperatures. Because people depend on local food and water sources in developing countries, the consequences of drought and famine are especially devastating.
- The intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change estimates that crop yields will decline by 50 percent in Africa by 2020. In a land already stricken by famine, the UN Development Program predicts that malnutrition rates will increase by up to 600 million people due to climate changes.
- Many churches, synagogues, mosques, and faith organizations work to assure food security around the world. Denominations and communions associated with

the National Council of Churches provide more than 48 percent of the funding for Foods Resource Bank, a non-profit dedicated to promoting food security. To maintain this same level of support, faith communities will need to increase their spending to more than \$2.9 million dollars, or 187 percent higher than their current level of support.

Water Purification:

- More than one billion people use unsafe sources of drinking water. As drought conditions increase and water tables lower, the number of unsafe water sources will increase.
- Many faith communities are involved in mission initiatives to help purify water from unsafe sources and dig wells where there is no water source. As drought and pollution increase, there will be a greater need for clean water in close proximity to where people live.

Disaster Relief:

- Warm waters increase the intensity of hurricanes. As climate changes continue to warm ocean surfaces, hurricanes will be more severe. Category 4 and 5 hurricanes currently make up 30 percent of hurricanes. As more intense hurricanes touch land, there will be loss of life and damage to property.
- Faith communities serve as first responders across the globe when disasters strike. To maintain the current level of support in the face of more intense hurricanes, faith communities will need to increase funding by more than 42 percent.

Taking Action

- Global climate change disproportionately affects the poor and those living in developing countries: the exact people who have the fewest resources with which to confront the problem. We are called to serve our global neighbors in need.
- As we work to heal God's creation and lessen our environmental impact, we must remember the effects of climate change on aspects of the faith community's mission. Not only must we make energy changes, but we must be mindful of the increasing needs for assistance around the globe and reflect those changes in faith mission.
- Many people and organizations advocate for "the environment" or for "people living in poverty." Our faith traditions call us to care for creation as a whole: people and the environment.

Questions for Discussion:

- 1) What stories or passages from our faith tradition speak to care for God's creation? What stories or passages speak to caring for marginalized people?
- 2) What global mission work does our faith community participate in? Which mission areas receive the most resources?

3) How can we be proactive in our mission work knowing that needs for food, clean water, and shelter will continue to grow due to climate change?