



Catholic Principles and Environmental Policy – A Statement from Washington State’s Bishops

October 4, 2018

The splendor of nature here in the Pacific Northwest provides us with inspiration and is a sure sign of God’s love. Yet while our corner of the world holds much beauty, we know not all is right with our planet. Harm to the environment is hurting people, most significantly our poorest and most vulnerable sisters and brothers.

For decades, the Catholic Church has raised concerns about the increasing threats to the environment and has encouraged ever greater care for God’s creation. In 1970, Blessed Paul VI urged “a radical change” in our approach towards the environment. In 1990, St. John Paul II called the ecological crisis a moral issue. Pope Emeritus Benedict reminded us that “the environment is God’s gift to everyone, and in our use of it we have a responsibility towards the poor, towards future generations and towards humanity as a whole.” In 2015, Pope Francis issued his encyclical *Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home*, specifically addressing climate change and emphasizing the “urgent need to develop policies so that, in the next few years, the emission of carbon dioxide and other highly polluting gases can be drastically reduced.”

Here in Washington, the state’s Catholic bishops have worked to promote care for creation in our own backyard, including the development of the groundbreaking 2001 pastoral letter “*The Columbia River Watershed: Caring for Creation and the Common Good*.” This important document stated, “the common good demands a proper respect for the land, the air and the water to assure that when we have passed through this land it remains habitable and productive for those who come after us.”

More recently, we wrote in our 2016 pastoral letter *Who Is My Neighbor? The Face of Poverty in Washington State*, that an unmistakable call of the Gospel is to care for “the least” among us – the poor and vulnerable. A foundational principle of Catholic Social Teaching is the sanctity of life and dignity of the human person. People in poverty often suffer the most from any degradation of the environment. At the same time, the U.S. Catholic bishops have long held that action to mitigate global climate change must be built upon a foundation of social and economic justice that does not put the poor at greater risk. In other words, we are called both to care for the environment and to be thoughtful about how proposed public policies will impact those living in poverty or on the margins of society.

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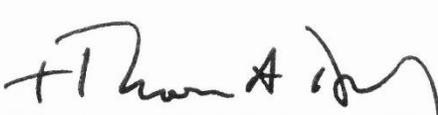
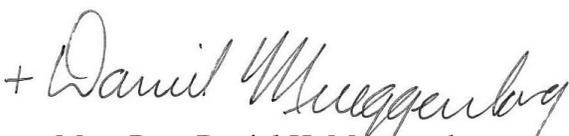
This fall, Washington voters will vote on Initiative 1631, the Clean Air Clean Energy Initiative. While we do not take a position either directly in favor of or in opposition to I-1631, we offer the following points to consider when casting your vote:

- All efforts to reduce the impact of climate change should respect human life and dignity, especially that of the poorest and most vulnerable among us.
- In accord with their human dignity, local communities - especially low-income residents whose voice is often not heard - should have a voice in shaping the efforts to reduce carbon emissions.
- Workers should be supported in dealing with the negative effects on the workforce resulting from a shift away from fossil fuels by receiving assistance to mitigate impacts on their livelihoods and families.

I-1631 would have significant implications. Applying Catholic teaching to the initiative is not a cut and dried exercise and calls for prayerful consideration. We believe that wise action to address climate change is necessary to protect the common good for present and future generations. Beyond the initiative, we urge every person in Washington State to seek effective ways in our personal lives, and in our businesses and industries, to promote the common good and to care for God's creation.

Thank you for your prayers and action in Jesus' name.

In Christ,

 + Most Rev. J. Peter Sartain Archbishop of Seattle	 + Most Rev. Thomas A. Daly Bishop of Spokane	 + Most Rev. Joseph J. Tyson Bishop of Yakima
 + Most Rev. Eusebio Elizondo, M.Sp.S. Auxiliary Bishop of Seattle	 + Most Rev. Daniel H. Muegggenborg Auxiliary Bishop of Seattle	

For more information, please visit the Washington State Catholic Conference (WSCC) website (WACatholics.org) for links to Church statements on caring for God's creation. We encourage you to join the WSCC Advocacy Network to receive important information and timely action alerts on this and other state and federal issues.