



## STEWARDS, NOT OWNERS

*CBCP on the Climate Change Issue*

In December, 2015, the nations of the world will gather at Le Bourget in Paris for the United Nations Climate Change Conference. The representatives of the state-parties will endeavor to arrive at legally binding measures addressing the pressing challenge of climate-change. From a broader perspective, the Paris Negotiations will be a welcome attempt to reach a consensus on responsibility for the future of the Earth and for generations yet to come. It is not some futuristic matter with which state representatives and negotiators will be concerned, but with nothing less than social justice.

### ***Climate Change Action is an Issue of Social Justice***

The social encyclicals of the Church have referred to social justice as that part of justice that guarantees that all social classes and groups are benefited by the resources of earth and of society, and are advantaged equitably from the progress of nations. Concern with the despoliation of the ecosystem and the deleterious disturbance of that delicate balance of everything that constitutes the human environment has brought home the point that social justice must, of necessity, include our responsibility for future generations.

Pope Francis' celebrated encyclical, *Laudato Si*, anticipates the Paris Conference and urges Catholics and Christians to be passionate about the environment and with the concerns that will be taken up at Le Bourget. It is a Christian obligation to be concerned with ecology and with climate change as a direct consequence of the moral concept of STEWARDSHIP and a concomitant of Christian charity. All persons of goodwill must train their eyes on Paris, and by collective and communitarian action, make the issues that will be there discussed, the issues and concerns of all, for in truth, caring about climate change and its deleterious and devastating effects on all, but especially on impoverished and struggling nations and communities, is our way of attending to the needs of the least of our brothers and sisters; it is how, today, we must wash each others' feet. *Laudato Si* teaches us that the core of the matter of climate change is justice.

*The notion of the common good also extends to future generations. The global economic crises have made painfully obvious the detrimental effects of disregarding our common destiny, which cannot exclude those who come after us. We can no longer speak of sustainable development apart from intergenerational solidarity. Once we start to think about the kind of world we are leaving to future generations, we look at things differently; we realize that the world is a gift which we have freely received and must share with others. Since the world has been given to us, we can no longer view reality in a purely utilitarian way, in which efficiency and productivity are entirely geared to our individual benefit. Intergenerational solidarity is not optional, but rather a basic question of justice, since the world we have received also belongs to those who will follow us. The Portuguese bishops have called upon us to acknowledge this obligation of justice: "The environment is part of a logic of receptivity. It is on loan to each generation, which must then hand it on to the next". An integral ecology is marked by this broader vision.*" (Laudato Si, 159)

### ***Climate Change Issue is an Intergenerational Responsibility***

Quite significantly the Supreme Court of the Philippines in that case that has now become a classic in environmental law -- *Oposa v. Factoran* -- already characterized concerns of this category as matters of "intergenerational responsibility".

We are not owners of the earth. We are its stewards, to keep and cherish and nurture its resources not only for ourselves but for future generations. The Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines has not been remiss in its duty of instructing the faithful on the matter of the environment. We were honored when the Holy Father cited one of our letters in *Laudato Si*.



***Pastoral Formation on the Climate Change Issues***

We your bishops commit to organize symposia and conferences on the issues that will be taken up at the Paris around of the climate change negotiations, as desired by Pope Francis. Meaningful participation and debate are premised on sound information and adequate knowledge. In these matters it is part of moral responsibility to inform oneself.

But more direct and immediate action can and should also be taken. Our parishes and Basic Ecclesial Communities can make, as the theme of their collective discernment, situations in the locality that scientists have found to be contributory to deleterious changes in the environment as well as to the disruption of the ecosystem. Mining, incineration and landfills are among the local concerns that immediately come to mind. Here, advocacy of Church communities in behalf of the common good should influence policy makers and translate itself into community action as well.

Climate change has brought about suffering for nations, communities and peoples. It is that kind of suffering that, in the words of Benedict XVI's "*Deus Caritas Est*" "cries out for consolation and help". (n. 28) When they who are in need cry out, it is not an option to respond. It is an obligation.

From the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, July 20, 2015

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