

## Caritas in Veritate in Light of the Catholic Health Ministry and Environmental Responsibility

On July 7, 2009, Pope Benedict XVI released his much-anticipated third encyclical “Caritas in Veritate” (Charity in Truth), in which the Holy Father furthers the work of Pope Paul VI<sup>i</sup> in considering “integral human development,” or holistic development of the entire human person.<sup>ii</sup>

Among the elements which together constitute integral human development, Pope Benedict examines the natural environment and our relationship with it. He confirms that “[t]he 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.”<sup>iii</sup>

Through the issue of climate change, the Church recognizes that humanity’s abuse and destruction of the natural environment and its atmosphere through the prolific and increasing emission of greenhouse gases challenges our stewardship of the Earth God called us to “cultivate and care for” (Gn 2:15). Climate change also threatens our unique Christian care and concern for the poor and vulnerable, who stand to be affected most by the adverse consequences of climate change<sup>iv</sup> via increasingly extreme weather patterns and storms, a rise in the incidence of infectious and respiratory diseases, and shortages of food and fresh water.<sup>v</sup> As well, the Church also sees climate change as an affront to our commitment to social justice, since it is likely that those most affected by these consequences will be those in the developing global south and people of future generations, both of whom are least responsible for the historical greenhouse gas emissions which have caused the problem and brought us to this point.<sup>vi</sup> Finally, because the human environment and the natural environment together constitute an interactive and dynamic system, such that “*We cannot interfere in one area of the ecosystem without paying due attention both to the consequences of such interference in other areas and to the well being of future generations*”<sup>vii</sup> (emphasis in original), the Church sees climate change as a threat to the “Universal Common Good.”<sup>viii</sup>

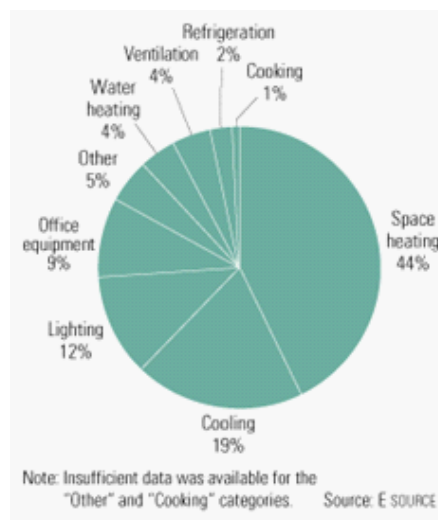
Since fossil fuel-based energy consumption (and its subsequent greenhouse gas emissions) is one of the primary activities responsible for climate-changing greenhouse gases, and because “about 80%” of the world’s energy comes from fossil fuel sources<sup>ix</sup> (84% in the U.S. ), the Pope urges us to “give due consideration to *the energy problem*”<sup>xi</sup> (emphasis in original).

This exhortation is particularly applicable to those in the First World and Global North who consume as much as 2.8 times the amount of primary energy per capita as citizens of the developing world,<sup>xii</sup> and especially to those in the United States which consumes 26% of the world’s energy with only 4.6% of the world population.<sup>xiii</sup>

Benedict continues by emphasizing the scientific reality that “[t]he technologically advanced societies can and must lower their domestic energy consumption, either through an evolution in manufacturing methods or through greater ecological sensitivity among their citizens.”<sup>xiv</sup> He then goes on to declare what science already knows, that “at present, it is possible to achieve improved energy efficiency while at the same time encouraging research into alternative forms of energy.”<sup>xv</sup>

In light of all of this, there is a considerable opportunity for Catholic healthcare, especially in the United States, to implement and advocate for energy policies which will advance the calling of Pope Benedict. This is due to the fact that while energy production and consumption accounted for 82 percent of the anthropogenic carbon dioxide emissions in the U.S. in 2006<sup>xvi</sup>, “[t]he healthcare industry ranks second in energy usage intensity among all commercial buildings in the United States.” Through its prolific use of energy to heat and cool spaces and water, and to power lighting, office and medical equipment<sup>xviii</sup> (Figure 1), hospitals are “one of the largest users of energy” in the country.<sup>xix</sup>

“Figure 1: End use energy consumption data”



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The healthcare industry also emits large amounts of climate-changing greenhouse gases through its extensive use of transportation services, waste production, food service, and facility renovation and construction.<sup>xxi</sup> Thus, given its intense use of energy and engagement in other greenhouse-gas emitting activities, hospitals “are major contributors to climate change.”<sup>xxii</sup>

However, because of its size and scale, Catholic healthcare has an opportunity to expand on its current commitment to environmental sustainability and be an industry leader in making sustainable energy choices about how healthcare is provided. Members of our healthcare ministry can begin to do this by learning from other facilities with good energy & emissions programs, and then developing and implementing energy policies and programs as part of their own sustainability agendas. Such initiatives may include policies to turn lights, equipment and heating/cooling units down or off when possible<sup>xxiii</sup>, increasing facilities’ energy efficiency standards and using only appliances and equipment certified Energy Star by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and building and/or renovating to obtain Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) building certification.

Catholic healthcare can also live out the obligation Pope Benedict asserts that the Church has to “assert [our] responsibility towards creation in the public sphere”<sup>xxiv</sup> by advocating now for strong<sup>xxv</sup> and just<sup>xxvi</sup> clean energy and climate change legislation which is based on science and not “political convenience”<sup>xxvii</sup> as the U.S. Congress currently negotiates its own domestic policy prior to the U.N.’s international negotiations in December, 2009. Catholic healthcare ministries can also challenge their utility companies and energy providers to employ more clean and renewable energy in their energy mix and service.

The challenge of responding to climate change and “the energy problem”<sup>xxviii</sup> can seem daunting. However, as the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops said in their 2001 document *Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good*:

In facing climate change, what we already know requires a response; it cannot be easily dismissed. Significant levels of scientific consensus—even in a situation with less than full certainty, where the consequences of not acting are serious—justifies, indeed can obligate, our taking action intended to avert potential dangers.

In other words, if enough evidence indicates that the present course of action could jeopardize humankind’s well-being, prudence dictates taking mitigating or preventative action.

Yet not only do we have a moral obligation to act, we also have the ability to do so. As President Obama declared at the recent G8 Summit, since “we know that the problems we face are made by human beings. . . that means it’s in our capacity to solve them.”<sup>xxix</sup>

Join the Catholic Health Association as we seek to protect both ‘the human environment’ and ‘the natural environment,’ and continue to promote dignity of the person, special concern for the poor, the common good and stewardship, while providing exceptional healthcare to those whom we serve.

(See Page 3 for references.)



Visit [www.chausa.org/climatechange](http://www.chausa.org/climatechange) to see CHA’s work on the climate change initiative.



- <sup>i</sup> Pope Paul VI first discussed integral human development in his 1967 encyclical *Populorum Progressio* (*The Development of Peoples*)
- <sup>ii</sup> *Caritas in veritate*, Paragraph 8
- <sup>iii</sup> *Caritas in Veritate*, Paragraph 48
- <sup>iv</sup> U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops. (2001). *Global climate change: A plea for dialogue, prudence, and the common good*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. <<http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/international/globalclimate.shtml#change>>.
- <sup>v</sup> Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. *Climate Change 2007: Synthesis Report*. Geneva, Switzerland: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. p 51.
- <sup>vi</sup> Roberts, J. Timmons, and Bradley C. Parks. (2007). *A Climate of Injustice- Global Inequality, North-South Politics, and Climate Policy*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology. p 22.
- <sup>vii</sup> John Paul II. (1990). *The Ecological Crisis: A Common Responsibility*. Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. no. 6.
- <sup>viii</sup> U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops. (2001). *Global climate change: A plea for dialogue, prudence, and the common good*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. <<http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/international/globalclimate.shtml#change>>.
- <sup>ix</sup> Samuelson, R. J. (2007, February 7). Global warming and hot air. *The Washington Post*, pp. A17.
- <sup>x</sup> Institute for Energy Research. (2009). *Fossil fuels*. Retrieved July 15, 2009, from <http://www.instituteforenergyresearch.org/energy-overview/fossil-fuels/>
- <sup>xi</sup> *Caritas in veritate*, Paragraph 49
- <sup>xii</sup> Derived from Energy Information Administration. (n.d.). *International energy statistics*. Retrieved July 15, 2009, from <http://tonto.eia.doe.gov/cfapps/ipdbproject/IEDIndex3.cfm>
- <sup>xiii</sup> Bradford, T. (2006). *Solar revolution: The economic transformation of the global energy industry*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. p 40.
- <sup>xiv</sup> *Caritas in veritate*, Paragraph 49
- <sup>xv</sup> *Caritas in veritate*, Paragraph 49
- <sup>xvi</sup> Energy Information Administration. (2008). *Greenhouse gases, climate change & energy* No. DOE/EIA-X012). Washington, D.C.: Energy Information Administration. p 2. <<http://www.eia.doe.gov/bookshelf/brochures/greenhouse/greenhouse.pdf>>.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Environmental Health Nursing Education Collaborative. (n.d.). *Implications for the healthcare industry and healthcare providers: "think globally, act locally"* Retrieved June 17, 2009, from <http://ehnursing.org/pmwiki.php?n=Main.ClimateImplications>
- <sup>xviii</sup> American Society for Healthcare Engineering (ASHE) of the American Hospital Association. (2004). *Healthcare energy guidebook: Results of the healthcare energy project- november 2001 through december 2003*. Chicago, IL: American Hospital Association. p 22-23. <[http://prowrite.com/HEP\\_05\\_12\\_04.pdf](http://prowrite.com/HEP_05_12_04.pdf)>.
- <sup>xix</sup> The Catholic Health Association of the United States. (2009). *Faithfully healing the earth: Climate change and catholic health care*. Washington, D.C.: Catholic Health Association. p 4. <<http://www.chausa.org/NR/rdonlyres/6BA4DA80-187E-44A6-98AA-0A8913A4AEA6/0/climatechange-brochure.pdf>>.
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- <sup>xxi</sup> The Catholic Health Association of the United States. p 10-13.
- <sup>xxii</sup> The Catholic Health Association of the United States. p 4.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Madison Gas and Electric
- <sup>xxiv</sup> *Caritas in veritate*, Paragraph 51
- <sup>xxv</sup> Energy Action Coalition. "PowerShift 2009." 2009. <<http://www.powershift09.org/about/goals>>.
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- <sup>xxviii</sup> *Caritas in veritate*, Paragraph 49
- <sup>xxix</sup> Obama, Barack. Speech on climate change. G8 Summit. L'Aquila, Italy. 9 July 2009.