The Human Face of Climate Change
By Susan Searle

Purpose
As people of faith, Catholics believe the issue of climate change is not just about politics, economics, or interest groups but rather it is an issue regarding the protection of God’s creation. Climate change is a moral issue for people of faith because it especially compromises the poor. Our faith calls us to act and advocate for the “least” among us. This ninety-minute session is designed to introduce youth to the Catholic response to climate change and to highlight how the global issue especially impacts the lives of those who are already struggling with poverty.

Session at a Glance
7:00 p.m. Welcome
7:10 p.m. What is Climate Change?
7:20 p.m. DVD: Who’s Under Your Carbon Footprint
7:30 p.m. How Climate Change Especially Affects the Poor
7:45 p.m. Climate Change for the Poor is Like Living in a House of Cards.
8:00 p.m. The Catholic Response to Climate Change: Concern for the Poor
8:10 p.m. The Human Face of Climate Change
8:20 p.m. Closing Prayer: Why Catholic’s Care about Climate Change
8:30 p.m. Good Night!

Extend the Session Ideas
1. Visit www.CatholicClimateCovenant.org and discover ways your youth ministry can take the St. Francis Pledge to care for creation and the poor.

2. Encourage youth to organize an “Alternative Gift Market” at your parish. Youth ministry teams design and set-up various display booths to educate the parish community about poverty-stricken people around the world who are already suffering due to global warming. For more information go to: https://gifts.crs.org (Give the Gift of Hope) or www.altgifts.org.

3. Consider sponsoring a parish “Climate Change Film Festival” showcasing various movies that highlight the issue of climate change and poverty. Your film festival could be a fundraising event for a charitable organization that is currently working to reduce the impact of climate change. Suggestions:
   a. “Global Warming and the Carteret Islands” — this short (5 minutes) Oxfam film gives a brief overview of the story of the people of the Carteret Islands.
who were given land by the Catholic Church in Papua New Guinea to relocate. See:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2o2AapO6rK8&playnext=1&list=PL9C86CDB25B5F0BC4.

b. “Sun Come Up” is a 39-minute film telling the story of the people of the Carteret Islands. For more about the movie (including rental or purchase information), visit: (http://www.newday.com/films/suncomeup.html).

4. Research possible actions for your youth (e.g., Tread Lightly/Lift Up the Lowly ideas for Earth Day) at the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry webpage on Stewardship: http://climate.nfcym.org/.

Materials Needed
- Heavy, warm blanket
- One double-bed size sheet
- 3x5 index cards, one package per small group of four to six participants
- Pens or pencils, one for each participant
- Markers
- DVD, “Who’s Under Your Carbon Footprint?” Available from http://catholicclimatecovanant.org (Video can also be downloaded from YouTube)
- 6-8 white heavy stock presentation boards
- Box-cutter knife
- Several glue sticks
- Old magazines with pictures of people from around the globe such as: National Geographic, Time, or Maryknoll Missionary Magazine. You can also download and print a variety of pictures from the Internet.
- Scissors, one pair per every two youth
- Heavy duty masking tape
- Large room fan
- Prayer environment: Bible (marked to Matthew 22:37-39), pillar candle, unsliced loaf of bread, bowl of water, four or five packs of green sticky notes
- **Resource 1, Readings for Closing Prayer**, one for each of the eight readers
- Song for closing prayer such as “We are the World” by Michael Jackson (the remake in 2010 was made to benefit Haiti earthquake victims; available on iTunes)
- CD or MP3 player and speakers

Prepare in Advance
1. Using heavy-duty white presentation board, make three life-size cardboard cutouts of people. You will need a man, woman, and child to volunteer to be your templates—unless you are a pretty good artist and can free-hand draw three life-
size figures. Tape two or three boards together, depending on the size of your people, and have your human templates lay down on the boards. Use a pencil and trace around the three people to make an outline of each. Carefully, use a sharp box-cutter knife to cut out your figures.

a. On the male figure, use a black marker to write the following quote: “Every year, 20% of Earth’s people in the rich nations use 75% of the world’s resources and produce 80% of the world’s waste.” (Source: “God’s Beloved Creation” by Elizabeth Johnson in America magazine, April 16, 2001)

b. On the woman figure, write the following quote: “Because woman farmers grow more than half of all the food in developing countries, climate change affects their livelihood and their ability to support the nutritional needs of their family.” (Source: Bread for the World)

c. On the child figure, write the following quote: “Children are among the populations that are most vulnerable to climate change, and may be the greatest victims of its impact.” (Source: UNICEF)

2. Place a large room fan strategically off to one side of your meeting room. Have the fan plugged-in and ready to be turned on before your session begins.

3. Make copies of closing prayer and invite youth to be readers.

4. Set up tables for refreshments and sign-in. Have one or two people at the sign-in table with a check-in sheet and name tags. Hospitality is important: As the leader, do not use the gathering time before the session begins to take care of last minute preparations. Spend the time moving among the participants, greeting and speaking with them.

**Session Outline**

**Welcome (10 minutes)**

Greet and welcome youth as they arrive to the session. Begin by explaining to participants that tonight they will be discussing the important issue of climate change and how it impacts not just the environment but how it affects the people who live on this planet. Open the discussion with these quotes:

Over the last three decades, 98 percent of all people worldwide were affected by a natural or climate-related disaster.

Developing nations are prone to experiencing the worst devastation as a result of climate-related disasters.”

(Source: Catholic Relief Services)

Invite volunteers to share what information they already know about climate change.
Be sure to include the following points in your discussion with youth:

- **Climate Change** means a change in global weather patterns which can lead to increases in temperature and storm activity. The overwhelming body of scientific evidence demonstrates that the earth is warming.

- Climate change is happening and it is caused largely by human activity. Greenhouse gas emissions from cars, power plants, and other human activities—rather than natural variations in climate—are the primary cause of global warming. Its impacts are beginning to be felt and will worsen in the decades ahead unless we take immediate action.

- The solution to climate change will involve a broad array of technologies and policies. It will also require that we individually make changes to our current lifestyles. Basically, there is no easy answer or one solution to the problem.

- The Catholic Church, led by the pope and the bishops, considers climate change an important issue for people of faith.

(Source: Climate Change 101: Understanding and Responding to Global Climate Change Science and Impact and Catholic Coalition on Climate Change)

**What is Climate Change?** (10 minutes)

Invite a volunteer to participate in a demonstration on climate change. Describe to your volunteer that you will be placing a sheet and a heavy blanket over them and you will be covering their entire body including their face. Assure your volunteer that they will still be able to breathe during the demonstration. Let your volunteer know that their job will be to verbally describe how they feel under the sheet and blanket. Explain that they will be helping you to demonstrate how greenhouse gases affect our planet. Once your volunteer is ready, lay a sheet and a heavy blanket over the person (be sure to cover their face).

Invite the rest of your group to come and stand around where your volunteer is lying. Wait about a minute and then ask the volunteer to describe what it feels like to breathe under the sheet and heavy blanket. (The volunteer should say that the air feels thicker and it is more difficult to breathe).

Next, ask your volunteer if their body temperature feels different under the sheet and blanket (they should say “yes” they feel warmer).

Ask the volunteer if they would be comfortable staying under the blanket for a long period of time. (They will most likely say “No! It is hot under here.”) After a few minutes, remove the blanket, and ask your volunteer to describe how the air feels different once the blanket is taken off.
Explain to the group that this demonstration is similar to what greenhouse gases do to our planet. Share with youth that some greenhouse gases are necessary to regulate our planet’s natural environment. These gases are represented by the sheet. However, too much man-made greenhouse gases acts like a giant blanket over the earth. This blanket of gases gradually warms up the environment and disrupts the earth’s natural balance—this effect is called global warming or climate change.

“The Who’s Under Your Carbon Footprint?” (10 minutes)
Introduce the film by saying:

The U.S. Catholic Bishops have said “we as Catholics are called to protect people and the planet.”(seventh principle of Catholic social teaching). Our faith also teaches that caring for the environment is a moral issue because it not only affects the planet, but it also affects the people whom God created. Because we follow Jesus’ example of especially caring for the poor, climate change takes on an even more urgent call. Science has shown that climate change will have the greatest impact on people living in the poorest countries. Since our modern lifestyle has helped to create this global impact, we are called to take responsibility and work to help lessen the impact of climate change on our brothers and sisters around the globe.

Show the video.

How Climate Change Especially Affects the Poor (15 minutes)
After the film, divide youth into small groups of four to six people. Distribute a package of index cards and pens or pencils to each group. Invite youth to brainstorm as many reasons they can think as to why the poor will be most impacted by climate change and then to write their answers on a separate index card. After youth have been working for a few minutes, stop the group and lead a brief group discussion on how climate change affects the poor. Use the following points:

- The very poor typically depend on natural resources for their livelihood.
- Climate change is likely to worsen hunger because farm land will be affected.
- As agricultural productivity declines, the number of farm jobs and wages will decline.
- Environmental stress many lead to political unrest in struggling countries.
- Extreme weather patterns will affect the health of the livestock that people depend on for food and transportation.
- Some poor may be forced to flee their homes to search for water, food and work.

Instruct youth to go back to their groups and continue writing ideas on their index cards. They may add the reasons you just presented if they do not already have them written down. Each group should have several index cards by the end of their allotted time.
Climate Change for the Poor is Like Living in a House of Cards (15 minutes)
Invite small groups to gather up all their index cards and pick a spokesperson to read what their small group has written on their cards.

Once each group has shared, tell participants that they will be using their index cards for a “house of cards building contest.” Each group may add 20 more index cards to their existing index cards to build their houses. The object will be to build the strongest and tallest house. They may only use index cards to build their houses, and they will have five minutes to complete their task. Warn youth that if their house falls down after time is up they will automatically lose the contest. Give groups three minutes to discuss and strategize and then officially start the contest!

After five minutes call time and see which group has the biggest house. Invite some of your other adult volunteers to judge the houses and determine a winner. As soon as your judges have announced a winning team, walk over to your strategically placed fan and turn it on without warning youth as to what you are doing. Note their reactions as their card houses all blow away!

Now, ask:
- What do you think was the purpose of this activity?
- Why did I blow down your card houses without warning?

After soliciting a few responses, provide the following information:

This is an example of what happens to the homes of people around the world. Because climate change affects the weather of our planet, the type of housing you live in will determine how well you can adapt to extreme weather changes. For example, think of the classic children’s story of the three little pigs. One had their house made of straw, one of sticks, and one of brick. When the wolf huffs and puffs and blows the house down, only the brick house remains standing.

In economic terms, having a brick house is more expensive than a straw or stick house. Throughout the world, housing of people living in poverty is often constructed of mud, bamboo, straw, or other inexpensive materials which are vulnerable to extreme weather. Think of Jesus’ teaching in Matthew (Matthew 7:24-27). Jesus reminds us that houses built on rock stand, while those built on sand do not. So many of the poor around the world literally have houses built on sand. Also, people living in poverty often cannot buy adequate insurance or keep a savings account, to respond to such emergencies.

The Catholic Response to Climate Change: Concern for the Poor (10 minutes)
Present to the group your three life-sized cut-out people with the quotes written on them. Starting with the male figure, invite a volunteer to read the quote aloud. Then say:

What words describe how you feel about that statement?

The Human Face of Climate Change
Invite two volunteers to use markers and write the group’s responses around the quote written on male cardboard figure.

Invite a second volunteer to read the quote aloud on the woman cut-out figure. Then say:

What words describe how you feel about that statement?

Invite two volunteers to use markers and write the group’s responses around the quote written on woman cardboard figure.

Invite a third volunteer to read aloud the quote on the child cut-out figure. Then say:

What words describe how you feel about that statement?

Invite two volunteers to use markers and write the group’s responses around the quote written on child cardboard figure.

**The Human Face of Climate Change** (10 minutes)
Inform youth that to conclude this session they will be creating a visual display of the human face of hunger by decorating the three cut-out people with magazine pictures.

Distribute several magazines, scissors, and glue sticks. Invite youth to cut out pictures of people from around the globe and paste them on each of the cardboard cut-out people. Paste faces of men on the male cut-out, women on the female cut-out, and children on the child cut-out. Encourage youth to search for a variety of people, races, cultures, and economic situations to paste on the cut-outs. Youth should try to cover-up any blank spaces on the cut-out people without covering up the written quotes.

**Closing Prayer: Why Catholics Care** (10 minutes)

*Gather*

Once youth have completed decorating the three cardboard cut-out people, gather them for the closing prayer. Invite a few youth to help create your prayer environment. Use the cut-out people, a loaf of bread, a bowl of water, and a few candles as your prayer environment. Place some markers and green sticky note pads near the cut-out people.

Prayer Leader: *begin with the Sign of the Cross*

**Creator God,**
We thank you for the glory of your creation, a mystery that surpasses our understanding. Open our hearts and minds to truly care for all of your creation through our actions and words. Help us to make life choices that show our love of creation so that the world will know Catholics care for the planet and all its inhabitants. We make our pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.
Listen
Prayer Leader:

Catholics care deeply about God’s creation of nature.

Reader 1:

St. Francis of Assisi, in his Canticle of Brother Sun,” sings of all as brothers and sisters. He calls planet earth our mother and speaks of the sun as our brother and the moon as our sister. Francis describes the water as our sister and the wind as our brother.

Prayer Leader:

Catholics care deeply about God’s creation of humanity.

Reader 2:

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus tells us that to love our neighbor is to love everyone, including the poor. Read Matthew 22:37-39

Prayer Leader:

Catholics care deeply about the bond between nature and humanity.

Reader 3:

Our Catholic bishops write that ‘we are called to protect people and the planet, living our faith in relationship with all of God’s creation.’

Prayer Leader:

Catholics care about all of God’s creation.

Sing “We Are the World.”

Respond
Prayer Leader:

Climate change is about the future of our one human family and the future of this planet we call home. So let us pause and remember some who are in most need of our help, compassion and prayer because of climate change...
Reader 1:

We pray for the drought stricken people of Markatola, India who are faced with malnutrition and starvation due to poor yields at harvest time.”

Reader 2:

We pray for the people of San Marcos, Guatemala who in 2005 were hit hard by a hurricane that wiped out their entire crop of produce.

Reader 3:

We pray for the people of Ethiopia, who for the past several decades have seen repeated droughts, rising temperatures, and increasingly variable rainfall which is killing crops and livestock and creating extreme famine among people.

Reader 4:

We pray for the people of Honduras who in 1998 suffered the effects of hurricane Mitch which forced some 200,000 people to flee their homes because of severe flooding.

Reader 5:

We pray for people of Nicaragua who must endure frequent earthquakes, hurricanes, floods, and volcano eruptions.

Reader 6:

We pray for the indigenous people of Newtok, Alaska who are being forced to relocate their entire community due to global warming effects on the rising sea.

Reader 7:

We pray for the former residents of the Carteret Islands, who had to abandon their island due to rising sea levels.

Reader 8:

We also pray for victims of natural disasters, including the people of Japan who just this year suffered a devastating 8.9 earthquake and tsunami, and the people of Haiti who are trying to rebuild their lives after a massive earthquake while continuing to struggle with food security, poverty, and hunger.

Prayer Leader:

Who else shall we pray for this evening?
Open prayer to spontaneous prayers of youth.

Pause for a moment of silent reflection.
Go Forth
Prayer Leader:

Science teaches us that the poor have contributed the least to climate change but will suffer the most consequences. Our Catholic faith calls us to consider how our actions and decisions affect poor and vulnerable people in our country and around the globe. As disciples of Christ, we recognize that we are called to act and advocate for the “least” of those among us. St. Francis, the patron saint of ecology, offers us a model of simple living in a time of ecological devastation. Let us now take a few minutes to silently reflect on a few simple things we can each do to help heal God’s creation.

Note to Leader: You might offer a few examples such as starting a Care for Creation club in their parish or school, turning off the water while we brush our teeth, or walking to school rather than driving.

After a few minutes of silence, say:

Let us end our prayer this evening by each of us making a personal commitment to remember the human face of climate change. I invite you to come forward one at a time and write an action you will commit to doing this week on a green sticky note. After writing down an action, you are invited to post your green sticky note on one of the cardboard cut-out people as a symbol of your commitment to help the world.

Websites and links in this session were accessed successfully on August 11, 2011.

Susan Searle is adjunct faculty for the Center for Ministry Development’s Certificate in Youth Ministry Studies Program, YouthLeader, and Just5Days programs. Susan is also an Ambassador for the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change and is available to give retreats, workshops, and presentations on this important issue to your parish youth ministry. Contact her at: smsearle@msn.com.
Resource 1

Readings for Closing Prayer

Respond

Prayer Leader:
Climate change is about the future of our one human family and the future of this planet we call home. So let us pause and remember some who are in most need of our help, compassion and prayer because of climate change...

Reader 1:
We pray for the drought stricken people of Markatola, India who are faced with malnutrition and starvation due to poor yields at harvest time."

Reader 2:
We pray for the people of San Marcos, Guatemala who in 2005 were hit hard by a hurricane that wiped out their entire crop of produce.

Reader 3:
We pray for the people of Ethiopia, who for the past several decades have seen repeated droughts, rising temperatures, and increasingly variable rainfall which is killing crops and livestock and creating extreme famine among people.

Reader 4:
We pray for the people of Honduras who in 1998 suffered the effects of hurricane Mitch which forced some 200,000 people to flee their homes because of severe flooding.

Reader 5:
We pray for people of Nicaragua who must endure frequent earthquakes, hurricanes, floods, and volcano eruptions.

Reader 6:
We pray for the indigenous people of Newtok, Alaska who are being forced to relocate their entire community due to global warming effects on the rising sea.

Reader 7:
We pray for the former residents of the Carteret Islands, who had to abandon their island due to rising sea levels.

Reader 8:
We also pray for victims of natural disasters, including the people of Japan who just this year suffered a devastating 8.9 earthquake and tsunami, and the people of Haiti who are trying to rebuild their lives after a massive earthquake while continuing to struggle with food security, poverty, and hunger.