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The gift of clean air

by Dennis Coday

Eco Catholic

Bishop Blaire calls for good stewardship to protect God's gift of air

By Catholic News Service

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (CNS) -- The gift of clean air provided by God to humanity deserves to be protected through strong environmental stewardship by making changes in daily life so that fewer pollutants enter the atmosphere, said the chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Domestic Justice Human Development.

Bishop Stephen E. Blaire of Stockton, Calif., urged an audience at the interfaith Festival of Faiths conference Nov. 7 that taking steps to live more simply, use natural resources wisely and reduce personal consumption, air pollution and one's carbon footprint to ensure clean air for all and to ease the effects of climate change on the world's poorest people.

Citing the creation story in the Book of Genesis and how God placed humanity in dominion over the earth, Bishop Blaire said human beings have the responsibility to "steward what God has given to us for the good of all the human family."

Also referencing calls by Pope Benedict XVI for greater concern for the environment, Bishop Blaire pointed in particular to the dangers of mercury and other toxins entering the atmosphere and posing health risks to children.

He linked environmental justice to pro-life concerns, noting that air pollution poses dangers to young children and children in the womb equally.

In the Stockton Diocese, Bishop Blaire said, the church's pro-life stance has led to the introduction of the Environmental Justice Project with a particular emphasis on reducing air pollution.

"People of faith bring a unique and important message: about the care of God's creation, about those most vulnerable to environmental injustice, those on the margins of our societies and those with fewest resources to protect themselves or advocate on their own behalf," he said.

Poor and vulnerable people worldwide contributed the least to climate change but are poised to suffer the most, he explained.

"We urge policymakers to move beyond the cost/benefit analysis and consider the common good," Bishop Blaire said. "This requires that all of us work together as individuals and collectively to protect the environment and human life beginning with the unborn."

Bishop Blaire also cited the work of **the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change** -- which includes a dozen national Catholic organizations -- in sharing the Gospel and church teaching on environmental stewardship.

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"We ask God for the virtue of prudence, which enables us to make wise decisions in responding to the challenges of the environment and in being faithful stewards responsible to God our creator," he said. "In the end it just makes good sense to want to have clean air for our children and families to breathe and for future generations."

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Editor's Note: The full text of Bishop Blaire's speech is online at www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/environment/upload/Good-Sense-Good-Air-November-7-2011_FINAL.pdf.

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