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The moral measure of climate crisis

NCR Editorial Staff | Dec. 28, 2011

Our Catholic institutions have always provided excellent elementary, secondary and college educations. We nurture our children?s spirits with prayer and good catechesis. We hope they will acquire a conscience for social justice while deepening their ecological awareness. Catholics have always had an admirable future focus. We need that focus on the future of our children now more than ever.

?Climate change is the central issue of the 21st century,? says Protestant teacher and author Sallie McFague. ?It is not one issue among many. ... All the other issues we care about -- social justice, peace, prosperity, freedom -- cannot occur unless our planet is healthy. It is the unifying issue of our time.?

The recent international climate conference in Durban, South Africa, achieved a hard-fought agreement on a program that can steer a new course in the struggle against global climate change in the near future. Maite Nkoana-Mashabane, South Africa?s foreign minister, chaired the conference and said at its end: ?We have saved Planet Earth for the future of our children and our great-grandchildren to come.? The Durban conference did indeed snatch a victory from the jaws of defeat, taking a big step forward toward limiting global emissions that need to decline soon so that temperatures can be kept below the 2 degrees Celsius scientists say is the threshold for dangerous climate change. It?s a way forward too in aiding the world?s most vulnerable nations as they cope with disruptive changes.

In a recent interview on the Eco Catholic blog, which just celebrated its one-year anniversary on the *NCR* website, Dan Misleh, executive director of the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change, urged a balanced view of the problem: ?We should not be the ones dismissing the science nor seeing the climate crisis as an end to life on the planet,? he said, adding that the Catholic contribution to the ongoing climate debate is continuing to remind the nations and the powerful interests involved that there is a moral measure to what they do and decide, that doing nothing is not an option.

Walk or bike; drive less; turn off your computer when not in use; air-dry laundry and recycle what you can. ?There are a hundred ways to lower our carbon footprint. The key to all of it, though, is to be more mindful of why we do it -- because we love the Creator, and we love one another.?

Every parent knows those moments when we pick up, cuddle and soothe a worried child, saying some version of this: ?Don?t worry; it will be all right. There will be something for you.?

Our Catholic future focus and the mindfulness Misleh speaks of can solidly support such assurances.

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