



*Denial is one way of coping with fear;
Education and action are others.*

Until recently, citizens have denied the existence of unprecedented climate change or labeled it as an environmental issue of secondary importance to more pressing human needs. However, as we grow in understanding, we are learning that climate change is a justice issue, affected by a perverse distribution of resources and priorities

Unequal Protection: Climate change unevenly affects the poor who have little money and less political clout. For example, in the Asian tsunami, hundreds of thousands of people died in the poorer global South because they did not have an early warning system like those in the North.

Unstable Agriculture: Most climate change disasters are not sudden, but silent, with spiraling effects. For example, rainfall patterns become erratic and extreme, leading to droughts and floods. In turn, droughts and floods create major obstacles for small farmers, the main food producers of poorer nations. Crops yield less, reducing national food supplies, increasing hunger and ruining livelihoods. In Africa, hundreds of millions suffer as a result.

Illness: Climate change has the power to alter disease patterns and introduce diseases to areas previously free from them. Malaria, the number one cause of death in Africa, is just one example in a vast range of health stressors. Poor people with less food have weakened immunity and are affected first.

Water Shortages: As climate-related droughts tighten their hold, water wars will surpass the violence of oil wars. 14 African countries are stressed due to water shortage and another 11 countries will join them in the next 25 years.

Migrants will move across borders in search of water, rather than public health services. People find ways to live without oil but cannot survive without water.

Who's Responsible? Right now, the poor are suffering the most significant consequences of climate change, but they are the least responsible. Adverse changes are caused in large measure by carbon emissions from vehicles, homes and lifestyles that are far beyond the reach of the world's poor.

Government Response: The G8 and Millennium summits revealed little political stamina to right the wrong. So, what fuels the inertia—greed, denial? There seems to be a fear among politicians that voters may be too selfish to withstand necessary changes. As Catholics, responsible stewards of creation and voters, we need to turn the tide!

It's NOT money, but priorities. The World Bank spent 86% of its 2003 energy budget on fossil fuel projects and only 14% on renewable energy. For every U.S. income tax dollar, 36¢ goes to military spending.

Urgency: Right now, hundreds of millions of lives are eroding due to climate change. 20 percent of all known species are at risk in fragile ecosystems. We witness the tragedy; we just mislabel the causes.

The poor are merely the "front line." Within our lifetimes, we will begin to experience more dramatic declines. According to a U.N. sponsored scientific panel, the world can avert the worst by embracing different but attainable strategies by 2030. Act now!