



Acting on Climate Change: A Christian Vocation

Justin Kilcullen is former CEO of Trócaire. He is part of SAGE – Shankill Action for a Green Earth, a project promoting *Laudato Si'* in St Anne's Parish, Shankill, County Dublin. He reflects on actions we can all take to tackle climate change.



Pope's Intention (universal): We pray that we all will make courageous choices for a simple and environmentally sustainable lifestyle, rejoicing in our young people who are resolutely committed to this.

Recently my son Eoin said that he was concerned about the future for his two young children. His worry is climate change. Predictions by climate scientists are that just forty years from now, life in Ireland, and globally, will have altered radically, so that our current lifestyles will be unsustainable. Our coastal cities and towns will be subject to continuous flooding, the West of Ireland will be subject

to torrential downpours and the East will be dried up but subject to flash floods. And for the developing nations it will be far worse, with billions

of people unable to feed themselves and becoming 'climate refugees'.

This is why Pope Francis has put Climate Change at the top of his agenda. In his encyclical letter *Laudato Si'*, he appeals to all mankind to address the crisis. He tells us Christians that addressing this crisis is no longer an option but a part of our spirituality and a living out of our

Pope Francis tells us that 'An awareness of today's ecological crisis must be translated into new habits.'

vocation as Christians.

If, like me, you have been living your spiritual life without paying much attention to this issue, the Pope's call comes as a bit of a shock. But equally shocking is the prospect that if things don't change, meaning that if we don't change, we will be implicated in the disaster that awaits future generations! Pope Francis asks us: 'What kind of a world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?' While it may be late in the day for many of us we are being called to make the effort, we still can play a vital role if we can make the changes necessary to help overcome the crisis.

Pope Francis tells us that 'An awareness of today's ecological crisis must be translated into new habits.' This starts with the little things that we can do in our daily life to reduce the carbon emissions that are the source of the problem. Essentially this is about saving energy. In Ireland, how we use energy in our homes is one of our biggest causes of carbon emissions.

60% of our household energy is expended on household heating. The simplest way to make a massive reduction in this is to put twelve inches of insulation in the attic! And the SEAI will give you a grant of 30% of the cost doing it! Secondly, set the thermostat on your central heating to 20 degrees. On very cold days wear a

nice warm jumper or cardigan. Now, just two more things. Heating water accounts for a further 20% of energy consumption so set your water heater to 65 degrees and replace the old lagging jacket on the cistern with a new thicker one. With these simple measures your new, warmer life has begun! Further habits you could develop would be to shower instead of taking a bath, turn off radiators in unused rooms and use the tumble dryer only as a last resort – hang out the washing like in the 'old days'.

Now that you are making this effort you might ask about the bigger issues like Ireland's reliance on private cars over reliable public transport, or the use of cement in our housebuilding where more sustainable houses can be built using timber frames. By playing our part in a small way it strengthens our right to demand of our politicians that they must tackle these systemic issues. Pope Francis calls on us 'to elect politicians who do not shrink from the problems of climate change but show leadership and responsibility for future generations'. We have seen the power of our 'grey vote' in Ireland before. It is time to use it again.

By doing these small things we make a vital start. Our grandchildren and great-grandchildren will be proud of us. One day they might even say 'My Gran helped save the World!' 