

Rising Tides, Raising Voices

a companion to **Sisters See their Homeland Threatened**



Coconut palms killed by sea encroachment - Jon Lewis





There's no planet B! - Callum Shaw

Every effort has been made to assign photo credits. Thanks to Pacific Calling Partnership for all other photos.

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Tiiringatea 2nd from left meeting with Craig Laundry MP

“The impact of climate change is very real in Kiribati.

All people who live next to the sea are feeling scared because the seawater is rising and destroying their houses and food crops. They have their sea wall but it breaks with the big waves and then the sea goes inside their house. They can't sleep so they go and find another place. The big waves broke the hospital at Betio and flooded it with sea water so the patients were moved to the sport complex while waiting for the hospital to be fixed.

I am twenty years old, I love my country. I love and respect my culture. I don't want to move to another country. Without my culture I am nothing. I have every right to stay in my country and Kiribati and practice my culture. A precious part of my culture is dancing. I love to perform my traditional dance because it is not just about entertaining people but it is also our way to show people that this culture is very important to us. Once again without my culture I am nothing.”

- Tiiringatea, an I-Kiribati participant in the Pacific Calling Partnership's climate leadership training program, 2014

The Inter-Congregational Voice on Climate Change is made up of twenty three Catholic Religious congregations working in solidarity with Pacific Island nations to address the injustice of climate change and calls on our leaders to pursue ambitious and effective climate action. The Inter-Congregational Voice works closely with the Edmund Rice Centre's Pacific Calling Partnership (PCP). As Catholics, it is our responsibility as stewards of creation to enact a cultural change to address the extreme inequitable impacts of the climate crisis.

In the face of the 2020 bush fire crisis in Australia, Prime Minister of Fiji Frank Bainimarama said that the prayers of the Pacific are with Australia, but “prayers alone will not turn back the tides of the climate crisis facing the world; for that, we need meaningful action.”¹

In ***Laudato Si'*** Pope Francis called upon us all to listen to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor to pursue climate justice and a transformative transition to this crisis. It is now more important than ever that we listen to this cry and call upon our leaders to do the same. He reminds us that our culture of unbridled consumption has helped create this deeply unequal global system that now imperils the very existence of the most vulnerable people.



Elders from Makin Island sharing their experiences of climate effects 2010. Photo - Louise Whelan

¹theguardian.com/world/commentisfree/2020/jan/07/australia-fijis-prayers-are-with-you-but-we-know-they-arent-enough-to-fight-the-climate-crisis

The climate crisis is the most pressing emergency facing the world today. Its impacts threaten to transform the world as we know it. More extreme and frequent weather events and natural disasters, rising sea levels, longer droughts, and heatwaves, food and water shortages and rising temperatures endanger the lives and livelihoods of billions of people throughout the world. Climate change not only disproportionately affects the world's poor countries but also disproportionately affects the world's poor people. This is the great injustice of the climate emergency.

The Pacific Islands are among those most endangered by the climate emergency. This is despite the fact that they have most often contributed the least to the causes of climate change.² The Pacific Islands are already experiencing more extreme weather events, longer droughts, bigger storms, rising sea levels, coral bleaching, decreased fish stocks, and coastal erosion. If urgent action is not taken to meaningfully address the climate crisis, these impacts are projected to dramatically worsen, threatening the very survival of these Pacific Islands.



Coastal erosion Chuuk. Photo - Fr Martin Everi

Kiribati and Tuvalu are two Pacific nations whose survival is particularly threatened by climate change. The climate crisis is damaging their delicate ecosystems, harming vital infrastructure, and threatening livelihoods and lives. However, I-Kiribati and Tuvaluan peoples have been facing the climate crisis with immense courage, resilience, and leadership. Former President of Kiribati Anote Tong said, ***"We can never give up. We can't afford to give up. No matter what the obstacles seem to be. For us there is no giving up."***³ This spirit can inspire Australian climate activism, standing in solidarity with Pacific nations to fight for climate justice.

During the summer of 2020 Australia experienced the devastating effects of the climate crisis. Unprecedented bushfires ravaged communities, destroying almost 3000 homes and resulting in the tragic deaths of 34 people. 18.6 million hectares of land were burnt causing enormous loss of biodiversity and the deaths of millions of stock and wildlife. This created an ecological disaster that we are yet to completely comprehend. According to a report issued on March 4, 2020 human-caused climate change made the bushfires at least 30%

more likely to occur.⁴ We can no longer insulate ourselves from the climate crisis.

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed that we are intimately and inextricably linked to our environment and to each other. It is time to question our focus on domination, prosperity and growth which has led us to this point of crisis. We need to respond to the call of Pope Francis by choosing a radical new way of living that recognises that we live in harmony with this interconnected world and that our survival depends on the survival of our planet.

"Faced with a climate emergency, we must take action accordingly, in order to avoid perpetrating a brutal act of injustice towards the poor and future generations."⁵ — Pope Francis June 14 2019

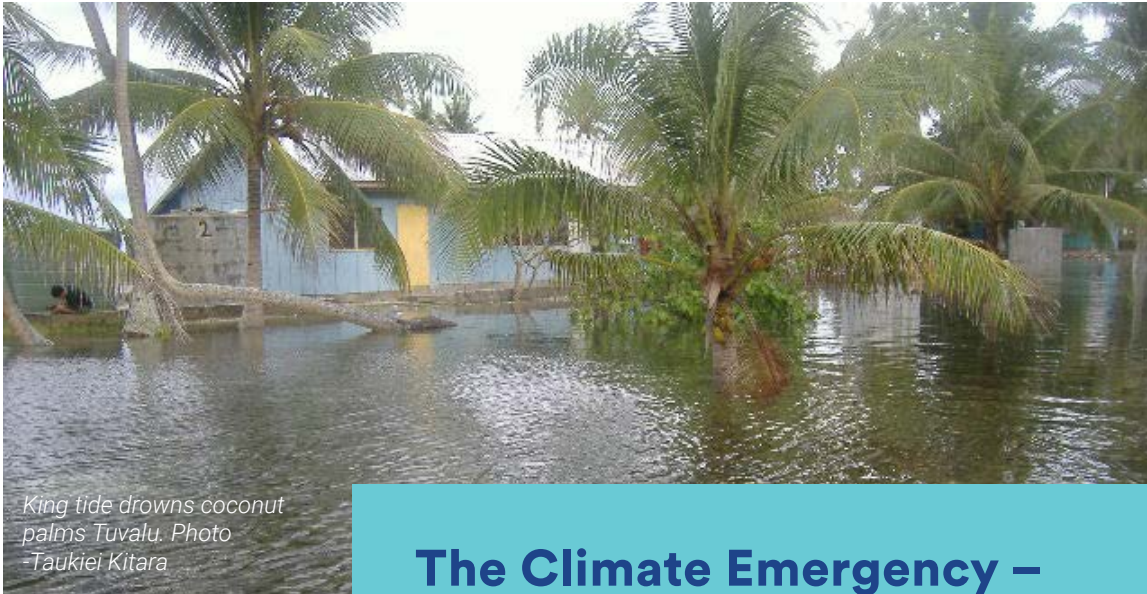
As members of the Inter-congregational Voice on Climate Change we present this monograph in honour of those affected by the climate emergency in the Pacific and in Australia and in response to the call of Pope Francis to recognise the climate emergency. As the sea level rises we are encouraged to raise our voices to meet this challenge.

²ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/Climate.aspx

³themonthly.com.au/blog/mary-robinson/2018/20/2018/1545260469/climate-justice

⁴worldweatherattribution.org/bushfires-in-australia-2019-2020

⁵vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2019/june/documents/papa-francesco_20190614_compagnie-petrolifere.html



King tide drowns coconut palms Tuvalu. Photo -Taukiei Kitara

The Climate Emergency – Rising Tides and Melting Ice Sheets

There is overwhelming scientific agreement that anthropogenic climate change is real and that its effects are already being felt. These impacts will disproportionately affect communities and nations that are already vulnerable and disadvantaged. Over 97% of scientists also agree that human activity is the primary cause. In 2014, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) confirmed that human-made greenhouse gas emissions are the primary cause of the climate crisis.⁷

In September 2019, the IPCC issued a special Report, ***"The Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate"***⁸ that stressed the need for urgent and immediate action. At the launch of the Report, Debra

Roberts, Co-Chair of IPCC Working Group II said,

"The more decisively and the earlier we act, the more able we will be to address unavoidable changes, manage risks, improve our lives and achieve sustainability for ecosystems and people around the world – today and in the future,"

The report stated that sea levels will rise higher and faster than previously predicted, and that already stressed coastlines face bigger waves and storm surges. A delay of even a few more years risks resulting in such a high concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere that will make it impossible to reach the Paris Agreement target of limiting warming to below 1.5 degrees.

In another special report that it issued in 2019, the IPCC stated:

"Without increased and urgent mitigation ambition in the coming years, leading to a sharp decline in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, global warming will surpass 1.5°C in the following decades, leading to irreversible loss of the most fragile ecosystems, and crisis after crisis for the most vulnerable people and societies."⁹

For Pacific Island communities, climate change is not some distant threat but a daily reality threatening their very existence.



Storm surge destruction

⁶[ipcc.ch/2019/09/25/srocc-press-release](https://www.ipcc.ch/2019/09/25/srocc-press-release)
⁷IPCC 5th Assessment Report (2014)

⁸[ipcc.ch/2019/09/25/srocc-press-release/](https://www.ipcc.ch/2019/09/25/srocc-press-release/)
⁹[ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/sites/2/2019/06/SR15_Summary_Volume_Low_Res.pdf](https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/sites/2/2019/06/SR15_Summary_Volume_Low_Res.pdf)

“The King tides are now more frequent around the islands and are washing away the smaller islands’ beaches , breaking up the protective reefs and much of the coral is actually dying off. Many of these now unprotected smaller islands are cut in two by the sea and cannot serve the people as before as places for holidaying, fishing and collecting sea food. A number of families that lived in houses on the beach line of the main island have had to rebuild their homes further inland.”

- Sr Telesia Talalua smsm, Wallis Island ¹⁰

Sea level rise is directly related to global warming caused by climate change. Due to past and current greenhouse gas emissions, global warming has already reached 1°C above the pre-industrial level. This has led the ocean to become warmer, more acidic, and less productive.

These warming temperatures have had major impacts on the stability of the Antarctic ice sheets and glaciers. In February 2020, the Antarctic registered a temperature of more than 20°C for the first time on record. This temperature, described by scientists as “incredible and abnormal,” is almost a full degree higher than the previous record of 19.8°C recorded in 1982. These warming temperatures are closely related to changes in permafrost and the ocean. From 2007 to 2016, the Antarctic ice sheet lost three times the amount of water than it had in the previous decade. The West Antarctic ice sheet may also collapse due to its severe instability. If there is a sustained increase in temperature these ice sheets will continue to melt at alarmingly rapid rates in turn releasing harmful gases and toxins that further contribute to global warming.

Growing water inputs from melting glaciers and ice sheets in Greenland and Antarctica, as well as the

expansion of warmer sea waters is already causing accelerated rates of sea-level rise. The seas are now rising at a pace faster than at any time over the last century. From 2006-2016, the rate of global sea level rise at 3.6mm per year and accelerating. This is 2.5 times faster than it had been for nearly all of the 20th century, when the sea level globally only rose by 15cm.

Even if greenhouse gas emissions are sharply reduced and global warming is limited to well below 2°C, sea levels could still rise by up to 60cm by 2100. Indeed, scientists from the University of New South Wales recently found that approximately 120,000 years ago, less than 2°C of ocean warming caused the West Antarctic ice sheet to melt, causing a sea level rise of more than 3 metres. They concluded that global warming must be kept well below 2°C to avoid such catastrophic impacts. Current predictions suggest that inaction on climate change will likely result in sea level rise of 1.1 metres by 2100. This is dramatically higher than the IPCC’s 2013 projection that inaction would result in sea level rise of up to 90cm by 2100. Without action, the seas will be 5 metres higher by 2300.

The IPCC predicts that if global warming goes beyond 2°C, by 2050 catastrophic climatic events that had previously occurred once per century would occur once per year. This means Pacific Islands could be exposed to more extreme coastal events, escalating floods, more fierce tropical cyclones, bigger storm surges, and higher king tides annually. This threatens the future habitability and survival of many low-lying atolls in the Pacific. and even the higher Pacific island nations will lose land and infrastructure.

To prevent all this, the global community needs to take significant, decisive, and coordinated action to limit global warming



Destruction left by storm surge Tamana Island

¹⁰Sisters see their Homeland Threatened

¹¹[theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/13/antarctic-temperature-rises-above-20c-first-time-record](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/13/antarctic-temperature-rises-above-20c-first-time-record)

¹²[climate.gov/news-features/understanding-climate/climate-change-global-sea-level](https://www.climate.gov/news-features/understanding-climate/climate-change-global-sea-level)

¹³[theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/13/mass-melting-of-antarctic-ice-sheet-led-to-three-metre-sea-level-rise-120000-years-ago](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/13/mass-melting-of-antarctic-ice-sheet-led-to-three-metre-sea-level-rise-120000-years-ago)

Climate Change – A Crisis of Human Rights

Pelenise at Human rights Council Geneva. Photo - KiriCAN



While many governments and public commentators view climate change in terms of its ecological and economic impacts, this crisis presents many challenges to the full and effective enjoyment of human rights today. The United Nations has officially and unequivocally stated that climate change poses an “immediate and far-reaching” threat to human rights globally. Several fundamental human rights are imperilled by the impacts of climate change, including:

- The right to life,
- The right to an environment of a particular quality
- The right to adequate food, water, and sanitation.
- The right to health,
- The right to human security
- The right to housing
- The right to self-determination
- The rights of Indigenous peoples, including the right to continue their meaningful engagement with the local environment

The climate crisis especially threatens the human rights of already vulnerable communities. People living in small island states and Least Developed Countries such as many Pacific Islands could be among the first to suffer from climate change.

There is a rise in typhoid, leptospirosis and dengue fever due to Climate Change, as well as infestations of ants which kill some plants and invade buildings. In areas where the sea water is encroaching on the land people are now resorting to planting their basic staple food (cassava) on the side of roads as the land is higher there.

- Sr Denise MacMahon smsm Fiji



Patrick Dodson on a friendship visit to Kiribati with an elder from Abaiang Island 2010. Photo - Louise Whelan

¹⁴Sisters see their Homeland Threatened

¹⁵CRA Report

¹⁶unenvironment.org/news-and-stories/story/human-rights-are-threat-climate-change-can-also-provide-solutions; <https://www.ohchr.org/en/issues/hrandclimatechange/pages/hrclimatechangeindex.aspx>; HR Council



Indigenous peoples and marginalised groups in developed countries also bear an immense burden from climate change. Communities in central Australia are already running out of water and experiencing scorching temperatures and record-breaking heat waves. Strong and immediate action is required if these areas are not to become uninhabitable and people being displaced from their ancestral land.

Australia cannot be insulated from the climate crisis or rely on other countries to solve these issues. This is a global emergency causing global injustices. It requires a global rights-based response that is fair and just, taking into account the disproportionate suffering many vulnerable communities face.

Advocacy movements based on climate justice, including the Inter-Congregational Voice on Climate Change, recognise that it is unjust and inequitable that these communities should suffer the most from climate change despite having contributed the least to its causes.

¹⁷unenvironment.org/news-and-stories/story/human-rights-are-threat-climate-change-can-also-provide-solutions; <https://www.ohchr.org/en/issues/hrandclimatechange/pages/hrclimatechangeindex.aspx>; CRA – Australian HR Commission

¹⁸[ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/Climate.aspx](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/Climate.aspx)

¹⁹[theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/dec/18/too-hot-for-humans-first-nations-people-fear-becoming-australias-first-climate-refugees](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/dec/18/too-hot-for-humans-first-nations-people-fear-becoming-australias-first-climate-refugees)

Australia's Response to Climate Change

"We in the Pacific are paying the ultimate price for the rise in greenhouse gases. Use your vote and tell your government that you have other resources than coal. Climate change affects all of us and will catch up with us. I...ask all of you, please help us in Tuvalu to save our mother Earth"

- Kuata, a mother of four and employee of the Tuvalu Media Department and , a Tuvaluan participant in the Pacific Calling Partnership's climate leadership training program, 2016



Kuata shows coal as she speaks about damage greenhouse gases have done to her homeland, Tuvalu

It is increasingly clear that climate change poses grave risks to Australia. It is vital we join in partnership with the Pacific Islands on the frontlines in facing this risk. However, the Australian government's current position (2020) on climate change has fallen short of the scientifically supported measures necessary to address the existential threat of climate change. Even in the face of our most recent catastrophic bushfire season where we experienced the longest and most severe bushfires on record, many of our political and some religious leaders refused to acknowledge the clear role of climate change in these worsening conditions.

Australia is one of the worst performing of all OECD countries on climate action.²⁰ Australia's greenhouse gas emissions are one of the highest in the world per capita.²¹ Australia also exports hundreds of millions of tonnes of coal, contributing to emissions overseas. The Australian government's current greenhouse gas emission reduction target is amongst the weakest of any advanced economy. The Prime Minister has also stated that Australia will make no more contributions to the Green Climate Fund.

In 2015 Peter Dutton said to then Prime Minister Tony Abbott that "time doesn't mean anything when you're about to have water lapping at your door," mocking Pacific Islands facing devastating

rising sea levels. In 2017, Scott Morrison, then treasurer, brought a lump of coal into parliament, reflecting his disregard for calls for a just transition to renewable energy. In 2019, Deputy Prime Minister Michael McCormack insulted Pacific Islanders with his suggestion they would survive climate change because they could come to Australia and "pick our fruit."

Even though Australia signed the 2018 Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) BoE statement recognising that climate change is the single greatest threat facing the Pacific²² the Australian government's response to the climate crisis in the Pacific has been inadequate leading to many expressions of frustration by Pacific leaders.²³ Despite referring to the Pacific as "family" at the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders' Summit in 2019 in Tuvalu, the Morrison government refused to join with the Pacific Islands in committing to take strong and decisive action on climate change to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees.

Speaking to Mr Morrison during the Forum Mr Enele Sapoga said, **"You are concerned about saving your economy in Australia ... I am concerned about saving my people in Tuvalu,"**²⁴. After the Forum, Mr Sapoga said **"The Prime Minister of Tonga actually cried in the meeting ... shed tears in front of the leaders, such is the passion."**²⁵

²⁰thenewdaily.com.au/news/national/2020/10/07/australia-climate-change-oecd/

²¹climateanalytics.org/latest/australia-on-track-to-become-one-of-the-worlds-major-climate-polluters

²²BoE Declaration; Kainaki II Declaration

²³abc.net.au/news/2019-05-16/guterres-antonio-un-pacific-meeting-climate-change/11115816



Enele Sapoaga with Maria Tiimon at UN Climate conference Bonn 2017

Scott Morrison did pledge with the other Pacific leaders to develop a long-term strategy by 2020 to reduce emissions, yet there is little evidence to date of the development of such a strategy. Instead, as Australia paves its way to a post-COVID 19 recovery, the government has moved to ramp up its dependence on the fossil fuel industry through its gas-led federal budget. Further, the budget contained almost no measures for climate change. This is deeply out of step with the global movement towards renewables, as Australia falls further behind international climate action. France for example, announced that one third of its \$164 billion stimulus measures will be green. The UK and Japan have pledged to reach net zero emissions by 2050 and China has pledged to do so by 2060. Australia, meanwhile, has refused to declare a climate emergency and remains 60% dependent on coal for our electricity needs despite our abundant solar and wind resources.

In January 2020, Bishop Vincent Long, chair of the Australian Catholic Bishops' Commission for Social Justice – Mission and Service said, "As a nation, we cannot claim to be a responsible global citizen in addressing the moral challenge of our age while we lag behind other nations on climate action and continue to subsidise old polluting industries."²⁶



Bishop Vincent Long

The Australian government's response to COVID-19 has been one of the most effective in the world, demonstrating that our leaders can take strong and decisive action, following scientific advice, to protect and secure our communities.

Similarly, Australia has immense potential to be a global leader on climate action. We have enormous solar and wind resources and an abundance of Lithium and other minerals needed for large scale battery storage which would enable Australia to

lead the world in renewable energy development. Australia can also directly influence other economies to shift towards renewables and away from fossil fuels.

While the Federal Government has fallen short of its commitments, we acclaim the efforts of other entities to address the climate emergency. For example, 1073 jurisdictions in twenty countries have declared a climate emergency, including 57 Australian local councils.

²⁴[abc.net.au/news/2019-08-15/no-endorsements-come-out-of-tuvalu-declaration/11419342](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-08-15/no-endorsements-come-out-of-tuvalu-declaration/11419342)

²⁵[abc.net.au/news/2019-08-15/no-endorsements-come-out-of-tuvalu-declaration/11419342](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-08-15/no-endorsements-come-out-of-tuvalu-declaration/11419342)

²⁶[cathnews.com/cathnews/37005-australia-must-lead-on-climate-change-bishop-long](https://www.cathnews.com/cathnews/37005-australia-must-lead-on-climate-change-bishop-long)

Calls for Climate Action from Pacific Island Church Leaders

The Inter-congregational Voice on Climate Change listens to and works with the Pacific communities on the front lines to bring their voices to the centre of climate change discourse. As several Pacific Island political leaders have expressed their deep disappointment and frustration with Australia's inaction on climate change, so too have a number of religious leaders.

Cardinal John Ribat, msc, Archbishop of Port Moresby, has been vocal in calling attention to the danger the climate crisis poses for Papua New Guinea. Cardinal Ribat says, "(The Catholic Church) are responsible to voice this...If nothing is happening to us in the way of help, our people will be faced with disaster."

Archbishop Peter Loy Chong of Fiji has also spoken out for significant action on climate change, calling for a Synod on the Oceans to critically examine the impact climate change will have on marine life and the disaster this will pose for Pacific peoples. Reverend James Bhagwan, the General Secretary of the Pacific Conference of Churches, in an open letter in the Sydney Morning Herald, appealed to the Prime Minister, Scott Morrison "as one person of faith to another" to take serious action on climate change.²⁷ He decried Australia's planned use of Kyoto carry-over credits, support for Adani's Carmichael coal mine, and resistance to climate action, saying, "No leader who claims Christian morality can allow this conduct on their watch."²⁸ he said.

Pacific nations offered valuable support during the 2019-20 bushfire season, when Australia felt the terrible impacts of the climate crisis. Papua New Guinea and Fiji provided military assistance and many Pacific Islands nations donated to assist Australia's bushfire fight. These bushfires demonstrated what climate science reveals: that Australia's recalcitrance on climate change imperils our survival as well as that of the Pacific. It is time to work in solidarity with our neighbours to face this common threat together. As the Pacific stepped up when we needed them, we call on to Australia step up and fulfil its commitments to its Pacific family.



Cardinal Ribat supporting Inter-Congregational Voice campaign

"Mother earth is crying. Save our home...

Peoples of the ocean – we gotta rise – to stop the violation against Creation."

- Extract from the Climate Change Lament, Archbishop Peter Loy Chong

²⁷[smh.com.au/environment/climate-change/a-climate-plea-to-scott-morrison-from-a-churchman-of-the-pacific-s-sinking-nations-20190808-p52f4a.html](https://www.smh.com.au/environment/climate-change/a-climate-plea-to-scott-morrison-from-a-churchman-of-the-pacific-s-sinking-nations-20190808-p52f4a.html)

²⁸[smh.com.au/environment/climate-change/a-climate-plea-to-scott-morrison-from-a-churchman-of-the-pacific-s-sinking-nations-20190808-p52f4a.html](https://www.smh.com.au/environment/climate-change/a-climate-plea-to-scott-morrison-from-a-churchman-of-the-pacific-s-sinking-nations-20190808-p52f4a.html)

The Climate Crisis in the Pacific

As Marshall Islands President Hilda Heine says, “Our front line is our last line. There is no fall-back. If the line falls, that’s it for us.”²⁹

Sea Level Rise

Rising sea levels could cause devastating and irreversible damage to Pacific Island nations. For some low-lying atolls, such as Kiribati and Tuvalu, sea level rise threatens their very survival. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the impacts of sea level rise could result in coral atoll nations becoming uninhabitable by 2030 and completely submerged by 2100.

Sea level rise will also cause more intense storm surges, larger king tides, and greater coastal erosion in the Pacific. Pacific Islands are already facing larger floods and storm waves from sea level rise, causing the destruction of seawalls and vital infrastructure, inundation of gardens, and infiltration of salty water into drinking wells.

In the Marshall Islands, floods have destroyed many homes, washed away the graves of loved ones, and left countless families with nothing.³¹ As the seas rise, these disasters will become more frequent and inflict more damage and destruction, threatening the habitability of many Pacific Islands.

“For Fijians...who rely on the land and sea for their livelihoods, a storm like Cyclone Winston is absolutely devastating. And although the response was immediate and effective, Australia needs to be much more proactive in (responding) to global warming and the way it contributes to the increased number of tropical cyclones and their devastating effects.”

- Mariana, a Fijian-Australian participant in the Pacific Calling Partnership’s climate leadership training program, 2016



Collapsing sea wall. Photo - Jon Lewis

“Sea level rise is the biggest threat facing the island nation. Many communities are already being forced to leave their homes and relocate inland due to the threat of rising sea levels.”

- Sister Fatafehi Icm, Tonga³⁰

Natural Disasters

More frequent and intense natural disasters are already causing devastation to many Pacific Islands. In 2016 Tropical Cyclone Winston ravaged many Pacific Islands, particularly Vanuatu, Fiji, Tonga, and Niue. 44 people were killed by Tropical Cyclone Winston. The total damage amounted to \$1.4 billion (USD), with Fiji losing assets worth 20% of its GDP.³² Cyclone Winston was the most intense and costliest recorded tropical cyclone in the South Pacific basin. Many of the Pacific nations had not even recovered from the damage inflicted by Tropical Cyclone Pam in 2015 and in 2016 when Tropical Cyclone Winston hit. In early 2020, Tropical Cyclones Sarai and Cyclone Tino struck Fiji and wreaking enormous damage in Tonga and Tuvalu. This is only a slight indication of what the future may hold if we do not take serious climate action now.

²⁹[sacbee.com/opinion/california-forum/article235939252.html](https://www.sacbee.com/opinion/california-forum/article235939252.html)

³⁰*Sisters see their Homeland Threatened*

³¹[sacbee.com/opinion/california-forum/article235939252.html](https://www.sacbee.com/opinion/california-forum/article235939252.html)

³²time.com/longform/sinking-islands-climate-change/

Food and Water Scarcity

Longer and more frequent droughts combined with salt water inundation from storm surges and king tides has put enormous stress on fresh water reserves in many low-lying Pacific atolls.³³ The US State Department has predicted that without climate action by 2030 some Pacific Islands will be completely uninhabitable due to the lack of fresh potable water supplies.³⁴ Water scarcity induced by the climate crisis is thus an enormous threat to the lives and livelihoods of many Pacific communities. Agricultural land and gardens which families and communities rely on for food and other essentials are also damaged by floods, droughts, natural disasters, and king tides. Warming and more acidic oceans deplete fish populations, a staple food source and economic resource in the Pacific. This exacerbates existing food security challenges that Pacific Islands already face.



Cyclone. Photo - NASA

A few families have already had to relocate inland because of the changing conditions. However, Tonga has no really high ground. The people are trying to prevent some of these effects by planting mangroves to hold onto the coastal land and beaches.

- Sr M Nive Kepu smsm Tonga³⁵

Coastal Erosion and Displacement

The impacts of the climate crisis, including sea level rise, coastal erosion, natural disasters, water and food scarcity, drought and heatwaves, will cause many areas of the world to become uninhabitable. It is projected that as many as 200 million people will be displaced by climate change by 2050.

People in the Pacific Islands are most at risk of displacement and forced climate migration. The Carteret Islands in the Pacific were the first place in the world to require community relocation due to climate change and sea level rise. Almost 2000 people living on the Carteret Islands, whose ancestors settled there over 200 years ago, have been relocated to nearby Bougainville due to the threat of sea level rise in the low-lying islands.³⁶ Many families have struggled to adjust to life in this unfamiliar place, far from their homes and communities, and disconnected from their ancestral lands.

Villagers from Vunidogoloa in Fiji have been relocated inland due to climate change, and the government has plans to move a further forty villages as they become uninhabitable due to sea level rise.³⁷ Five islands in the Solomon Islands have also been completely lost due to sea level rise and coastal erosion and six other islands are at great risk of complete inundation.³⁸



Coastal erosion

³³[sacbee.com/opinion/california-forum/article235939252.html](https://www.sacbee.com/opinion/california-forum/article235939252.html)

³⁴George Carter

³⁵*Sisters see their Homeland Threatened*

³⁶[abc.net.au/news/2018-08-04/the-race-against-time-to-save-the-carteret-islanders/10066958](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-08-04/the-race-against-time-to-save-the-carteret-islanders/10066958)

³⁷[time.com/longform/sinking-islands-climate-change/](https://www.time.com/longform/sinking-islands-climate-change/)

³⁸[zmescience.com/ecology/climate/climate-change-islands-claimed-10102019/](https://www.zmescience.com/ecology/climate/climate-change-islands-claimed-10102019/)

“In Avuavu on the Weather Coast of South East Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands, where I come from the majority of people were living along the coastal areas. Due to the impact of Climate Change, particularly by the rising sea levels or tidal waves the people had no choice but to move inland onto higher grounds and into the mountain areas in more recent years.

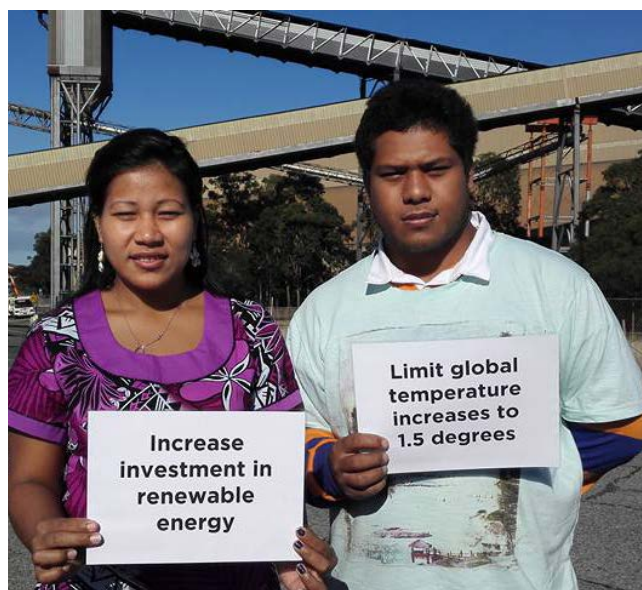
They built houses on the land or grounds that were normally used and kept specifically for gardening to provide food for the families. Some of the sacred places or spaces that were given to them by their ancestors and which they need to interact and maintain their identity and values are also now being used by families as plots on which to build homes. The flooding which now occurs also causes a lot of damage to the family homes and gardens.

- Sr Jennifer Laku smsm, Solomon Islands³⁹

Kiribati and Tuvalu

The low lying atoll nations of Kiribati and Tuvalu are among the most vulnerable nations to the climate crisis.⁴⁰ 32 of Kiribati's 33 islands are less than two metres above sea level, meaning large parts of Kiribati are projected to be inundated by water by 2050.⁴¹ When Tuvalu hosted the Pacific Islands Forum in August 2019, world leaders were greeted by children sitting in water singing “Save Tuvalu, save the world.”⁴² This was a forceful reminder of the all too real threat the climate crisis poses to the Pacific's future.

For I-Kiribati and Tuvaluan peoples, their ancestral lands and ocean are integral parts of their culture and identity. The loss of land, degradation of the ocean, and looming threat of relocation imperils deep cultural and historical ties these peoples have to their land.



Maningare and Kotei at Newcastle – biggest coal Port in southern hemisphere

“Our culture is our identity and that is what we treasure.”

- Kotei, a community youth leader and I-Kiribati participant in the Pacific Calling Partnership's climate leadership training program, 2016

The climate crisis threatens core aspects of I-Kiribati and Tuvaluan identity. Relocation may seem a simple solution to outsiders; It does not address fundamental issues of justice. It is unjust and unacceptable that they should lose their connections to their land and culture and potentially be forced from their homes by the climate crisis. It violates their human rights to practice and enjoy their culture and continue their meaningful engagement with their ancestral lands. Relocation also threatens the rights to self-determination and sovereignty as independent nations.

“Climate change is not about moving people to a safer place. That won't stop the issue. It is about the people. We love our culture, we don't want to move.”

- Maria Tiimon Chi-Fang, Project Officer at the Pacific Calling Partnership, Edmund Rice Centre for Education and Community Education

³⁹Sisters see their Homeland Threatened

⁴⁰UNCCC Bonn, 2017 - smh.com.au/environment/climate-change/pacific-leadership-on-climate-change-is-necessary-and-inevitable-20190704-p5240u.html

⁴¹smh.com.au/environment/climate-change/pacific-leadership-on-climate-change-is-necessary-and-inevitable-20190704-p5240u.html

As Pope Francis has repeatedly called the Church and people of good will, climate action must begin with listening to what vulnerable people are saying. This applies to Australia's Pacific Island neighbours, as well as the peoples of the Amazon. This is truly a matter of survival for these nations

Kiribati and Tuvalu are already experiencing the impacts of climate change. Sea levels have risen causing coastal flooding and erosion, and increasingly severe tidal storms and flooding.⁴³ Tuvalu was heavily affected by Cyclone Pam and Cyclone Ula in 2015. Gale-force winds and pounding rain destroyed entire islets, flattened homes, and uprooted trees.



Wave from storm surge breaks over sea wall.
Photo - KiriCAN

"I know (our) future is threatened by climate change. I'm 23 and want to have children. My country is very poor and we are already struggling to survive while Australia and other developed countries enjoy the benefits of coal mining. This is the song to the world to countries polluting the atmosphere... hear our cry and help us please, we want to live on that shore and not be victims of climate change. Our voices for climate justice are calls to you, we are small, we are vulnerable, we are on the front line so please save us and other islands."

- Maningare, a beautiful singer and I-Kiribati participant in the Pacific Calling Partnership's climate leadership training program, 2016

Protecting coast with sea wall made from dead coral.
Photo - Jon Lewis

"My island Funafuti is the main island of Tuvalu. It is so thin that you can stand on one side and see across to the other. Tuvalu has always had cyclones but now they are getting more intense and dangerous, doing more damage."

- Saineta, a computer science student and Tuvaluan participant in the Pacific Calling Partnership's climate leadership training program, 2017

Kiribati lies in a part of the Pacific that does not experience cyclones but in 2015 a storm surge and King Tide hit Kiribati islands causing major flooding and significant damage to homes, infrastructure, agricultural land, and water supply.⁴⁴ Local hospitals were flooded during the disaster, forcing ill patients to evacuate for long periods and greatly damaging vital medical equipment. Classrooms were flooded and children were unable to attend school while the community gradually recovered from the damage. Teachers in Kiribati have warned that the quality of education will suffer as increasingly frequent and severe natural disasters interrupt school attendance.

More frequent and intense disasters of this kind, inundating vital agricultural land with saltwater, also cause soil salinity damaging vital staple crops like taro, coconuts, and breadfruit. Already limited freshwater sources are further depleted by floods, heightening food and water scarcity.⁴⁵ It is projected that water scarcity will make Kiribati and Tuvalu uninhabitable long before they are inundated by sea level rise. Destruction, like that of the 2015 floods will intensify in the future if the climate crisis continues to worsen.



⁴³smh.com.au/environment/climate-change/pacific-leadership-on-climate-change-is-necessary-and-inevitable-20190704-p5240u.html

⁴⁴OLSH Article - Quotes...about Kiribati and Climate Change (Philippa and Lorraine organised a conference with over 100 people attending with OLSH Sisters). 'Sr Kaitaake'

⁴⁵thethmonthly.com.au/blog/mary-robinson/2018/20/2018/1545260469/climate-justice; 2013 World Bank report, Turn Down the Heat

Kiribati and Tuvalu are also already experiencing warming temperatures, which have increased by roughly 0.18°C per decade since 1950. This has caused longer and more severe droughts and heatwaves. Warming ocean temperatures and related acidification is causing damage to sea life in these oceans.

“For the people of small islands, understanding the importance of the ocean to human survival is as natural as breathing. If the ocean is healthy, we are healthy; if the future of the ocean is uncertain, so is ours.”

- Marlene Moses, the former Nauruan ambassador to the UN



Rev. Eria surveys damage from king tide. Photo - Nicola Daley

Ocean resources are essential to Pacific economies and cultural identities. For example, Kiribati depends heavily on the fishing sector for revenue and food. However, the catch potential is projected to decrease by 70% by 2050 due to climate change, leaving i-Kiribati communities without this vital resource.⁴⁶ This significantly threatens food security, health, and economic activity in Kiribati.

⁴⁶smh.com.au/environment/climate-change/pacific-leadership-on-climate-change-is-necessary-and-inevitable-20190704-p5240u.html

Pacific Climate Leadership: We are not drowning, we are fighting



Kiribati President Anote Tong surrounded by media at COP 21 Paris 2015

Pacific communities have risen in force to demand climate justice. They are not, and will not be, passive victims of the climate emergency. They are the leaders of the climate movement.

The Pacific Calling Partnership's KATEP program has been strongly supported and financed by member congregations of the Inter-Congregational Voice on Climate Change. From 2014 onwards promising leaders from Kiribati and Tuvalu have been nominated by local climate organisations KiriCAN and TuCAN to take part in the KATEP program. Participants have taken part in practical workshops on advocacy, using the media, developing leadership skills, sharing stories, making presentations, climate science, climate justice, and project planning. They then took part in a range of public activities such as meetings with members of parliament, consultations with church leaders, addressing public meetings and awareness raising with school groups. As emerging leaders with relevant skills and knowledge, they have returned to their communities to play a role in building climate awareness and several of them have joined PCP delegations to UN climate conferences.

In the face of the dearth of global climate leadership, there is also The Pacific Climate Warrior campaign organised by 350 Pacific unites grassroots activists from across 12 Pacific Island nations to share their experiences of climate change and hold large polluters to account.⁴⁷ In 2014, as part of this campaign, thirty Pacific Islanders participated in



Inter-congregational voice members, interfaith representatives with KATEP participants and PCP team

a blockade against coal ships in Newcastle. They sailed into the harbour in traditional canoes and kayaks and sent a forceful message that the Pacific would not surrender to the Australian fossil fuel industry.⁴⁸ Sr Kateia KaiKai smsm and Maria Tiimon Chi-Fang both representing the Pacific Calling Partnership joined the blockade.

⁴⁷Hannah Fair, "Not Drowning but Fighting: Pacific Islands Activists," *Forced Migration Review* 49 (2015): 58-59.

⁴⁸Fair 2015 58

⁴⁹Fair 2015 58

⁵⁰theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/oct/23/former-tuvalu-pm-says-he-was-stunned-by-scott-morrison-s-behaviour-at-pacific-islands-forum ; afr.com/politics/federal/morrison-more-interested-in-making-money-than-saving-lives-20191023-p533gw



Sr Kateia Kaikai explains climate effects in the Pacific to Mercy Sisters' school students

Additionally, organisations such as Pacific Islands Climate Action Network (PICAN), the Tuvalu Climate Action Network (TuCAN), and the Kiribati Climate Action Network (KiriCAN) work with Pacific communities to build climate leadership and develop grassroots solutions to the impacts of climate change. The message, “We are not drowning, we are fighting,” is a powerful statement of hope and a courageous call to action.⁴⁹ These climate warriors say they will not be silenced and will not let climate change destroy their homes without a fight.

Though some nations have dragged their feet on climate action and in some cases actively stalling international negotiations, Pacific Islands nations have taken up the mantle of global climate leadership.⁵⁰ In 2019 the Pacific Islands Forum endorsed the Kainaki II Declaration for Urgent Climate Change Action Now. This was the strongest collective statement that the Forum has ever issued on climate change, declaring a climate change crisis and repeatedly reinforcing the need to limit global warming to 1.50C.⁵¹ Pacific nations have also been critical in advocating for meaningful emissions reduction targets and effective mitigation and adaptation strategies in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Leaders like Anote Tong (Kiribati), Enele Sapoaga (Tuvalu), Tony de Brum (Republic of Marshall Islands) and Hilda Heine (Republic of Marshall Islands) have all exercised inspirational and effective leadership at numerous international meetings including UN climate summits. Fiji’s presidency of the 23rd annual Conference of parties to the UNFCCC (COP23) in 2017 brought Pacific voices further to the forefront of international climate discourse and through the grouping of Pacific Small Island Developing States (PSIDS), Pacific voices continue to be in the centre of global climate discourse. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres commended this work, saying that Pacific nations such as Tuvalu are “an example that the rest of the world should follow.”⁵²



Anote Tong with PCP delegation to UN Conference Bonn 2017

⁵¹theconversation.com/pacific-island-nations-will-no-longer-stand-for-australias-inaction-on-climate-change-121976; climatechangenews.com/2019/08/28/pacific-leaders-set-new-bar-collectively-declaring-climate-crisis/

⁵²un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2019-05-18/statement-end-of-visit-pacific – Antonio Guterres 18 May 2019

Faith and Climate Change

The churches have been critical to climate activism in the Pacific. Across the Pacific, approximately 80% of people identify as Christian, with many national constitutions explicitly identifying the nation as a Christian country (Fair, 2018).⁵³ Many Pacific governments and communities became cognizant of the threats of climate change through the Pacific Conference of Churches calls to action embodied by the Otin Taai Declaration 2004 and Moana Declaration 2009.⁵⁴ Critically, the Moana Declaration embodied a call to action, reaffirming the church's vital responsibility "to recognize and speak out against the injustices brought on by climate change."⁵⁵

Church leaders have continued to be instrumental in calling for more ambitious climate action. In 2016 the Federation of Catholic Bishops' Conferences of Oceania called for "courageous, far-sighted governance shaped by the principles of the common good and justice for all human persons" to inform the immediate implementation of the Paris Agreement.⁵⁶

"We, participants in the Pacific Churches' Consultation on Climate Change, feel called by God to: ...Call on our sisters and brothers in Christ throughout the world to act in solidarity with us to reduce the causes of human-induced climate change. We issue this call particularly to churches in the highly-industrialized nations whose societies are historically responsible for the majority of polluting emissions..."

- Pacific Conference of Churches, Otin Taai Declaration 2004

In 2019, after the Synod of the Amazon, Archbishop Peter Loy Chong of Suva called for a synod on the oceans. He has described climate advocacy as "a question of respect for God and his creation and alleviating the pain of those who suffer".⁵⁷ Archbishop Chong, together with Brisbane Archbishop Mark Coleridge publicly declared their support for the school strikes for climate, describing climate change as "a matter of life and death" for Pacific nations.⁵⁸



Claire and Sr Geraldine with Don Henry at UN Climate conference, Durban 2011

⁵³Fair PhD 188

⁵⁴Fair PhD 190 - oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/justice-diakonia-and-responsibility-for-creation/climate-change-water/pacific-church-leaders-statement

⁵⁶oikoumene.org/resources/documents/otin-tai-declaration

⁵⁷catholicleader.com.au/news/pacific-catholic-leader-to-speak-on-the-poor-climate-change-and-the-threat-of-rising-tides; catholicleader.com.au/news/archbishop-peter-loy-chong-from-fiji-calls-for-oceania-synod

⁵⁸brisbanecatholic.org.au/assets/uploads/laudato-si-joint-statement.pdf

⁵⁹Lusama 2007: 23; Fair PhD 225, 228

Church teachings are vital to the climate movement and the search for climate justice in the Pacific. Many Pacific Island climate campaigners see their climate activism as a form of spiritual devotion as they protest the actions of large and wealthy emitters to protect God's gift of creation and to follow Jesus' mission to stand for justice.⁵⁹

Pacific Islanders have risen to the challenge of the climate emergency. Yet we know climate change cannot be stopped in the Pacific alone. A transformational change is required which includes a shift in the predominant culture of consumption in many societies. As Pope Francis has reminded us, this calls for a value shift in all people.

As a mother of a 7 month old baby I am worried about his future and his life- all the children of Tuvalu have a right to life- a right to an environment with good quality. I love my country, I love my people and traditions, I love my culture and I don't want to lose them because of climate change. We all want to stay in our own lands because it defines who we are. We don't want to migrate or relocate

- Merineta, Tuvaluan participant in Pacific Calling Partnership's climate leadership training program, 2014



Merineta with students at Congregational Catholic Schools Social Justice day 2015

The Inter-Congregational Voice on Climate Change: A Catholic Fight for Climate Justice

Who We Are

The Inter-congregational Voice on Climate Change is a group of Catholic Religious congregations that joined together in 2015 to be in solidarity with Pacific peoples as they advocate for urgent and effective responses to the climate crisis.

These religious congregations have historical and ongoing involvement with the peoples in Pacific Island nations having been involved in education, health, community development, and climate justice in Australia and the Pacific. They also bring years of personal connections and experience of living and working in the Pacific to a shared advocacy and to amplify the voices of the people of the Pacific. Many members of these congregations have felt the pain of climate change in the lives of the people and been aware of the existential threat this crisis poses for the future of the Pacific Islands. A strong voice for climate action in collaboration with the people of the Pacific is necessary.

The focus has been on raising awareness among the Australian community of the existential threat facing the Pacific Islands and 'our common home'.

In 2019 delegations of the Inter-Congregational Voice met with 24 MPs and Senators from all sides to urge them to pursue a stronger climate policy and to share with them stories of climate change's devastating impact in Pacific Islands where their congregations work. The ten delegates divided into three teams so they could meet with the maximum number of Parliamentarians. They spoke with them about Pope Francis and the links he has described between faith and climate change. They talked about the science of climate change explaining why it is essential to work towards less than 1.5 rather than a 2° rise.

They urged the politicians to develop and publically promote a vision of environmental and economic hope for Australia as a global renewable energy superpower, and to increase the Government's greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets to 45% by 2030 and zero net emissions by 2050, without using Kyoto "carry-over" credits. Their key message was that the survival of



Inter-Congregational Voice Event hosted by Good Samaritan Sisters to raise awareness of climate change 2018

our Pacific neighbours relies upon Australia pursuing a strong climate policy and a strong commitment to climate action.

The Need for a Religious Response to Climate Change

Pope Francis has continued to call on all sectors of the church of the duty to hear the Earth's cry and stand with vulnerable people, such as our Pacific brothers and sisters in calling for strong action on climate change.

The church is a powerful and influential force in the Pacific. The church is the "dominant cultural force" in the region, often filling an institutional governance void in villages where government reach is limited.⁶⁰ Christianity is a "lived spiritual reality" for many, fundamentally shaping the moral framings and daily decisions of individuals and communities.⁶¹

Despite the crucial importance of the church in the lives and consciousness of many in the Pacific, this aspect is often excluded from discussions on climate change. Much of the discourse surrounding the climate crisis takes a scientific and highly secular approach.⁶² Some see religion as a barrier to climate action. The science is critical to discussions about the climate emergency, but purist scientific focus has limited the resonance of international climate discourse and activism within the Pacific. Such secular messaging fails to consider the intrinsic and foundational values and morals within Pacific communities.⁶³ Religion, spirituality and culture are the most important foundation stones of these values.

⁶⁰Tomlinson, M., and D. L. McDougall. 2013. "Introduction: Christian Politics in Oceania." In *Christian Politics in Oceania*, edited by M. Tomlinson and D. L. McDougall, 1–21. New York: Berghahn Books (I mistakenly cited this as Tomlinson and McDougall 2007)

⁶¹Fair PhD 188.

⁶²Mike Hulme, "Climate Change and the Significance of Religion," *Economic and Political Weekly* 52, no. 28 (2017): 14–17. (Hulme 2017)



Mangila, Sr Domenica and Saineta

Spirituality and religion are critical to make sense of the climate crisis in the Pacific. Science is not enough to resolve fundamental culture issues. Recognising this the “tufala save” approach, uniting religious and moral knowledge with scientific knowledge, has been developed⁶⁴ to balance religious and scientific understandings of climate change in a specifically Oceanic context. This builds upon approaches such as Upolu Vaai’s embodied theology which proposes an Oceanic vision of climate justice grounded in Samoan

values of interconnectedness and theologies of the Cross.⁶⁵ Values of interconnectedness, reciprocity, and the sacredness of land and sea are integral within many Pacific cultures, embodied through familial and communal practices and teachings.⁶⁶ These cultural values can clearly inspire climate action. In building a locally resonant and meaningful vision of climate justice, it is crucial to actively blend these moral and religious values with scientific knowledge of climate change.



Children plant mangroves. Photo - Louise Whelan

The church is vital to this process. The Australian Catholic church is deeply connected to the Pacific church. We need to support our Pacific brothers and sisters to stand up for our common home and fight for climate justice. It cannot merely be an institutional vacuum filler but needs to play an active role in disseminating Christian values to mobilise community climate awareness and action. A living and evolving church can engage with the fundamental challenges that climate change poses to our faith and our relationships to God, our Earth and each other. While valiant efforts are already being made to build a Catholic response to the climate crisis, more is needed. As Catholics in Australia as indeed all Australians, we have a role in this process. We are stewards of God’s creation, called to fight for justice and act as a sign of God’s love. Pope Francis’ encyclical **Laudato si’** is an important foundation for us to spiritualise climate justice in resonant and meaningful ways.

⁶³Hannah Fair, “Three Stories of Noah: Navigating Religious Climate Change Narratives in the Pacific Island Region,” *Geography and Environment* (2018): 1-15. (Fair 2018)

⁶⁴Fair PhD 187

⁶⁵Cecilie Rubow and Cliff Bird, “Eco-theological Responses to Climate Change in Oceania” *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology* 20, no. 2 (2016): 153.

⁶⁶Rubow and Bird, 154.

Laudato Si' – On Care of Our Common Home

Korea.net / Korean Culture and Information Service CC BY-SA 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons



In 2015, Pope Francis published his encyclical ***Laudato si'*** calling for a conversion of heart, recognising the deeply interconnected relationship between all creation, humanity, and God. Catholics and non-Catholics alike are called to hear the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor, recognising that protecting our environment is fundamentally an issue of justice.

Pope Francis' call to action appeals to us to open new dialogue about the future of our planet, our common home. This is a call for the church to engage in inclusive, counter-cultural and counter-hegemonic dialogue to confront the powerful interests that have caused the climate crisis. Echoing Pope Francis' call, Archbishop Peter Loy Chong has said that "we need an ecology with God at the centre." Climate action needs to go to the root causes of this crisis, addressing the misguided ways our society has prioritised our own self-interest and pursued technocratic profit at the expense of human interconnectedness and the environment.

Laudato si' follows a rich tradition of Catholic social teaching, drawing on the theological writings of St Francis, Pope John XXIII, Pope Paul VI, Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI. Concern for our sister, Mother Earth, has always been an essential element of Catholic social teaching. The creation story in Genesis teaches that the world was created by a loving and personal God, who gave humanity stewardship, not dominion, over creation. As Pope Francis writes, "we have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the Earth."⁶⁷

Laudato si' recognises the harm humanity has inflicted upon the earth through rampant consumption, accumulation, and greed. Pope Francis condemns our culture's distorted values, focused on consumerism, short term profit, and power. Technology has been put on a pedestal and objectified people, creatures, and creation, leading to the exploitation and degradation of our earth and the poor. Pope Francis writes that there is an intimate relationship between the poor and

⁶⁷LS 2

the fragility of the planet. We cannot separate ourselves from nature. Thus, climate change is not merely an ecological crisis, but an environmental and social crisis that requires an integrated and revolutionary response. Crucially, Pope Francis recognises that Indigenous communities and their cultural traditions are particularly and specially affected by environmental degradation and related capitalist cultures and values. This recognises the burden of Pacific Island communities on the front lines of climate change. Though they have only marginally contributed to the climate crisis, their lives, cultures, and homes are imperilled by this catastrophe. Meanwhile, the highest polluters and emitters seek to insulate themselves from harm, allowing those most vulnerable to bear the cost of their exploitation and destruction. Pope Francis condemns this ecological debt between the global north and south.⁶⁸

Laudato si' recognises that Indigenous communities need to be principal dialogue partners in the fight for climate justice. This is essential to hearing the cry of the poor and acknowledging our interconnectedness with God, the Earth, and humanity. As Pope Francis writes, we are one single human family who share one common home that we must protect.⁶⁹

Laudato si' calls for a revolution in our thinking and acting, to restore dignity to the excluded, combat poverty, and protect nature. It is a call for a renewed and deepened humanity, to include all peoples in dialogue that will prioritise the common good of humanity and the earth. Pope Francis calls us to realise that we are all deeply and fundamentally interconnected and that the climate crisis is part of a larger failure to recognise this intrinsic truth. He urges us to find the foundation of our responses to climate change and our fight for climate justice in this call to conversion. Purely economic, scientific or technocratic solutions to the climate crisis fail to address the root causes of this emergency. We need a revolution in our values and moral framework. This informs the necessity to spiritualise climate change, especially in the Pacific where Christianity is so widespread. Laudato si' is a critical foundation for these efforts.

The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically demonstrated the essential truth of our interconnectedness with our Earth and with each other. As with the climate crisis, no one has been immune to this pandemic. Yet it is the people who are most marginalised who have been most harmed. As we emerge out of this pandemic, we have a unique opportunity to reimagine how we shape our society and to question capitalism's obsession with competition, accumulation, and individualism. We can build a recovery that recognises and protects our 'Common Home' by living in solidarity, taking collective responsibility for our Earth, and caring for each other and the planet.



Karitaake the sea wall builder. Photo - KiriCAN



Maina with Tinaai speaking at Side event UN climate conference Paris 2015

I urgently appeal, then, for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet. We need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all.

- LS 13

⁶⁸LS 51
⁶⁹LS 52

Where to Now: Spiritualising Climate Justice in Australia and the Pacific



PCP delegation to Doha UN Climate Conference 2012: Maina, Fr Claude, Chair Inter-Congregational Voice, Maria, Melton

⁷⁰The climate crisis is an emergency that threatens us all. In our pursuit of more, our society has forgotten what it means to be human, made in the image of God. The catastrophic impacts of the climate crisis are directly linked to our neglect of the environment and of the poor.

The people of Oceania have not been passive or silent. They have not allowed themselves to become victims. They have risen to fight for their homes, holding large emitters and polluters to account to demand that they take responsibility for the climate crisis and act to protect the Earth.

Religion and moral frameworks are critical in the fight against climate change. Scientific knowledge is not enough to address the cultural and moral issues that have contributed to climate change. Climate change is a call to action for all people of faith. Protecting creation is our responsibility and vocation as Christians. The fight for climate justice is not only about reducing carbon emissions or

introducing renewable energy targets. It is a fight for our common earth and our common humanity.

We hope that the church in Australia will heed Pope Francis' call for conversion of heart. This revolution is being led by the Pacific and other marginalised communities most threatened by climate change. They need our support. We can show that support by changing our lifestyles and value systems that have contributed to our culture of constant consumption; by reaching out to start conversations about the climate emergency and awakening people to the connected plight of the earth and the poor; by building relationships among our congregations, our parishioners, our communities, our families, our friends, our colleagues, and our leaders and representatives to implore them to act for climate justice; and by listening to our brothers and sisters in the Pacific to hear their stories and understand their lived experience of the climate crisis. The call is for all to come together to work to build our common home and shape a new dialogue about our common future.⁷¹

⁷⁰sacbee.com/opinion/california-forum/article235939252.html

⁷¹LS 13-14



Coconuts a staple in the Pacific - for now



Waverley College students with Maria, Seimila and Tebataua 2014, credit PCP

“Time is running out. We are the last generation with a chance to prevent the land from being submerged. The land, along with our culture, keeps us all connected to past and future generations. One day, we want to be able to introduce our future generations to the land where we were born and raised, where our identity will forever be rooted”

- Ngyolani Henry, a young Marshallese now living in Sacramento. She is convenor of a climate action youth group called Wavement.



Bishop Paul Donoghue SM with parishioners, calling for action on climate change

