
WITNESS for JUSTICE

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Our Warming Earth

by Mari Castellanos
Policy Advocate

There has been a lot of interest in a recently released “Third National Climate Assessment; Climate Change Impacts in the United States.” This is rightly so. It is very direct about the present and foreseen consequences of the rising global temperatures and what it may mean for human beings everywhere. Climate change, once a debated possibility, is no longer so. Rather, it is a present reality that is already having an impact on weather, crops, water, energy, health, etc. at the national and global levels.

Summers are hotter; floods are more common; snow melts earlier in the year; sea levels are rising and the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events is increasing. The National Climate Assessment puts all of these elements together and tries to understand what it means for the people and the creatures of the world. The research over the past decades has led to the increased certainty that we are seeing impacts associated with “human induced climate change.”

The climate is changing and the earth is warming. The scientific conclusion is that global warming is primarily due to emissions of heat trapping gases from burning coal, oil and gas; from the clearing of forests and from intense agricultural practices that have increased the concentration of carbon dioxide, or CO₂, a heat trapping gas. The average temperature in the United States has increased by 1.3 to 1.9 degrees since 1895, and most of the increase has taken place since 1970. While this may not seem to be a great deal, it actually is.

According to the Climate Assessment, all regions of the United States have experienced warming in recent decades.

In general, temperatures are rising more quickly in the north, with Alaskans experiencing some of the largest increases in temperatures between 1970 and

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the present. We are barely able to conceive the impact of all these natural changes. Our world, the environment of the Earth, has evolved over millions of years. When we read the Creation account in the Book of Genesis from our limited human perspective, we sometimes assume that time is the same for God as it is for humans. But for the Creator, a millennium may be as a day is for humans. We are humbled by our inability to undo the damage we have caused with our careless ways. We may atone by making changes in our lifestyles that may begin to slow down the precipitous and dangerous changes to Earth's climate.

Adaptation to climate changes needs to involve local, state, regional, national and international bodies. Churches and civic groups need to become engaged in searching for the best practices to protect God's people's health and wellbeing. We need to commit to energy saving features such as "green roofs", water and energy saving appliances and transportation options. This is perhaps the greatest challenge humankind has ever faced. It is not a territorial issue. It powerfully impacts all of us.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mari Castellanos is a Policy Advocate for the United Church of Christ's Justice and Witness Ministries.

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