EarthBeat
Justice

A young woman wears an air-filtering mask and holds a sign while participating in the Global Climate Strike in New York City in September 2019. (CNS photo/Gregory A. Shemitz)

by Barbara Fraser

Freelance journalist based in Peru

View Author Profile

Follow on Twitter at @Barbara_Fraser

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

October 16, 2020

Editor's Note: *EarthBeat Weekly is your weekly newsletter about faith and climate change. Below is the Oct. 16 edition. To receive EarthBeat Weekly in your inbox, sign up here.*

Is it too late to change the course the world is on?

That's a question that comes up more and more frequently. This week, I've heard reasons for hope, but also messages of urgency. That is, there's still time, but we need to act now. And although the problem may look overwhelming, it can be broken down — like all the tasks on our to-do lists — into manageable chunks.

First, though, it's important to understand where most of the greenhouse gases we humans produce come from and how we can set priorities for tackling them, with policies and our own actions. For an overview, check out this webinar by environmental scientist Jonathan Foley, executive director of Project Drawdown.

"Drawdown" refers to the point at which humans' greenhouse gas emissions stop increasing and begin to fall. That is the point at which we step back from the edge, and Foley says it's within our grasp.

Which human activities cause the greatest greenhouse gas emissions? As it turns out, electricity and food account for nearly half.

Generating electricity produces 25% of total human-created emissions, while agriculture, food and land-use change (for instance, destroying forest for ranching or to grow crops like oil palm or soybeans) account for 24%. So doing those things more efficiently and less wastefully would go a long way toward reducing emissions, Foley reasons.

For energy, that means not only moving away from fossil fuels — something to which Illinois Catholic bishops lent their support late last month — and increasing

our use of renewable sources like the sun, wind and waves, but also retrofitting the world's buildings, so they use less energy.

For food, it means wasting less, at home and in supply lines, as well as decreasing consumption of beef and dairy products. That's partly because cattle belch methane and partly because ranching drives tropical deforestation.

While climate solutions require policy changes, there are many things we can do, as individuals and communities, by making lifestyle changes, encouraging others — and, of course, voting.

Here's what's new on EarthBeat this week:

- Speaking as part of the TEDx Countdown on climate change, Pope Francis said humanity has one clear goal: "To build, within the next decade, a world where we can meet the needs of the present generations, including everyone, without compromising the possibilities of future generations." Cindy Wooden at Catholic News Service reports that for the pope, all hands, minds and hearts are needed, and time is of the essence. "Each one of us can play a valuable role if we all set out today — not tomorrow, today," he said.

- Climate change takes an emotional toll. We live in a time of growing eco-anxiety, writes Gary Gardner of GreenFaith in a commentary for EarthBeat. He finds inspiration in the concept of radical kinship, a sense of being family with the other human and non-human beings with whom we share the planet.

- Meanwhile, Archbishop Gabriele Caccia, the Vatican's permanent observer to the U.N., reminded that body that climate change poses "an existential threat" to millions, "attacking their already precarious habitats and destabilizing their vulnerable economies, societies, agriculture and food systems," Catholic News Service reports.

- The lopsided impact of the problem is underscored by a new Oxfam study, which found that the richest 1% of the world's population — some 63 million people — generates 15% of global greenhouse gas emissions. That's twice the amount caused by 3.1 billion of the world's poorest people, writes Joseph Opoku Gakpo for the Cornell Science Alliance, as part of the Covering Climate Now reporting initiative, in which EarthBeat also participates.

- Especially hard hit is Africa, reports Frederick Nzwili for Catholic News Service. Some 20 million people in East Africa who were facing severe food shortages because of drought and flooding are now bracing for a possible second wave of locusts.

- Switzerland's bishops have joined Protestant leaders to support legislation that would require Swiss companies to uphold environmental and human rights standards everywhere in the world where they work or face sanctions, writes Jonathan Luxmoore for Catholic News Service.

- And in Louisiana, as she cleaned up branches torn from her oak trees by hurricanes, youth minister Lindy Brasher was reminded that God also calls us to shed the old so new growth can sprout. She shares her reflection for EarthBeat's Small Earth Stories.

And here's some of what's new in other climate news:

- A new study shows that we could provide equitable access to energy for the world's population even if we reduce fuel consumption by about 60% by 2050, reports Sara DeWeerdt at The Anthropocene. The researchers' scenario for what they call "decent living energy" globally would allow for one laptop with internet per household, a phone for everyone age 10 and up, universal access to education and healthcare, and keeping indoor temperatures at 68 degrees Fahrenheit. That means wealthier people would have to sacrifice a bit for all to gain.

- As fires become increasingly widespread and hazardous in the Amazon basin, researchers are teaming up with small farmers to find ways to reduce burning and manage fire safely, Letícia Maria Klein and Thiago Medaglia report for Mongabay and the Pulitzer Center.

- The pandemic has grounded many of us, but not 4BBRW, a male bar-tailed godwit who flew non-stop from Alaska to New Zealand in 11 days — a 12,000-mile journey. Scientists say he probably never slept and never stopped flapping. That weird name? It refers to the four bands — two blue, a red and a white — on his leg.

Upcoming events:

- NCR columnist Franciscan Fr. Dan Horan and other experts will explore how the world has received Pope Francis' encyclical Laudato Si', in a virtual panel at 7 p.m. eastern time on Oct. 19.
- For those who are weighing their values and their vote, Creighton University is offering a webinar on "Voting and Catholicism: A Critical Discussion of Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship," at 7 p.m. central time on Oct. 20.

For more information about these and other upcoming events, check out our list here. And if your group is planning an event, you can submit it for inclusion on that page, too.

Closing beat:

EarthBeat celebrates its first birthday at the end of this month, and we'd like you to help us chart our course for the next year. What do you like most or least about EarthBeat? What would you like us to cover more? What are we missing?

Next week, we'll be sending out a survey to our readers. Please take a few minutes to respond — it will help us make sure that EarthBeat is hitting the mark. As a thank-you, you'll have a chance at a drawing for a gift card. And, of course, you can always write to us any time at earthbeat@ncronline.org.

As always, thanks for reading EarthBeat! If you like EarthBeat Weekly, why not share it with a friend? Feel free to forward this newsletter or pass along the link to EarthBeat Weekly on our website. And if you're reading this issue in your browser and would like to receive it in your inbox, you can sign up here for weekly delivery.

Barbara Fraser

NCR Climate Editor

bfraser@ncronline.org

This story appears in the **EarthBeat Weekly** feature series. View the full series.