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Nature

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scribed the environmental crisis as "a moral challenge." It called on Catholics to examine how they "use and share the goods of the earth" and how they "live in harmony with God's creation."

In the past 10 years, the awareness of a connection between religious faith and environmental issues has reached a groundswell, according to Paul Gorman, executive director of the National Religious Partnership for the Environment, based in New York.

The partnership, which began eight years ago, includes the National Council of Churches, the Evangelical Environmental Network, the Coalition on Environment and Jewish Life and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

One environmental issue that all faiths seem focused on is global warming because it "affects all of God's creation," Gorman told Catholic News Service.

Twenty years ago, when discussion about the "greenhouse effect" first began, he said, religious organizations didn't touch it, primarily because it was a complicated issue and "everyone was a little tentative about the science."

Now, religious action on it includes interfaith global warming campaigns in 18 states and a statement against global warming signed by 40 Protestant, Eastern Orthodox and Jewish leaders earlier this year.

In addition, this June the U.S. bishops approved a 15-page document calling on Americans to recognize "the seriousness of the global warming threat and to develop policies that will diminish the possible consequences of global climate change."

Gorman said the U.S. bishops' statement placed the issue of global warming in a "religious and moral context that has largely been absent" in ongoing discussions about the problem.

The statement was approved just four days after President Bush delivered a speech acknowledging the United States as "the world's largest emitter of man-



CNS photo courtesy National Park Service

A guide leads a group of visitors on snowmobiles through Yellowstone National Park before the snowmobile ban went into effect.



Reuters/CNS

made greenhouse gases."

Holy Cross Brother David Andrews, director of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference, who taught at the former Cardinal Mooney High School in Greece from

1970-72, said the issue of global warming is one of his organization's top concerns.

In a letter to President Bush following the announcement that the United States was withdrawing from the Kyoto treaty, Brother Andrews said that "climate change represents the single most comprehensive challenge to all of God's creation here on earth. It is a test of biblical covenant, a challenge of obedience to God's mandate of stewardship and a standard of justice among all God's children."

Brother Andrews said he has seen much more activity in recent years at the local church level on environmental issues. He thinks such efforts have been inspired by pastoral letters by U.S. bishops in different regions of the country that address environmental projects launched to help the environment.

That's good news for Walter Grazer, director of the environmental justice program for the USCCB, who said the goal of his department when it was founded eight years ago was not to "create a Catholic en-

vironmental movement" but to integrate knowledge of care for environment into Catholic parishes.

He said a key aspect that the church brings to environmental discussions is the perspective of human responsibility, stewardship and social justice.

"It's not just about the wilderness or the wetlands, but about communities and families," Gorman said, referring to religious involvement in environment issues.

And sometimes it's about what is happening in one's own backyard as a result of policies made in Washington, as Father Joseph Oblinger can attest.

The priest, who celebrates weekend Masses at Our Lady of the Pines in West Yellowstone, Mont., disagrees with the decision announced by the Bush administration in late June to reconsider and possibly do away with the ban on snowmobiles in Yellowstone National Park.

"People say that you really feel close to God here, enjoying God's creation," he told CNS. And that environment changes, he added, when the estimated 1,000 snowmobiles come in with their smog and noise.

Thousands of miles away in Anchorage, Alaska, Holy Cross Father LeRoy Clementich questions the need to drill for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

Father Clementich, director of pastoral education for the Anchorage Archdiocese, commented recently that he finds support in Scripture for both sides of the environmental debate.

"On the one hand one could reasonably say that the resources of the earth were made for our responsible use, let's use them," he said. "But let us ask the correlative question: Are we being responsible stewards for the future or are we simply concerned about filling our 'gas guzzlers' in our own times?"

Note to readers: Due to the low volume of letters received during the summer, we are omitting the Opinions page this week.

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