



Resolutions To Action

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The Intersection of Migration and Climate Crisis

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EXPERIENCE

For the last three years I've been ministering with the School Sisters of St. Francis in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. When I began the sisters were just completing their negotiations with Lutheran Social Services to house refugees. Three years later the sisters have had four families living in the duplex known as the "Refugee Home."

In June we invited two of the families to the motherhouse to greet them after their initial few months of adaptation. Both families are from Myanmar. Due to religious and ethnic persecution they became refugees. The younger family, a family sought refuge in Thailand for seven years. The other family came from a refugee camp in Bangladesh with three children ages seven to sixteen.

Since they have arrived the children have enrolled in school,

the moms are taking English as a Second Language (ESL) classes and the dads are fully employed. These refugees are a testimony that migrants can make it here and they can make a difference as they become more fully integrated into society.

While these families fled persecution, others are on the move because of climate change.

Eleanor Ainge Roy wrote a moving story in the [May 16, 2019 issue of the Guardian](#) about the people on one of the nine archipelagos islands known as Tuvalu. She interviewed Leitu Frank 32, who said she felt like she couldn't breathe anymore because the rising sea threatens to strangle her family.

Leitu, said, "The sea is eating all the sand. Before, the sand used to stretch out far, and when we swam, we could see the sea floor, and the coral. Now, it is cloudy all the time, and the coral is dead. Tuvalu is sinking." Tuvalu is sinking due to the effects of climate change on this tiny island on the frontline of global warming.

Roy interviewed Frank's aunt, Nausaleta Setani. Setani says, "I have been learning the things that are happening are the result of man (sic), especially [from] other countries. It makes me sad. But I understand other countries do what is best for their people. I am from a small country. All I want is for the bigger countries to respect us and think of our lives."

Their island nation is the fourth smallest in the world. Only 11,000 people live here. Tuvalu's total land area is less than 26 sq. kilometers. Most of the islands sit barely three meters above sea level. Two of Tuvalu's nine islands are on the

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verge of being swallowed by the sea.

Central America's dry corridor presents another example of climate-caused forced migration. Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras are experiencing environmental stress that is forcing rural to urban migration. An April 2019 report from the Center for Climate and Security, *Central America: Climate, Drought Migration and the Border* noted the decline in small-scale farming. "The peasants are leaving the countryside for capital cities." There many find only limited opportunity and are forced by poverty and violence to migrate once again often joining one of the caravans headed north.

SOCIAL ANALYSIS

The phenomenon of climate migrants is not new, but it has been missing from much of the migration and climate debate. Recently, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has been focused on bringing climatic and environmental factors to light to show how climate change affects human mobility, both directly and indirectly.

The [Global Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre \(IDMC\)](#) has found that 17.2 million displacements were associated with natural disasters in 148 countries and territories in 2018. The IOM reported that approximately 760,000 people in Somalia, Afghanistan, and several other countries were displaced by drought. For many there is no returning home.

Alaskans are also victims of the climate crisis. There the thawing of the permafrost is causing buckled roads and damaged buildings and

homes. The melting ice makes it harder to reach marine mammals that hunters rely on and imperils travel along roadways that were once frozen. Global warming touches everything from morning until night says Vivian Karthuis, president of the Association Village Council for 56 tribes, "Quinhagak is the tip of the iceberg."

Finally, on August 26, 2019 the world learned about the catastrophic burning of the Amazon. The phrase "our house is burning" was repeated over and over again by French President Emmanuel Macron who reminded us all that the Amazon is a critical global resource whose forests are the source of 20% of the planet's oxygen. Although, these fires may not be a directly linked to climate change, they will certainly affect the climate and health of other regions. Like the rising sea level, melting ice cap, and devastating droughts, the Amazonian fires contribute to the loss of habitats, the extinction of animals, the devastation of vegetation and forced migration.

REFLECTION

Pope Francis understands that "everything is closely related" and that "today's problems call for a vision that takes into account every aspect of the global crisis." The key concept Pope Francis talks about in chapter four of *Laudato Si* is integral ecology.

Pope Francis refers to climate change as climate crisis. We need to make the connection as to how the climate crisis is affecting global migration in all its aspects. Severe climate conditions are forcing the thousands of farmers in the poorest agricultural areas in Sub Saharan

Africa and Central America to risk everything in the hope of finding sanctuary in Europe or the United States.

The [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change \(IPCC\)](#), the United Nations body for assessing the science related to climate change, warns that the effects on climate will be catastrophic if the threshold of 1.5° C outlined in the Paris Agreement goal is crossed. Perhaps if we cannot totally mitigate the impacts of climate change, we can at least find ways to slow it down.

ACTION

- Become familiar with these two youth movements: "[Laudato Si Generation](#)" or "[FridaysForFuture](#)."
- Do you see the connection between people on the move and climate change? Do you feel the connection? Knowing we are all part of one another, how will you respond differently to this climate crisis? What one concrete step can you take to reduce its impact on migrating peoples?
- Where do you see the intersection of migration and climate, migration and racism, poverty, food insecurity and violence where you live? What actions can you join in your own home area?
- Pay attention to where your heart breaks regarding people on the move. Take one simple step to make a difference.
- Join the [Citizens Climate Lobby](#) to advocate for our common home or some other climate group in your area.
- Read *Laudato Si* and commentaries such as [Ten Green Commandments of Laudato Si](#).