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## Ten theses on climate protection

A discussion paper

29 January 2019

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## Foreword

Climate change, which is caused largely by greenhouse gas emissions, is of outstanding significance for both people and the environment. Pope Francis refers to this several times in his Encyclical *Laudato si' – On Care for Our Common Home*. Combating climate change is a major environmental challenge which affects key aspects of justice. On the one hand, this is about global and intergenerational justice. The Church takes the side of the poor, the weak and the disadvantaged. She stands up for justice, and exercises solidarity with those who are and will be most affected by climate change, now and in the future. At the same time, however, ecological justice is also at stake. The book of Genesis formulates a task for mankind to bearing responsibility for God's Creation: "The LORD God then took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden, to cultivate and care for it" (*Gen 2:15*).

The German bishops adopted a position on this issue back in 2006, with an expert text on the challenges of global climate change, and this document has lost none of its validity. Nevertheless, the Encyclical *Laudato si'* has established a new framework for this topic within the Church. In addition, recent climate developments and those in climate policy have demonstrated the need for the Church to bring the topic back to the centre stage. Enormous quantities of greenhouse gases have already been emitted in the past decades and centuries. The remaining greenhouse gas budget, which is in line with internationally-agreed climate targets, is running perilously low. The window of opportunity for Mankind to put a stop to dangerous climate change is closing rapidly.

Against this background, the Commission for Society and Social Affairs of the German Bishops' Conference requested its

Working Group on Ecological Issues to prepare an expert text on climate protection. Based on a description of the need to protect the climate, also from a socio-ethical perspective, recommendations with specific implementation steps for climate protection are presented on the basis of economic, scientific and legal considerations. Ambitious climate goals are therefore a commandment of justice, and form the basis for the preservation of Creation. Implemented consistently, they are the path to our future, which must be shaped jointly and sustainably. Germany is advised to reach the goal of attaining climate neutrality as early as possible, and by 2050 at the latest. Politicians must focus on all areas of action – energy, buildings, transport, industry and agriculture – and create a reliable long-term framework. At the same time, all people are called on to make their own individual contribution to climate protection by practising an environmentally friendly lifestyle, for example in nutrition and mobility.

My sincere thanks extend to the members of the Working Group on Ecological Issues and its Chairman, Auxiliary Bishop Rolf Lohmann, who developed this expert text. The publication is intended to clarify the significance of climate change as a challenge that transcends borders and eras, and to introduce recommendations into the public debate for those responsible in the political and social spheres, but also for each individual.

Responsibility for Creation is a central concern for the Church. She herself is prepared to make Her own contribution towards improving climate and environmental protection, and to lead by example. The German bishops therefore adopted the text entitled “Responsibility for Creation as a Mission for the Church. Recommendations for Action on Ecology and Sustainable Development for the German (Arch-)Dioceses” in the autumn of 2018. The ten specific recommendations for action relate to matters of pastoral care, diocesan administrative activities and

socio-political commitment. Where and when we ourselves act in accordance with these recommendations, we seek as a Church to do justice to our role-model function.

The Church is a bearer of hope in times of increasing cause for concern. “The Creator does not abandon us; he never forsakes his loving plan or repents of having created us”, as Pope Francis writes in his Encyclical *Laudato si’*. “Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home” (No. 13). Buoyed by such confidence, this expert text is intended as an incentive not to wallow in indifference, but to act to protect the climate.

Bonn/Essen, January 2019

A handwritten signature in black ink, starting with a plus sign followed by the name 'Franz-Josef Overbeck' in a cursive script.

Bishop Dr. Franz-Josef Overbeck

Chairman of the Commission for Society and Social Affairs of  
the German Bishops' Conference



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## Ten theses on climate protection

The ecological and social drama that is climate change, which can now be felt worldwide, is the present starting point for a re-discovery of the value of Creation and the challenges of responsibility for the future and global solidarity. In view of the need to take urgent action, the recommendations on climate protection that are set out below are intended to provide an orientation and specific impetus for these insights to be implemented, also in the context of social, economic, political and church action. They build on the expert text from the German Bishops' Conference on climate change from 2006.<sup>1</sup> This document is more topical than ever: Global warming continues to advance, posing an acute threat in more and more regions of the world.

The Papal environmental and social encyclical entitled *Laudato si'*,<sup>2</sup> the Paris Agreement on Climate Protection, and the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, therefore call for economic development to be sustainable and combined with social and ecological justice. For the Church, this is not only a matter of finding solutions to problems of global, inter-generational and ecological justice, but at the same time, it is about an indispensable witness to faith in God, who seeks the salvation of all human beings and of all Creation.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Secretariat of the German Bishops' Conference (publisher): *Climate Change: A Focal Point of Global, Intergenerational and Ecological Justice*. The German Bishops – Commission for Society and Social Affairs/Commission for International Church Affairs No. 29. 2nd, updated edition (Bonn 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis: Encyclical *Laudato si'* on Care for Our Common Home. [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/de/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/de/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html), 2015. The abbreviation LS and the respective paragraph number in the text below refer to the Encyclical.

## I. *Live Laudato si'*

Pope Francis considers today's climate change to be a "global problem with grave implications: environmental, social, economic, political and for the distribution of goods". It is said to be "one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day" (LS 25). The Encyclical considers the causes to lie in the rapid increase in emissions of greenhouse gases "released mainly as a result of human activity", particularly through the "intensive use of fossil fuels", but also stemming from deforestation and changed uses of the soil (LS 23). The Pope agrees with climate researchers and with the international community: Global warming is clearly anthropogenic, i. e. man-made.

In spite of well-founded global research on climate change and comprehensive resolutions aiming to bring about climate protection, global society has yet to succeed in effectively changing course. Against their better judgment when it comes to global warming and its devastating consequences, above all the wealthier nations and social groups are continuing along the well-trodden paths of resource overuse, excessive consumption and global injustice. They live at the expense of countless people in the countries of the South, at the expense of future generations, and of Nature itself. In this crisis that is both ecological and social, the Pope has stated that it is necessary to "intervene with others in these social dynamics", which cause poverty and environmental destruction (LS 231). The question, however, arises as to where the strength can come from to effect such social change. *Laudato si'* in particular has kindled hope among millions of people in Germany and around the world that the Church can play a decisive role.

From a Christian point of view, climate protection is a proving ground for living responsibility for Creation. The orientating

power of faith is particularly manifest in intensive processes of learning, dialogue and conversion. The Encyclical formulates numerous theological, ethical, spiritual, practical and political impulses in this regard. This can be summed up as a continuation of the Biblical message of conversion and returning to an appropriate lifestyle in the context of today's ecological-social crisis. This accordingly requires nothing less than a comprehensive cultural revolution (*LS* 114), a fundamental change to currently-prevalent models of production and consumption (*LS* 26).

## 2. Counteract dangerous climate change

The Paris Agreement on Climate Protection made it possible for the first time to conclude a general, global climate agreement aimed at bringing about a tangible limitation of the global rise in temperature. The most important greenhouse gas emitters in the world – industrialised, newly-industrialising and developing countries – have thus explicitly committed themselves to climate protection. The global goal that has been enshrined in international law is to keep global warming well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. Efforts are to be made to limit the rise in temperature to 1.5 degrees. This means that the countries of the world will have to operate and live in a climate-neutral fashion in the second half of the century at the latest.

The Paris Agreement must now be implemented rapidly by all its Parties. The focus is on nationally-defined contributions, i. e. voluntary commitments to climate protection. However, it is apparent that the commitments made so far, regarded as a whole, are far from sufficient to even come close to achieving the goal adopted in the Paris Agreement. It is therefore important to sig-

nificantly step up the respective national contributions. The industrialised countries can and must do more to achieve consistent climate protection. The obligation under international law to make efforts to consistently limit the rise in temperature to 1.5 degrees requires the industrialised nations to commit to the goal of achieving climate neutrality as early as possible, and by 2050 at the very latest. Developing and emerging countries must be supported financially and technologically through bilateral and multilateral cooperation in order to facilitate a rapid transition to a climate-neutral economy and society, and to enable them to adapt to the climate change that is already in motion.

It is the cumulative greenhouse gas emissions, and not solely the emissions in the target year, that are decisive for achieving the climate goals. This must also be taken into account consistently when setting milestones for emission reductions. Carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) plays the most important role. The remaining CO<sub>2</sub> budget is extremely limited, and many carbon sinks are also in danger of being lost. The loss and degradation of forests continues to advance alarmingly – annual emissions resulting from the loss of forests account for more than one-fifth of global greenhouse gas emissions. The same applies to soil, in which four times as much carbon is stored as in forests. As a result of urbanisation, erosion and degradation, every citizen of the world will have almost one-quarter less land at his or her disposal by 2050, and the remaining areas will have less and less CO<sub>2</sub> storage capacity, if the currently predominant intensive cultivation of land continues.

The Earth's climatic tipping points are already in danger of being exceeded, entailing irreversible changes to the natural environment and major risks for Mankind today and in the future, as well as for our fellow creatures. In line with the precautionary principle, far greater efforts must therefore be made than in the past, in order to come as close as possible to limiting the global

rise in temperature to 1.5 degrees. This is not only demanded by the Paris Agreement, but also by human rights, above all the rights to life, health and a socio-cultural subsistence minimum. The closer we come to the 1.5 degree target, the less health, environmental and social damage can be expected to ensue from climate change. Every tenth of a degree of temperature rise that is prevented means that suffering will be avoided and lives will be saved.

### **3. Prioritise global justice**

The emissions associated with the present lifestyles and economies of the rich violate the fundamental principles of justice, given that they are already undermining the existential human rights of billions of people today. Those who wish to defend the moral foundations of democracy and of a free and just world order cannot but fight with all their might for progress to be made in climate protection. Framework conditions that ensure a fair distribution of the associated burdens are not only a moral necessity, but at the same time an imperative of common sense: The later climate protection begins, the greater will be the damage caused by climate change. Because people and Nature are much more severely affected in the tropical and subtropical countries, and because the industrialised and emerging countries are the main polluters, the rich countries of the North must no longer turn a blind eye to the misery which is already so great today that many in the South are leaving their homes in desperation.

In conjunction with the existing, rapidly-developing technological possibilities, players in international climate policy within government, business and society, can already steer energy supply, and thus a significant part of economic development, in

a new direction. Policy-makers are under an obligation to systematically disclose all the environmental and social consequential costs of economic action, and to ensure by creating the appropriate framework conditions, that they are not passed on to uninvolved third parties. This is an indispensable requirement for eliminating this specific destructive side of the world economy, and for giving people in the countries of the South, future generations and non-human Nature, fair chances in life. From a Christian point of view, the ethical foundations for this are constituted by the principle of the unity of the human family and of all Creation, as well as by the obligation to serve the common good in dealing with the fundamental goods of Creation. Climate is indeed a global common good (*LS 23*), and protecting it must take centre stage in international action.

Making progress today in the areas of climate protection, energy system transformation and resource conservation calls not only for ethical appeals and political resolutions, but also for greater coherence to be achieved in coordination between different policy fields, cross-sector cooperation between policy-makers, business and society, and the creation of effective international institutions. It is equally a question of justice and political wisdom to invest more resources in mitigating climate change and adapting to its consequences. In addition, this is increasingly proving to be a major contribution towards peace-keeping and in the international fight against the causes of displacement and migration.

## **4. Implement climate targets in a credible, goal-orientated and consistent manner**

Experience with the implementation of climate goals shows that deviations are often tolerated and compromises are made too readily. Objections on the part of stakeholders from industry and society quickly lead to the withdrawal of steps towards climate protection that had been agreed upon, even though these would contribute to the common good. It will not, however, be possible to achieve the climate goals that have been set within the specified period of time if we carry on in this manner. Climate policy is only credible and viable if the agreements are implemented in a goal-orientated, consistent manner.

The consistent implementation of climate goals necessitates a broad approach. First and foremost, this includes the switch to renewable energies and greater energy efficiency as well as energy sufficiency. Renewable energies must replace fossil and nuclear energies as quickly as possible. Energy consumption must be reduced through efficiency in conversion, transport and consumption, as well as through changed lifestyles, i. e. sufficiency. This transition to a safe, environmentally friendly, affordable energy system promises great opportunities, but must be cushioned in both economic and social terms. Economic performance and social acceptability are of central importance when it comes to implementing the energy system transformation.

All fields of action must be examined: The energy sector, buildings, transport, industry and agriculture must be designed to be climate-friendly. In addition, each and every individual can accelerate social change by adopting a more sustainable lifestyle.

This also means less meat and fewer dairy products, more food from sustainable production and climate-friendly mobility. The State should support its citizens in climate protection and create an appropriate framework. Cities and municipalities play a key role in both climate protection and climate cooperation in this context.

The implementation of the climate goals, however, also means that Germany, just as the other economically-powerful countries whose prosperity growth was to a large extent accompanied by extensive greenhouse gas emissions, will, in accordance with the Paris Agreement, “support developing country Parties for the effective implementation of this Agreement”,<sup>3</sup> and in particular in reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

## 5. Take the lead in Europe and around the world

The European industrial nations, and in particular Germany as the EU Member State with the strongest economy, are particularly responsible for climate protection. Together with the other developed countries, and as agreed in the Preamble to the Paris Agreement, they should take the lead in developing and establishing sustainable lifestyles, as well as sustainable consumption and production patterns. The German Climate Protection Plan 2050 refers to the Paris Agreement, and orientates German climate protection policy towards the guiding principle of largely achieving greenhouse gas neutrality by 2050. Consequently, Germany should commit to achieving greenhouse gas neutrality as early as possible, and by 2050 at the latest. This would make

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<sup>3</sup> *Paris Agreement* in: Official Journal of the European Union L 282 of 19 October 2016, Article 3.

Germany a pioneer in Europe and across the world. The European goals must also be tightened up in line with the Paris objectives. Germany should in particular advocate stricter European emission reduction targets to be achieved as early as 2030, as these also support the ambitious goals of Germany's energy system transformation. Joint European initiatives such as an agreed minimum price for CO<sub>2</sub>, the coordinated expansion of renewable energies, cooperation on the transformation of transport systems, and cooperation on investments and the financing of this transformation, also seem particularly worthwhile.

Against this background, the commitment of policy-makers to a German Climate Protection Act, in order to ensure compliance with climate protection targets and to define a long-term target range in line with the Paris Agreement, is also to be welcomed unreservedly. The legally-binding framework for implementation must now establish clear institutional procedures and responsibilities. Climate protection stakeholders require planning reliability beyond the next legislative periods, not only for 2030, but also for 2050. The goal of achieving climate neutrality as early as possible will create such reliability. The reliable long-term framework of climate protection also includes a price for CO<sub>2</sub> that is based on the damage caused by climate change, and can therefore already be included by companies in their economic calculations.

## **6. Opt out of fossil fuels**

Climate neutrality means phasing out fossil fuels. The simplest way to do this is probably through electricity generation, as shown by the rapidly-increasing share of renewable energies in this sector. It is therefore important that the prospects and timing of phasing out coal-fired power generation are quickly clari-

fied by social consensus, and that the exit path be ambitious. The challenges of climate protection are even greater when it comes to buildings, transport, industry and agriculture.

The next few years will see old and no longer profitable anthracite- and lignite-fired power plants leaving the market for economic reasons alone, and this should be taken advantage of in order to accelerate the phasing-out of coal, and to achieve the climate target in the electricity sector. Coal-fired power generation on today's scale is not necessary to ensure a secure electricity supply in Germany. The phasing out of coal-fired power generation will gradually reduce German electricity exports in particular.

The expansion of renewable energies is of particular importance for the success of the energy system transformation and in order to phase out coal.<sup>5</sup> The interim target of 65 percent for renewable energies in the electricity sector by 2030 is an important political milestone, but the ultimate target must be 100 percent renewable energy generation. Natural gas can guarantee security of supply in the electricity system during the transition phase, but so-called green gas (synthetic natural gas produced from renewable electricity) should support decarbonisation in the electricity and building sectors as soon as possible. But if gas-fired power plants are to really pay off, further shortages on the electricity market and higher CO<sub>2</sub> prices are needed. Synthetic fuels and electric mobility, based on electricity from re-

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Secretariat of the German Bishops' Conference (publisher): *Committed to God's Creation. Suggestions for a Sustainable Approach to Energy*. Working Papers No. 245en (Bonn 2011) as well as Secretariat of the German Bishops' Conference (publisher): *Empfehlungen zur Energiewende*. The German Bishops – Commission for Society and Social Affairs No. 37 (Bonn 2013).

newable sources, can put an end to dependence on oil in the transport sector.

## 7. Create the right framework

In addition to a binding legal framework, the restructuring of the energy system also requires a sensible, stable, long-term economic framework, and not just a multitude of piecemeal measures. The first step is to reduce climate-damaging subsidies, for example in the consumption of electricity and energy, diesel, kerosene or coal. As far as possible, a streamlined energy price system should assign a largely uniform price to all greenhouse gas emission sources in relation to their climate impact. Additional price incentives are also necessary in order to achieve Germany's short- to medium-term goals, for example in the shape of an energy tax that is geared to CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, or as a minimum price in EU emissions trading. As coal is phased out, the CO<sub>2</sub> price will prevent an administrative phase-out path for coal merely increasing the capacity utilisation of the remaining coal-fired power plants. This would hardly benefit the climate.

A uniform CO<sub>2</sub> price would also improve the competitive position of renewable energies vis-à-vis fossil energies and facilitate the intended restructuring of the energy industry. In return, other levies and charges could be reduced at least partially. These include the electricity tax, but also other electricity price components such as the levy under the German Renewable Energy Sources Act (EEG) or grid charges, which – as joint expenditure – would not have to be apportioned to electricity. Renewable electricity could thus become cheaper and be used increasingly in all sectors. Stronger CO<sub>2</sub> pricing on the heating market and in transport would also strengthen renewable ener-

gies in these sectors and, additionally, boost sector coupling, i. e. the use of electricity from renewable energies in all sectors.

Sector coupling is only conceivable if accompanied by increasing digitalisation, which offers enormous opportunities for greater efficiency and economy in energy use. This applies not only to flexible distribution structures in the electricity grid, but also to control systems that are adapted to the needs of end consumers in areas such as thermal energy, household appliances or mobility. In addition to grid expansion, the networking of energy, information technologies and control processes (smart energy) is also necessary in order to secure supply and to provide reliable framework conditions for producers and consumers. A lean energy pricing system would support these digital business models, which, however, require IT security aspects to be taken into account, particularly in view of increasing dependences.

The reform of the energy system can be designed in a revenue neutral way, without imposing additional burdens on the final consumer, since the new climate policy framework will be more efficient in the medium and long term. However, the possibility of targeted relief must be used to compensate for or at least cushion social hardship in terms of climate justice, and to support lower-income households through social transfers during the phase of restructuring the energy system.

## **8. Involve consumers and producers**

The conversion from conventional to regenerative energy generation has accelerated significantly in recent years, partly due to the expansion targets and decisions to phase out nuclear energy. The expansion, particularly in the wind energy sector, is taking place largely in Northern Germany, whilst the demand for sub-

stitute electricity sources is greatest in the South and Southwest of the country, following the shutdown of the nuclear power plants. The volatility of renewable energies and their integration into a European electricity grid also make it necessary to enhance and expand the electricity grid in Germany. The demand for renewable energy and the breadth of its impact are therefore highly heterogeneous in terms of the extent to which citizens in Germany are affected.

This makes it all the more important to appropriately safeguard the interests of the affected citizens in order to secure the public acceptance of the energy system transformation. Acceptance of the location of renewable energy facilities and of the infrastructure that they necessitate (e. g. grid expansion) does not necessarily require the adoption of a positive attitude towards or endorsement of the planned projects, but at least that they be tolerated. Four prerequisites must be satisfied for a substantial change to be accepted in one's own living environment:

- Orientation and understanding: If there is an understanding of the value of the measure, it is more likely to be accepted. However, in order for people to understand what they can expect from planning projects, they need information about the planning options and the planning process.
- Self-efficacy: People tend to reject encroachments on their environment if they suspect that their freedom and independence with regard to their lifestyle might be adversely affected. For example, people would regard an encroachment on their habits as unacceptable interference if household or entertainment appliances were switched off when the demand for electricity is too high.

- **Positive risk-benefit ratio:** The more the planned measures bring personal benefits or are perceived as being good for groups and individuals that are particularly valued, the more acceptance can be expected. Greater acceptance can also be expected if measures enhance the common good. Risks and benefits must be conveyed openly and clearly in the communication regarding the consequences of planning in the energy sector, including when it comes to uncertainties. In addition, concerns about the health consequences of high- and very high-voltage current, some of which have still not been fully researched, must be taken seriously. At the same time, there must be a coherent weighing up against nature and landscape-conservation concerns. Similarly, compensation schemes should be discussed in order to provide adequate compensation for land that was previously used for agriculture.
- **Identity:** The more people can also identify emotionally with a measure, the more they will be willing to accept it. When drawing up new plans, information is important that helps local residents to understand the significance of the project for the further development of the local environment and to verify how well the project conforms to the self-image and perceptions of the local social and cultural environment. It is central in this respect that municipal planning autonomy be secured or restored. In particular, new operator models and ownership options should be mentioned here, which can create ownership through emotional attachment to property or rights of use (such as cooperatives, issuance of share certificates, profit sharing etc.).

If these four aspects are to be influenced to bring about greater acceptance of the planned projects, it is necessary that the information and communication offers relate at least to all four aspects. The effectiveness of communication when it comes to influencing acceptance is, however, limited. Information and communication alone are not sufficient, especially when it comes to projects that place a burden on local residents and with regard to which the general benefit to society is controversial. This includes the expansion of electricity grids or the establishment of wind farms, even if the communication is in the form of dialogue for raising the level of acceptance.

It is therefore advisable to give the people concerned greater opportunities to participate, so that they themselves can decide, on the basis of different variants, to what extent the four acceptance criteria are being met. Citizen participation activities, which are envisaged at an early stage of the planning phase, are particularly useful in this respect. Numerous studies show that people want to play an active part in the energy system transformation process, and this is also documented by a large number of citizens' initiatives motivated by energy policy. At the same time, however, opposition must not be allowed to lead to a standstill. Politicians' commitment to the common good requires them to decide in favour of the good of all, if necessary in the face of such opposition.

## **9. Practice and promote sustainable lifestyles**

In order to promote sustainable lifestyles, lifelong education for climate protection and learning about the other sustainability goals of Agenda 2030 is necessary. This conveys information, points out connections and behavioural options and, when an-

chored in the Christian faith in Creation, practices the basic attitudes of reverence, joy and gratitude, as well as respect for the living beings and goods of Creation.

Today's consumption habits are highly energy- and resource-intensive. Changing consumer habits therefore constitutes a vital contribution to climate justice. This is not a question of limiting the quality of life, but of living a different life, a good life that does not focus on possessions.

A change in thinking is also needed in our approach to nutrition and in the handling of food. Priority should be given to food that comes from sustainable agriculture, mainly produced and marketed regionally and seasonally. In the case of products originating from countries of the South, priority must be given to goods that have been produced and traded sustainably and fairly. Today's culture of throwing food away must be counteracted.

Structural support and regulatory measures, both political and social, are important and necessary for the practice of sustainable lifestyles. These include agriculture, mobility and land use:

The future of agriculture must be rural and multifunctional, with a consistent eco-social orientation towards the model of sustainability and the common good. In order to protect the climate, the emissions associated with production must be reduced and made climate-friendly in their entirety as soon as possible. Agriculture must adapt to climate change and contribute to climate protection by changing crops and cultivation methods.

The realignment of mobility would make a major contribution to the energy transition. The public infrastructure should be consistently geared towards energy-saving behaviour, e. g. by expanding public transport and the cycle path network.

The goal must also be to limit the daily additional space occupancy in Germany in accordance with the Federal Govern-

ment's Sustainable Development Strategy. Sustainable land policy and spatial planning are therefore needed at all political levels. A halt to net sealing is essential in the long term.<sup>6</sup>

## 10. Take the role-model function of the Church seriously

The goal of greenhouse gas neutrality, as well as the goals of the 2030 Agenda, also apply analogously to church action. If the Church wishes to be credible, She must lead by example, especially when it comes to climate protection. She must thus put into practice the Biblical mandate of holding God's good Creation in trust, acting according to Her own self-perception as a sacrament, i. e. as a sign and instrument of salvation. The doctrine (of the faith), proclamation and one's own practice are to be in harmony and do justice to the exemplary character of the Church. Climate protection is a lived belief in Creation, and belongs at the heart of church activities.

Christians have recognised "that their responsibility within creation and their duty towards nature and the Creator are an essential part of their faith"<sup>7</sup>. The Church is aware that Her own climate protection actions have fallen short of what is possible and necessary in some cases in the past. Decisive changes have taken place in many areas in the twelve years since the publication of the German Bishops' Conference's expert text on cli-

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Secretariat of the German Bishops' Conference (publisher): *Der bedrohte Boden*. The German Bishops – Commission for Society and Social Affairs No. 44 (Bonn 2016).

<sup>7</sup> Pope John Paul II: *Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All of Creation*. Message for the World Day of Peace on 1 January 1990, No. 15. Pope Francis takes up this passage again in *LS 64*.

mate change in 2006: Church institutions are divesting from fossil energies; local environmental management and diocesan energy management systems have been and are being introduced; comprehensive climate protection concepts are being drawn up and implemented at various structural levels within the Church. But these are only the first steps. There is a need for intensification, expansion and acceleration of church climate protection commitments. To this end, the German bishops adopted recommendations for action on ecology and sustainable development for the German dioceses at their autumn plenary assembly in 2018.<sup>8</sup>

It will be decisive for the future, firstly, to make climate protection in its many facets standard practice in everyday church practice and, secondly, and going even further, to allow the Church to be experienced as a space for real laboratories for an alternative culture of life a ‘future workshop’ for testing new social models.<sup>10</sup> Pope Francis’ demand for a holistic ecology that hears the cry of the poor and the cry of the planet in equal measure must be the guiding principle. Examples of such good practice can be taken up elsewhere and spread, whether at the local level in a parish, an educational institution or a monastery, or within overarching spaces and structures. It must not be forgotten, while consistently striving to avoid greenhouse gases, that church action will also have to adapt to the climate change that is already taking place, e.g. in flood protection, forest restructuring, the management of church land, regarding the ef-

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<sup>8</sup> Secretariat of the German Bishops’ Conference (publisher): *Responsibility for Creation as a Mission for the Church – Recommendations for Action on Ecology and Sustainable Development for the German (Arch-) Dioceses*. Arbeitshilfen No. 301 (Bonn 2018).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Secretariat of the German Bishops’ Conference (publisher): *Handeln für die Zukunft der Schöpfung*. The German Bishops – Commission for Society and Social Affairs No. 19 (Bonn 1998), No. 187.

fects of increasingly damp winters on the fabric of buildings, and in the practice of church development cooperation.

Because the Church is only one social-political player among many, She must seek to enter into a dialogue with those who work for the future of the Earth as a common home for all. She can and must speak in the social and political debates of our time as an advocate for the poor, the weak and the disadvantaged, and as an advocate for God's threatened Creation.

Not least by means of a practised 'ecological spirituality', which is neither "dissociated from the body or from nature or from worldly realities, but lived in and with them, in communion with all that surrounds us" (*LS* 216), the Church can, ultimately, create new hope in a world that is increasingly at risk of losing hope in the face of global climate change.

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