

The Energy Transition: Workers are part of the solution

MESSAGE FOR THE FIRST OF MAY 2020

Over the past few years, a widespread collective movement has developed to promote actions to protect the environment. Christ's Church knows that it too is called to be part of this movement. On this 1 May 2020, on the occasion of International Workers' Day, we wish to turn our attention to the circumstances surrounding energy transitions and their impact on the lives of ordinary people, especially workers and the poorest members of our society. The COVID-19 pandemic that we are facing at the moment only makes it all the more urgent to be committed to a just energy transition. Indeed, the current socio-economic system has contributed to the spread of the novel coronavirus, and a transformation of this system for the sake of greater justice must become a priority once things start up again following the crisis.

Though the imperative of protecting the Earth, our common home, is part of the biblical perspective, still it must be conceded that the Christian Church has been slow to make ecological considerations a fundamental component of the proclamation of the Gospel and of Christian ethics. Now that we are hearing more and more about how necessary it is to "go green", many movements of citizens are calling for an energy transition that will require an ecological conversion of our economic system and governmental policies no less than of our personal habits. The purpose of these demands is to ensure the continuity of a happy life on Earth by taking care of creation – for ourselves, for impoverished persons, and for future generations. There can be no true energy transition without international solidarity.

Along with Pope Francis, "we know that things can change" and we wish "to recognize, encourage and thank all those striving in countless ways to guarantee the protection of the home which we share. Particular appreciation is owed to those who tirelessly seek to resolve the tragic effects of environmental degradation on the lives of the world's poorest."

Encyclical *Laudato si'*, 24 May 2015, para. 13

More than 400 of Québec's municipalities, representing close to 80% of the population, have signed the *Citizens' Universal Declaration of Climate Emergency* (DCE) and many have already gotten to work in one or another of the domains covered by the DCE. More than 285 000 persons have signed the *Transition Pact*, committing themselves to reduce their ecological and carbon footprints, and on 27 September 2019, more than 500 000 citizens took part in the largest demonstration in the history of Québec. Many parish communities as well as dioceses and religious communities have taken steps towards an ecological conversion, especially in concert with the Green Churches Network. Each one of us is part of the problem, and we wish to be part of the solution. At the same time, the means employed to implement an ecological conversion must take into account the changes that it requires, which can have an impact on the world of work (transportation, manufacturing), increases in prices for consumers, professional retraining, etc.

Certain groups will be more affected than others by these changes, whether because of the energy transition needed or because of an intensification of the consequences of the ecological crisis itself. Collectively we have responsibilities towards workers in industries that are in decline or that are changing, such as forestry, fisheries, and the energy sector; towards persons displaced by natural disasters here and elsewhere in the world; towards persons who work the land, at the mercy of the elements and trade agreements. Only efforts made in solidarity and measures for a progressive transition can ensure that the most vulnerable will not be the ones to be impoverished by these changes.

Change is possible if we leave behind old habits to take on new ways of producing and consuming, by teaching people and taking care of those who are slower to take up a new way of organizing our lives. These changes are opportunities to create something new: greener and more dynamic cities; countrysides with revitalized soil and more diversified activities; shorter transportation routes for the delivery consumer goods; effective and accessible public transportation in all regions of Québec; buildings renovated to be more ecological; downtown cores where increased density will be achieved responsibly, and where attention will be given to the marginalization of impoverished persons; economies that are less dependent on polluting and non-renewable forms of energy; public services better adapted to local needs; a society that is more welcoming to displaced persons and more inclusive of the different ways citizens are able to contribute.

Jesus said, “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (*Gospel according to St. John* 10:10, NRSV). His attitudes and his actions towards people are still a call to conversion today and they usher in a New Earth where the humble are raised up and the mighty are cast down from their thrones (*Gospel according to St. Luke* 1:51-53). In the face of the climate emergency, we are essentially dealing with matters of life and salvation. For this reason, the community of believing Catholics dares to say: Let no one be left behind by the changes we must make!

This message was prepared by the *Conseil Église et Société*
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Questions for further reflection

In which aspects of the energy transition are you already involved, as an individual?

On which aspects do you wish to act?

What ecological decisions has your parish community already put into practice?

For example, is your parish community part of the Green Churches Network?

Are you among those groups or persons who are at risk in the energy transition?

If so, what manifestations of solidarity do you need?

What groups or persons are at risk in your own environment, and how might you be in greater solidarity with them?

In your experience, what state of mind is the most favourable to face the challenges that you anticipate?

How might you develop such a state of mind?