

Caring for the Earth and for one another:

Catholic Multicultural Center, local parishes lead study on a Catholic response to climate change

By Laura Green
For the Catholic Herald

MADISON — In *Laudate Deum*, Pope Francis stated, “[Climate change] is a global social issue and one intimately related to the dignity of human life.” Released in October of last year, this apostolic exhortation reminds people of faith that climate change is not only an issue of caring for God’s creation, but even more so, it is an issue of social concern for our brothers and sisters in need.

“Anyone can think that climate change is so simple; there are some who do not even notice its effects,” said Zacarias Bernabe Martinez, program coordinator with

ANADES, a non-profit in San Salvador, El Salvador. He added, “But here, the ones who are most affected are the most vulnerable. And we are not heard, when it comes to environmental issues.”

Local parishes lead study

Bernabe Martinez is one of four presenters who will be speaking at the *Laudate Deum* study series hosted by the Catholic Multicultural Center (CMC) in Madison and Pastorate 21 (Our Lady Queen of Peace and St. Thomas Aquinas Parishes) in Madison. These communities are teaming up to take a look, through a Catholic lens, at the social and environmental impacts of climate change, and



A group of women in their agroecology program (Contributed photo)



Zacarias Bernabe Martinez

learn more about how Catholics are called to respond.

Climate change effects

Bernabe Martinez explained that in recent years, the communities he serves through ANADES have seen drought followed by extreme flooding, due to climate change. Most people do not have the means to install irrigation systems, so when there is no rain, people cannot grow enough food to eat. This has spurred some people to leave their land in the countryside in search of better ways to sustain themselves and their families, migrating to cities or risking their lives to journey to the U.S.

Hunger and migration fueled by climate disasters is an issue that Bernabe Martinez sees affecting the poor and middle class exclusively.

Other concerns his communities have experienced as a result of a changing climate include lack of water for human consumption and a widening of existing gender inequalities.

Rural women, many of whom are still relegated to the role of caring for the home and children, have to work harder to put food on the table and obtain water for use at home.

His country has also experienced a rise in political

conflicts and social clashes, especially over the privatization of increasingly scarce water resources by the current government.

The challenges expressed by Bernabe Martinez offer concrete, real world examples of a 2019 statement from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops: “Our care for one another and our care for the earth are intimately bound together . . . The effects of climate change are borne by the most vulnerable people, whether at home or around the world”.

Study series

The CMC and Pastorate 21 hope to journey with participants to a deeper understanding of the social impacts of climate change happening right now. The study will feature presenters from different geographic and ethnic backgrounds to help shed light on the implications of climate change in their community, teach about the diversity of people responding to climate change, their innovative solutions, and let participants know what they can do to support them.

“Our goal at ANADES is to generate social change, including in the administration of our natural resources,” explained Bernabe Martinez. He said he would like to see

the creation of policies — both at home and in wealthier, more powerful countries such as the U.S. — that promote food security and access to clean water for everyone. He also strives to raise awareness among decision-makers regarding climate change prevention, resilience, and the need to act. At its core, for him climate change is an issue of justice and faith.

“We have a special commitment as Christians,” commented Bernabe Martinez. “When God calls me home, I am not going to be able to say that I alone changed the world for the better . . . but I will be able to say that I tried my best.”

If you want to hear Bernabe Martinez and other presenters from close to home and around the world speak, this four-week study is free and all are welcome to participate. It will take place Wednesday evenings from Jan. 17 through Feb. 7 from 6:30 to 7:35 p.m. on Zoom. For more details or to register, contact Laura Green at the Catholic Multicultural Center at Laura@cmcmadison.org or 608-441-1180.

To learn about the work and mission of ANADES, visit anades.org/wp/

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