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New Survey: Majority of Maryland Catholics Believe Climate Change is Happening and Support State and Local Policies to Curb Harmful Effects

BALTIMORE, MD – In time for Pope Francis' visit to the Maryland area this week, George Mason University and Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health [released 2015 survey data](#) showing an overwhelming majority of Maryland's Catholics believe climate change is happening, will harm the health of their communities and support state and local climate and energy policies to address its impacts. The survey of more than 1,500 Maryland residents was conducted on behalf of the Climate Communication Consortium of Maryland from April 11 to June 24, 2015 .

"These results bear out what we have seen in our work with Catholic parishes across the state of Maryland, and in conversations with more than 50 local leaders about what the Pope's teachings mean locally," said Joelle Novey, director of Interfaith Power & Light (DC.MD.NoVA). "Maryland's Catholics accept the scientific consensus on climate change, understand the harm that a damaged climate is already doing to our neighbors and the natural world, and feel called by their faith to affirm life by responding and taking action."

More than half of Catholic residents surveyed report that members of their households, people in their communities and they themselves are moderately or very vulnerable to the health effects of climate change. In addition, a majority of those surveyed said climate change will make the following health problems more common in Maryland: injuries from storms or other extreme weather (52 percent), heat stroke (54 percent), respiratory and breathing problems (57 percent) and allergies (68 percent).

"As leaders of faith we are concerned when we see that people do not have the means to survive in vulnerable areas," said Father Juan J. Molina, OSST, Order of the Most Holy Trinity, Baltimore. "As sea level rises, floods increase and the most vulnerable people are those who suffer most."

Maryland is one of a handful of states leading the way with a state-mandated greenhouse gas reduction goal of 25 percent by 2020. During the 2016 Maryland General Assembly session, the law responsible for that goal, the 2009 Greenhouse Gas Reduction Act, is up for renewal.

"These survey results demonstrate that Catholics in Maryland not only recognize the effects of climate change on public health, they want to see state policies such as promotion of local agriculture, energy efficiency, and renewable energy that support healthy people and healthy environments," said George Mason University Professor and Director of the Center for Climate Change Communication Edward Maibach, MPH, PhD.

Of the Maryland Catholics surveyed, 69 percent support local and state governments taking action to protect their communities against harm caused by climate change, 78 percent support energy efficiency rebates, 73 percent support incentives for renewable energy and 84 percent strongly support the promotion of local agricultural products. In addition, 76 percent would like to see the current state mandate of 20 percent for renewable energy generation strengthened.

"The faith community is a tremendous resource for mounting effective responses to the environmental challenges we face, said Peter Winch, MD, MPH, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. "The survey clearly demonstrates their engagement and commitment."

Follow #cleanermdnow or visit www.climatemaryland.org to learn more about Maryland's actions to address the impacts of climate change.

The study was fielded by George Mason University and Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health on behalf of the Climate Communication Consortium of Maryland. The response rate to the mail survey of a random selection of state households was 27 percent with a total sample of 1,547 respondents, including 346 who described themselves as Roman Catholic. The unweighted sample margin of error for Catholics is +/- 5.27 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence interval. The state data is weighted in accordance with U.S. Census population distributions for regional distribution, gender, age and education. The study was funded by the Town Creek Foundation of Easton, MD.

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