

CLEAN AIR AND BLUE SKIES

The International Day of Clean Air for Blue Skies is celebrated annually on 7 September.

Strolling through the park this morning I was delighted by the scent of eucalyptus and lemon myrtle, wildflowers mingled with the earthy smells of surrounding farmlands, a whiff of woodsmoke from the neighbour's chimney and the heady perfume of early flowering jasmine growing on a fence. After a rather cool night, I enjoyed the warm sunshine and fresh air. I live in a small village on the outskirts of a large city. We don't have a great deal of air pollution except during bushfires, or when farmers are burning off, harvesting or ploughing fields.

Air pollution is however, one of the biggest environmental health risks, and avoidable causes of death and disease globally. Tiny, invisible particles of pollution penetrate deep into our lungs, bloodstream and bodies and are responsible for about one-third of deaths from stroke and lung cancer, as well as one quarter of deaths from heart attack. It is a cause of asthma and chronic respiratory illnesses. Particularly in developing countries, air pollution disproportionately affects women, children and the elderly, especially in low-income populations as they are often exposed to high levels of indoor air pollution from cooking and heating with wood fuel and kerosene.

Air pollution exacerbates climate change, causes economic losses, and reduces agricultural productivity. Poor air quality is a challenge in the sustainable development for all countries, but in particular in cities and urban areas in developing countries, with levels of air pollution higher than limits set out in the World Health Organization air quality guidelines. The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development document entitled "[The future we want](#)," promotes sustainable development policies that support healthy air quality.

What can we do? Call upon governments and corporations to adopt sustainable policies, and as individuals, be aware of actions we can take to reduce our contribution to air pollution. Small changes will help. Improve indoor air quality by ventilating your rooms, use approved wood heaters, grow house plants, and avoid smoking. Limit the use of your car, switch off instead of idling, and always re-fuel after dusk. Avoid using polluting chemicals and dispose of waste thoughtfully.

Climate Change must be taken seriously. From shifting weather patterns that threaten food production, to rising sea levels that increase the risk of catastrophic flooding, the impacts of climate change are global in scope and unprecedented in scale. Without drastic action today, adapting to these impacts in the future will be more difficult and costly. By tackling air pollution, we can secure healthy air for all.

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*May we always see the world through the eyes of Christ, speak to those we meet
with the words of Christ, and take with us on our journey the peace of Christ*

