

January 29, 2013

The Honorable Chris Christie
Office of the Governor
P.O. Box 001
Trenton, NJ 08625

Dear Governor Christie,

The three-month anniversary of Superstorm Sandy prompts us, as leaders of various Franciscan Provinces and Congregations represented in the Northeast United States, to write to you. Our parishes, schools, and urban outreach community centers minister to more than one hundred thousand people in New York and New Jersey. Hurricane Sandy impacted the lives of many of them, including thousands of parishioners of St. Francis of Assisi Church in Beach Haven, New Jersey who were forced to abandon their homes, as well as the church itself, which was left under three feet of water. We grieve for the people of New Jersey and New York who suffered such heavy losses as a result of the epic storm. Nearly 100 human lives were lost in the U.S., and countless homes and other valuable properties were destroyed. Entire neighborhoods and parts of the metropolitan area were paralyzed for days, with power lost to millions of citizens.

We want to thank you for the hard work, personal involvement and heart-felt compassion you have shown the people of New Jersey during Hurricane Sandy and in its aftermath. Given how highly polarized the politics in our country has become, especially around the issue of global climate change, we particularly want to applaud you for your willingness to put the American people ahead of ideologies and partisan politics. Your actions are a great sign of hope to us and to millions of people across our country.

Recently, a number of Franciscan entities across the country signed the attached letter to President Obama urging him to demonstrate strong leadership by addressing climate disruptions like Superstorm Sandy. The letter calls on the President to host a national summit to mobilize the American people and our institutions to engage in the development and implementation of efforts to address climate preparedness, resilience building and emission reductions. A representative of Franciscan Action Network presented this letter to White House officials at a meeting attended by a wide range of civic, business and religious leaders. We understand that the Administration is seriously considering the summit as one possible way to spark a national conversation on climate change.

We hope and pray that you will join the governors of Vermont, Maryland and Colorado in calling President Obama to host this summit, thereby signaling to the American public that climate change is indeed a defining issue of our time. Your personal engagement and leadership will be an important factor in these efforts to rebuild the lives of those victimized by Superstorm Sandy, engender a greater sense of community and common purpose, modernize our infrastructure and invest in climate change mitigation and preparedness. The need for additional green energy projects, new efforts to safeguard the environment and create good jobs, and care for the most vulnerable among us is also paramount. The summit would be a wonderful opportunity for all of us to work together, forge a new vision, and improve and protect the lives of millions of people.

The time is right for this type of work. Superstorm Sandy was an unprecedented natural disaster that left the people of New Jersey with a new sense of vulnerability. However, it also has made us more determined to look critically at the extreme weather events that occur more and more frequently in our country and abroad, and to draw conclusions regarding some of their root causes.

2012 produced the hottest temperatures ever recorded in the contiguous United States, with a heat wave in March throughout much of the country, fierce wildfires in Colorado, and severe drought in the Corn Belt. Over the last year, millions of people across the globe have been seriously impacted by a similar, troubling pattern of climate disruptions, as exemplified by extreme flooding in Australia, China and the Philippines, and severe droughts in

northeast Brazil and in the Sahel region of Africa, where an estimated 10 million people continue to face crop failures and grave food insecurity.

Each of these tragic extreme weather events – whether in the Northeast of the U.S. or the Sahel region of Africa – puts a human face on global climate change, goads our collective conscience and calls for visionary leadership and bold action.

The dependence of the world’s economy on fossil fuel with its resulting heavy greenhouse emissions has put millions of people in a very precarious position. The recently released DRAFT National Climate Assessment, put together by dozens of the country’s top climate experts, makes clear that if we stay anywhere near our current emissions path, we are headed for a devastating 9°F to 15°F warming over most of the United States in this century, with ever-worsening extreme weather, heat waves, deluges and droughts. The report makes clear that “no part of the nation is safe” from man-made climate change. As the polar ice caps continue to melt and sea levels to rise, and as climate change legislation remains stuck in partisan gridlock, our country and the rest of the world continue on a trajectory toward global climate catastrophe.

Superstorm Sandy should be a wake-up call for all. It is incumbent upon all of us – elected officials, civic, business and religious leaders – to work together, across any divides, to seek and to implement measures that would ameliorate climate disruptions and put us on the path toward a sustainable, prosperous future.

Finally, as Catholics, shaped in a particular way by the life, vision and values of St. Francis of Assisi, we are compelled to speak on the religious and moral dimensions of Superstorm Sandy and on how we ought to respond to it.

The basic tenets of our Judeo-Christian Franciscan tradition hold that God speaks to us through the natural world and Holy Scripture; that God has a special concern for the suffering and powerless; and that we are called to partner with God by living with compassion, striving for justice, and caring for the natural world. For the past 800 years, Franciscans have lived out that tradition, resolutely building bridges towards a more equitable, peaceful and hopeful future. Now, especially in light of Superstorm Sandy, the Franciscan tradition calls us to overcome fear, face the truth about global climate change, and reach out to the victims of current climate disruptions and defend and foster life.

The Franciscans friars, sisters and lay partners who minister around the world already have witnessed firsthand the tragic consequences of climate change in the daily lives of people living in poverty. Many Franciscans work alongside organizations like Catholic Relief Services to help communities adapt to the consequences of global climate change and mitigate its effects.

Above all, however, in light of Hurricane Sandy, the Franciscan tradition invites people of good will to work together to harness the ample goodness, ingenuity, spiritual power and pragmatism of the American people so that we might act with prudence, overcome polarization, and move toward solutions.

Please let us know if we can be of any assistance to you. Once again, thank you for all that you have done to help the victims of Sandy and for your demonstrable willingness to help forge a national consensus on climate disruption.

Peace and all good,

Franciscan Leadership Representing Ministries in the Northeast United States

Sr. Nancy Marie Jamroz, CSSF
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Felician Sisters Leadership Team

Very Rev. John O’Connor, OFM
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Franciscan Friars (OFM)
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Very Rev. Primo Piscitello, OFM
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Immaculate Conception Province

Very Rev. Justin Biase, OFM Conv.
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Sr. Margaret Mary Kimmins, OSF
Congregational Minister
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P.S. Any response to this letter may be sent c/o Holy Name Province JPIC Office, 504 Hexton Hill Road, Silver Spring, MD 20904 or jplic@hnp.org.

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