

An underwater photograph of a vibrant coral reef. The right side of the image shows a dense, vertical structure of coral in various shades of brown, tan, and blue. The left side is filled with a large school of small, bright red fish swimming in clear blue water. The overall scene is rich in color and detail, representing a healthy marine ecosystem.

The 30x30 Target Ocean Target

Why Protecting 30% of our Oceans Aligns With Spiritual Values

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Faiths for UNOC3



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Overview

Faith communities are a powerful yet often overlooked force for ocean conservation. With deep-rooted moral authority, vast global networks, and strong connections to coastal communities, religious institutions represent an underutilized resource for marine conservation, with 85% of the world's population adhering to faith traditions.

These voices offer unique contributions through their established networks, demonstrated capacity to influence policy, and ability to sustain long-term commitments.

The 2025 UN Ocean Conference (UNOC3) in Nice, France this June provides a critical platform for faith voices to shape marine protection policy, influence national commitments for 30x30 goals, and ensure equity in conservation frameworks. Religious leaders bring moral authority that can transform negotiations while their institutions provide the community trust and networks needed for implementation.

Faiths for UNOC3 is a multifaith campaign bringing faiths to the forefront of marine protection at this conference. Supported by Bloomberg Ocean Initiative and Oceans5, the campaign is working to ensure that faith leaders help shape global ocean policies, champion conservation goals, and advocate for equitable, inclusive solutions.

The 30×30 Target: A Call to Action

What is 30×30?

30×30 is a global target to protect and conserve at least 30% of the world’s land, freshwater and ocean by 2030. This ambitious goal was adopted under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework in December 2022, representing one of the most significant conservation commitments in history.

The science is clear, as documented by numerous peer-reviewed studies from institutions like the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES): effective marine protection is vital for long-term economic, social and planetary wellbeing. Research from marine biologists, oceanographers, and climate scientists demonstrates that protecting at least 30% of ocean ecosystems is necessary to:

				
Restore depleted fish populations	Preserve marine biodiversity	Build resilience against climate change impacts	Secure food supplies for coastal communities	Maintain carbon sequestration in marine habitats

Communities around the world and the future of our planet depend on the recovery and health of the ocean.



Current Status

Currently, only 8.3% of the global ocean has some form of protection, with just 2.8% under effective protection that meaningfully benefits biodiversity. At the current rate of progress, we will reach only 9.7% protection by 2030 - far short of the 30% target.

The protection gap is particularly acute in international waters (the “high seas”), which make up nearly two-thirds of the global ocean but have less than 1.5% under any form of protection. Without significant acceleration of marine protection efforts, the world will fail to meet this critical conservation goal.

Visit: <http://30x30.skytruth.org>

Why 30×30 Matters for Faith Communities






For faith communities, 30×30 represents:

- 🌀 **A Moral Imperative:** Many faith traditions teach the sacred duty of environmental stewardship and responsible care for creation. The rapid degradation of marine ecosystems calls for urgent action aligned with these spiritual principles.
- 🌀 **Community Protection:** Coastal communities, often home to religious institutions, face existential threats from rising seas, declining fish stocks, and polluted waters. Marine protected areas help safeguard these vulnerable populations.
- 🌀 **Intergenerational Responsibility:** Protecting ocean ecosystems ensures resources for future generations, honoring the spiritual obligation to care for those who come after us.
- 🌀 **Social and Environmental Justice:** Marine protection must include the rights and voices of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, reflecting faith traditions’ commitment to human dignity and equitable access to resources.



The Scientific Case for 30x30

The 30x30 target isn't arbitrary—it's based on extensive scientific research. Studies published in prominent journals like Science and Nature indicate that protecting 30% or more of marine ecosystems:

	Increases fish biomass by an average of 670% compared to unprotected areas
	Preserves genetic diversity essential for species adaptation to climate change
	Enhances ecosystem resilience against ocean acidification and warming
	Creates spillover benefits for fisheries adjacent to protected areas
	Safeguards critical carbon sinks in seagrass meadows, salt marshes, and mangroves

The International Panel on Ocean Sustainability (IPOS), launched at UNOC3, will further strengthen the scientific foundation for marine protection targets.



30×30 Policy Priorities and Faith Perspectives

1. Include ambitious and effective marine biodiversity conservation targets and actions within their National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) to help meet the global 30×30 marine goal.

Faith communities can advocate for stronger NBSAPs in their countries, bringing moral weight to calls for ambitious marine protection. Religious institutions often hold positions of trust and influence with governments and can use this standing to encourage meaningful ocean conservation commitments. Faith-based educational networks can help explain the importance of these technical policy documents to broader audiences.

2. Urgently increase the scale and pace of establishing new marine protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs), prioritizing areas of high ecological integrity, to achieve 30×30 in the ocean, in concert with initiatives led by Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

Faith communities have deep connections with coastal communities and Indigenous Peoples. They can help bridge traditional ecological knowledge with conservation planning, ensuring that new marine protected areas respect cultural values while achieving ecological goals. Religious institutions own approximately 8% of global habitable land, including many coastal areas, giving them a direct stake in marine conservation.

3. Commit to ratify the High Seas Treaty by June 2025, and to accelerate progress to designate and implement all high seas MPA priority sites by 2030, including existing proposals ready to be adopted under other regional treaties.

Faith communities can use their global networks to advocate for High Seas Treaty ratification across multiple countries simultaneously. Religious leaders can frame ocean commons protection as a matter of global moral intergenerational responsibility. Faith-based educational institutions can help explain complex international ocean governance in accessible terms.

4. Improve the effective management of new and existing protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, ensuring harmful and destructive activities like bottom trawling are excluded, both in national waters and the high seas.

Faith communities can promote ethical consumption practices that reduce demand for unsustainably harvested seafood. Religious institutions can use their moral authority to challenge destructive fishing practices and advocate for stronger enforcement in protected areas. Faith networks can monitor implementation, ensuring accountability for marine protection commitments.

5. Ensure that sufficient and durable financing for marine protection and conservation is included by all donor countries, multilateral institutions, and other financial partners when fulfilling obligations towards annually contributing \$20B by 2025 and \$30B by 2030, mobilizing \$200B annually by 2030, and ensuring direct access to inclusive financing for Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

Faith communities manage approximately 10% of global financial investments (Faith Invest) and can align these resources with ocean conservation. Religious institutions can advocate for equitable distribution of conservation financing to developing nations and local communities. Faith-based development networks can help channel resources to community-led marine conservation initiatives.



Faith-Based Actions for 30x30

Religious communities can contribute to the 30x30 target through various practical actions:

In Religious Facilities and Lands

1. **Protect Coastal Properties:** Designate faith-owned coastal lands as conservation areas
2. **Sustainable Practices:** Implement plastic-free policies in religious buildings
3. **Green Infrastructure:** Install water management systems that prevent runoff pollution
4. **Sacred Spaces:** Create “ocean sanctuaries” that combine spiritual and ecological significance

In Religious Communities

1. **Education:** Integrate ocean conservation into religious education programs
2. **Consumption:** Promote sustainable seafood and reduce plastic use among adherents
3. **Mobilization:** Organize community coastal cleanup days as spiritual practice
4. **Advocacy:** Encourage congregation members to contact elected officials about 30x30

In Broader Society

1. **Investment:** Shift faith-based institutional investments toward ocean-friendly businesses
2. **Partnerships:** Collaborate with scientific and conservation organizations
3. **Media Engagement:** Share faith perspectives on ocean conservation through various channels
4. **Policy Advocacy:** Support ocean protection legislation and international agreements

Connect with Faiths for UNOC3

The ocean—source of life, regulator of climate, and connector of cultures—calls us to a higher standard of care than political expediency alone can inspire. Through Faiths for UNOC3, spiritual communities articulate what scientific data alone cannot: that protecting our shared waters honors our deepest commitments to justice, compassion, and intergenerational responsibility.



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Disclaimer

These policy and action briefs reflect the policy landscape as of April 2025. They will be updated periodically as developments occur prior to UNOC3 and beyond as ocean policy continues to evolve. We welcome feedback and suggestions from faith communities to improve these resources and ensure they best serve your needs for ocean advocacy, both for the 2025 conference and for long-term engagement with marine conservation efforts. Please contact us at crew@oceans.faith with your input