

Laudato Si'

Caring for our Common Home

When naming his recent encyclical, Pope Francis took inspiration from a hymn written in the 13th century by St Francis of Assisi. However, it was his use of more modern terminology that really grabbed the headlines.

Pope Francis's well-measured statements and pronouncements always attract attention but when the Pope warns that the world 'is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth', people really sit up and take notice.

The unusually strong and direct language was reflective of Pope Francis's exacerbation at the current condition of our planet and of the likely impacts for life on earth unless immediate action is taken to address humanity's current relationship with it.

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis calls for action at local, national and international levels to combat ecological destruction, and in particular the future threat and current reality of climate change. The Encyclical, which is addressed to 'every person who lives on this planet,' clearly aligns the Catholic Church with the growing movement calling for urgent changes to lifestyles and energy consumption in order to safeguard the future of the planet.

Speaking in the strongest terms yet in defence of the environment as 'our common home', Pope Francis warns of the unprecedented destruction of ecosystems as a result of human activity, clearly outlining the threats to future generations as a result of our actions.

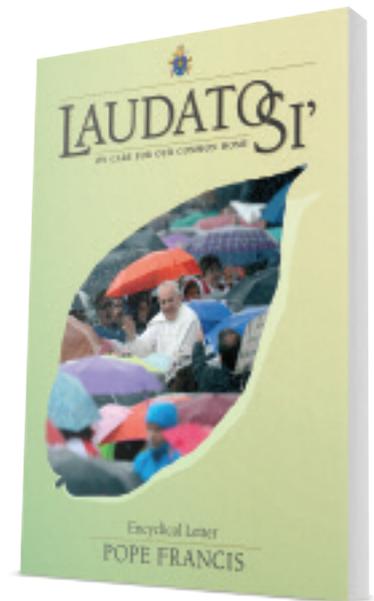
Calling for an 'integral ecology', Pope Francis underscores the human roots of the current ecological crisis in social, political and economic structures. He points to the need for a radical shift in direction in political and economic priorities in order to meet the needs of the poorest, while also warning that our current lifestyles and consumption patterns are unsustainable.

The Encyclical, which is one of the most important Church documents in a generation, should mark a turning point in the global response to environmental justice, and particularly climate change. It is a powerful wake-up call to a world sleep-walking into disaster. Pope Francis has clearly aligned the Catholic Church with calls for urgent political action to reduce carbon emissions and set the world on the path to a sustainable future.

Trócaire is dealing with the consequences of climate change on a daily basis. Drought, flooding, storms and forced migration are all on the rise. Although we are insulated from the worst impacts in Ireland, we must not forget that hundreds of millions of people around the world are struggling to survive in great part due to the changing climate.

The release of the Pope's encyclical was extremely timely. 2015 is a vital year for the future of our planet, with a number of extremely important international summits taking place.

In September the UN hosts the Sustainable Development Goals summit,



which will outline global anti-poverty priority areas. Climate change is set to feature highly on the list in recognition of the fact that it is a dominant driver of poverty across the developing world. That meeting will be followed in December by a meeting of world leaders in Paris at the UN Climate Summit. With experts warning that the window for action is rapidly closing, we need politicians in December to take the brave steps necessary for progress to avoid the worst effects of climate change.

Through his recent encyclical, Pope Francis has added the voice of the global Catholic Church to the calls for agreement on a legally-binding framework to decarbonise our societies as a matter of urgency.

At a recent conference in Maynooth organised by Trócaire, Maynooth University and St Patrick's College, experts and scientists clearly outlined the dangers of doing nothing. Professor Jean Pascal van Ypersele, Vice-Chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), warned that



levels of carbon in the atmosphere today are unprecedented. The Professor outlined how for 800,000 years the levels of carbon in the atmosphere varied between 180–280 parts per million (ppm) but now stands at 400ppm.

Professor van Ypersele described the ‘hidden message’ of the IPCC reports as being the complete lack of political will to tackle an issue that presents a threat to all forms of life on earth. Limiting global temperature rises to 2 degrees Celsius would be an enormous challenge given that two-thirds of the level of carbon compatible with restricting temperature rises to 2 degrees has already been emitted, he said.

Bishop Theotonius Gomes, Auxiliary Bishop of Dhaka in Bangladesh, outlined the threats facing his country as a result of climate change. It is estimated that a one metre sea level rise would displace 30 million people in Bangladesh. Bishop Gomes warned, ‘we will have to return much of Bangladesh to the sea’ unless there is an urgent change in attitudes to tackling the climate problem.

‘We must face the reality that industrial activity is disturbing masses of people in places like Bangladesh,’ said Bishop Gomes.

Father Sean McDonagh spoke about the ecological impacts of climate change, warning that vast numbers of species are going extinct as a direct result of human behaviour. Father Sean quoted research published recently which showed that the earth is currently experiencing its sixth extinction phase. He warned that humanity was changing the planet faster than evolution could adapt, which was driving vast numbers of species into extinction.

The science on climate change is already clear. Pope Francis has now clearly outlined the moral and spiritual arguments for taking action. This Encyclical tackles the lethargy that is felt by many people when faced with this most pressing of crises. Pope Francis makes clear that everything is interconnected. We are custodians of this planet and we have a clear moral obligation to ensure that everyone has access to its abundant resources, and that we hand it to future generations in a condition that is compatible with life.

For further information please visit trocaire.org/climatejustice

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Practical Ideas for an Irish Church response

In 2014, the Irish Catholic Bishops’ Conference issued *The Cry of the Earth*, a pastoral reflection on climate change. In this document the Bishops noted: ‘in addressing the challenge of climate change, everyone has a part to play. Every action taken in favour of a just and more sustainable environment, no matter how small, has an intrinsic value. Action at a global level, as well as every individual action which contributes to integral human development and global solidarity, helps to construct a more sustainable environment and, therefore, a better world.’

Trócaire issued *Glas*, a pastoral resource, to accompany *The Cry of the Earth*. This resource has been distributed to parishes throughout Ireland in order to give communities ideas of practical steps that can be taken to promote a healthy environment.

The *Glas* resource contains practical steps parishes can take towards fostering a greater spirit of care for our planet. These include:

- Form a group within your parish to examine the implications of *Laudato Si’*.
- Suggest that your parish pastoral council should have an environmental officer.
- Hold a parish Novena / Mission during September or October focused on the theme of ‘creation and climate justice’.
- Invite the local primary school to share their ‘green school’ story to see what you can learn from their initiatives.
- Invite a Trócaire speaker to your parish to give an insight of how climate change is impacting the world.
- Screen ‘A Drop In The Ocean’, Trócaire’s short documentary on climate change (trocaire.org/drop).
- Work with your local town council to look at environmental issues in your community.
- Create an eco-space in your parish where people can enjoy the beauty of nature.
- Study passages of scripture that deal with environmental issues. These include Colossians 1:16–17, John 1:3, Isaiah 43:20–21, Job 12:7–10, Psalm 104 and Psalm 54.

