

In June 2015 Pope Francis released *Laudato Si'*, his second encyclical. *Laudato Si'* translates to Praise be to you and focuses on the need for Christians and all humans to come together for the care of our 'common home,' the earth.

This encyclical highlighted Pope Francis's deep Franciscan passion for the environment. He has been praised for his close attention to scientific data that indicates our earth is in crisis. As, American Franciscan Sister and respected writer, Ilia Delio states "the encyclical of Pope Francis stands apart from his predecessors not only in its breadth of inclusiveness, but in its ecumenical and global appeal and its engagement with modern science."

Recently, we have seen social justice issues such as climate change, mining, and our relationship with Indigenous people moving to the forefront of Australian political discussion. This issue of *Watermark* focuses on a few key teachings from *Laudato Si'* that are relevant to our struggles for eco-justice in Australia. We hope that our politicians will learn from Pope Francis and take note of his leadership on environmental issues, combining scientific research with his core values.

"Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live," Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'* 2015

Learning from our Indigenous people

Pope Francis suggests that local cultures should play a vital role in the solution of environmental issues rather than having decisions made about them. Australia has one of the oldest living cultures in the world with a continuous relationship and connection with their land. Australia needs to learn from the Aboriginal people, their knowledge of sustainable practices and how to live with the earth.



Pope Francis explains that to Indigenous people "land is not a commodity but a gift from God and from their ancestors who rest there, a sacred space with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identity and values. When they remain on their land, they themselves care for it best."

Pope Francis says that "it is essential to show special care for indigenous communities and their cultural traditions. They are not merely one minority among others, but should be the principal dialogue partners, especially when large projects affecting their land are proposed."

In Australia by promoting native title; saying no to new mining projects; investing in renewable and sustainable energy; and learning from and consulting with Aboriginal people, we can begin to minimize the long term damage that we are causing our earth.

“Climate change is a global problem with grave implications: environmental, social, economic, political and for the distribution of goods. It represents one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day. Its worst impact will probably be felt by developing countries in coming decades,” Pope Francis Laudato Si’

Climate Change

In Australia climate change continues to stir national debate. Some of our most influential politicians, including our current Prime Minister, deny the need for urgent action when it comes to climate change. Our governments tend to look out for the interests of big business and mining companies, rather than thinking of the long term effects of mining and pollution on our country.



Pope Francis says “reducing greenhouse gases requires honesty, courage and responsibilities above all on the part of countries which are more powerful and pollute the most.”

According to Climate Action Tracker Australia is the world's 13th biggest emitter of carbon dioxide and the highest emitter per capita among the top 15. In August the Federal Government announced plans to cut carbon emissions by at least 26% of 2005 levels by 2030. The Climate Change Authority chair, Bernie Fraser, said the Authority recommends reductions of 45-63% by 2030 and the Authority believed more ambitious targets, than those adopted could be achieved at modest costs.

As a leader in the Asia Pacific region Australia needs to do more to cut carbon emissions and take climate change seriously. Our political leaders are urged to listen to Pope Francis’ advice and stand up for our earth. As Christians, our hope is that our government ministers and change mak-

Great Barrier Reef

Pope Francis says that “global regulatory norms are needed to impose obligations and prevent unacceptable actions: for example when powerful companies or countries dump contaminated waste or offshore polluting industries in other countries.”

In an Australian context this needs to be taken as a warning to do more to protect our Great Barrier Reef, which is potentially at risk from development projects.

In June 2015 the UNESCO World Heritage Committee placed Australia on probation and gave it five years to halve the deterioration of the Great Barrier Reef. The committee decided against labeling the Great Barrier Reef endangered but gave strong warnings to the Australian government that it needed to continue doing more to protect this precious ecosystem from the threat of climate change, industrial port development and water pollution.



In encouraging news, in August 2015, approval for the Carmichael coal mine in Queensland was set aside after a Federal Court case, powered by environmental advocacy groups, ruled that the Environment minister had not properly assessed the endangered species. If the mine is to go ahead GetUp! says it would mean that every year thousands of coal ships, along with massive dredging and dumping machines, would fill the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.

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“Human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start,” Pope Francis Laudato Si’

What does Pope Francis want us to do now?

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, prepared a Laudato Si’: On Care For Our Common Home discussion guide for members of faith organisations to reflect on further action after reading Laudato Si’. The questions below have been adapted from this guide to encourage faith leaders in Australia to reflect on our responsibilities and what can be done to encourage change.

- What contributions does our unique Catholic perspective bring to the environmental movement, and how can we act on this?
- How can faith communities in Australia be involved in exerting pressure on leaders and governments, both locally and nationally, to be more responsible stewards of creation?
- What ideas do you have to help civil and political leaders make decisions and policies that will benefit the generations to come, instead of only considering the short-term?
- How has the incorrect vision of humans’ role in the world, that Pope Francis describes contributed to problems such as pollution, climate change, access to safe, drinkable water, loss of biodiversity, and global inequality?
- What values should be reflected in our local, national and global relationships, and in our conversation around addressing environmental issues? What changes in attitudes, perspectives, and actions might these values lead to?



Education in environmental responsibility can directly and significantly affect the world around us. Try and make small changes such as

- avoiding the use of plastic and paper
- reducing water consumption
- Separating refuse
- showing care for other living beings
- using public transport or car pooling
- planting trees
- turning off unnecessary lights
- reusing something instead of immediately discarding it



Making changes in your workplace or Parish*

1. Ensure learning about care for God’s creation is part of formation for all people. Find educational resources online at www.usccb.org/environment
2. Do an energy audit to find where energy consumption could be reduced. This is not only good for the earth, but also for your budgets.
3. Consider going solar.
4. Implement recycling and composting.
5. At events, replace disposable cups, plates and cutlery with washable or compostable items.
6. Donate leftovers to local charities or cook only what will be reasonably consumed.
7. Offer employee benefits for public transport or carpooling.
8. Conserve electricity during non business hours.
9. Plant trees on your property.
10. Find out what environmental efforts are happening in your local community.

*Taken from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Laudato Si’: On Care For Our Common Home Discussion Guide

“We are not God. The earth was here before us and it has been given to us,” Pope Francis, Laudato Si’