

Remarks of Bishop Richard Pates  
July 2, 2015  
Press Conference  
“Laudato Si” encyclical

As bishop of Des Moines, and as the former chair and continuing member of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee on International Justice and Peace, I have witnessed firsthand the pain and suffering of extreme weather conditions.

During my three years as Chair of the bishops’ committee, I traveled to 23 basically developing countries to show solidarity and support on behalf of the U.S. Catholic Church. It was heartbreaking to see our brothers and sisters struggle. Africa is particularly vulnerable to climate change. Many farmers, who depend on rain, have seen their rains decrease dramatically and some countries expect to see a 50 percent reduction in their crops within the next five years. It’s a disaster in the making, as rural African families produce 80 percent of their continent’s food supply.

Environment and climate issues are also critically important in Latin America, particularly Central America where I have visited. Pollution and ecosystem decline in rivers can have dangerous consequences throughout several countries as they share common water sources.

As I explained at the World Food Prize last fall, climate change has also fueled human conflict. The 2003 violent conflict in Darfur, Sudan was triggered by drastic drought conditions that began 20 years earlier. With no pasture lands for herders to feed their animals, they went to the farms, which were overrun by the famished animals. Farmers attacked the animals, the herders retaliated against the farmers. Violence grew and to this day rages in Darfur.

Here at home, too, I have seen major shifts in weather patterns that concern Iowans. A few years ago, when our Iowa farmers struggled with drought, I asked them how they could continue to work in an industry whose outcome was always unpredictable but even more so now with the palpable shift in weather patterns. Many of them shared how they had inherited their land and felt it a great responsibility to care for God’s creation. They put their trust in God to carry them through. Their effort was affirmed by the words of St. John Paul II, who during his historic 1979 visit to Des Moines and Iowa encouraged good stewardship of the land. In support of their vital role the Pope thundered: “Farmers be Proud.” Today, we’re dealing not with drought but too much rain. I can drive by farms and see pockets of blackened fields where fledgling crops have drowned.

While I can share anecdotal stories about climate change, NASA indicates 97 percent of climate scientists agree that climate change over the past 100 years is likely the result of human activity.

I invite others on our program to expand on the scope of the issue and the call Pope Francis has extended to action.

## Conclusion to Press conference

We stand here today not to talk about *whether* we should do something, but rather we need to work together to figure out *how* we're going to act. Pope Francis calls us to action.

To begin we need to commend Iowa and Iowans for the significant commitment to wind power already in place. This clean energy provides 27% of the power consumption in the state and Iowa ranks #2 in the entire country for amount of power produced through this renewable resource. Hand in hand with environmentally friendly energy goes job growth and corporation location and expansion because of the availability of this asset.

In further response, we can and I dare say should **read** Pope Francis's encyclical "Laudato Si."

- I call on Catholics throughout the Diocese of Des Moines to spend some time this summer reading the Holy Father's words on the environment. Bring it with you to the pool or on your vacation. Spend some time with it on a cool summer evening. Adopt the encyclical for your book club's next meeting. There is a lot in this document for small faith-sharing groups to ponder.
- I intend to order copies of the encyclical for our diocesan staff. We will be discussing its implications in the coming months. In this vein, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has already produced a discussion guide which should be valuable in coordinating discussions in small groups gathered through central and southwest Iowa.
- I have asked our clergy in the Diocese of Des Moines to preach on the issue and share the Catholic teaching that leads us to move forward.

After reading the encyclical, I encourage all people to consider **what role they can play** in caring for God's creation.

- We are called to participate in public life and work for the common good. I invite all Catholics in Iowa to talk with their local, state and national leaders urging them to exercise leadership in protecting the Earth. We will have presidential candidates visiting our state regularly in the coming months. We have a unique opportunity to keep the issue of climate change on the front burner. Ask not *if*, but *how* they plan to work toward solutions to climate change.
- I also urge Iowans to conserve energy, use energy-efficient appliances, and invest in renewable energy systems.

In the very difficult challenge of individual and corporate change which, bottom line, is what is at stake, Pope Francis offers motivation. As believers, we are called to reverence the remarkable beauty and gift of creation. As people committed to justice we recognize creation is intended in equal measure for all in the human family. As pro-creators of children we want our offspring, grandchildren and posterity to be beneficiaries of our love and sacrifice not our greedy consumption.

The Pope calls us to take the high road that which marks us as truly made in his image and likeness. It is the road of altruism, expressing love for its own sake for the benefit of others.