



Statement
Bishop Richard Pates
On Publication of the Encyclical of Pope Francis
“Praise be to you”

Pope’s encyclical “Laudato Si” (Praise be to you) raises an urgent call for action by the human family.

Pope Francis has sounded a clarion call for universal action to reverse ailing Mother Earth’s health condition. Evidence abounds: pollution and waste, widespread experience of radical climate variation, reduction of safe water which is the “stuff of life,” and loss of biodiversity. More distressing is the impact on human life – where the poor suffer intolerably and societies and cultures are unraveling.

We are all born into life on this planet. This common home is an unmerited gift. Through creation, God has provided for us an abundant Mother: Earth. Earth’s health is imperiled by a relational breakdown with God, with fellow humans and with the planet itself. Our faith and the common relationship with one another impels us to address this situation. Our destiny is intertwined – earth and each human person on a common journey. For the Christian, this is in unity with Christ who leads us to the goal of creation – life-giving unity with the Father.

To arrive at this goal, Pope Francis accentuates the reality that all of creation is in communion. Echoing St. Francis of Assisi, the Holy Father proclaims: “Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth.”

The Pope insists that the natural environment is “a collective good, the patrimony of all humanity and the responsibility of everyone.” Our work to ensure justice and a livable situation for everyone represents “fidelity to the Creator, since God created the world for everyone.”

In considering the primacy of the human person in creation, those activities which diminish the dignity of each human person are to be challenged. Especially is this so with the emerging supremacy of technology. This development gives rise to a “practical relativism,” which translates, if it can be done, do it. Most importantly as we pursue material “progress” we must adhere to the requirement to provide work for people to enable them to achieve the meaning and purpose God has in mind for them – core to the hierarchy of human values.

Moving forward with “environmental conversion,” Pope Francis employs a word characterizing his papacy: dialogue. This dialogue occurs on an international scale, on the natural and local scene. It emphasizes transparency in decision making, in politics, in economy and religious dialogue with science. In all of these formats, the key is transparency, openness and a commitment to reach resolutions that are in the best interests of each of us individually and as one human family.

Such conversion or change requires us to think of the preservation of that which gives life: air, water, fertile soil. We can do so by being responsible in our own situation but also by joining together in advocacy of those policies that will characterize us as grateful “stewards” so that all God so lovingly created might thrive.

We, in Iowa, have been especially blessed and been inspired by leaders who are able to parse the grammar of responsible stewardship. Farmer after farmer who visit with me, tell me that they are committed to leaving the soil and water for which they are responsible, in much better shape than they inherited it. Wind power has taken off in Iowa. It is now the number two state in the United States producing more such energy per capita than any other state. This development of renewable energy creates jobs and produces clear, breathable air while enabling us to experience reasonable benefits in our lifestyle.

We, in Iowa, also have the opportunity to raise the issue of environment to a high profile. This is due to the role Iowa enjoys in holding the first caucuses of the presidential electoral cycle. May we not squander this opportunity.

“Praise be to you” as an encyclical is not a political document, nor a scientific document, but rather a religious document which our Holy Father, Pope Francis, has developed to guide us in our moral life in order that we might be faithful to the scriptures and teachings of the Church in our times. May it inspire us to unite in generating hope and in building the Kingdom of God.

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