



For all things give thanks.
1 THESS 5:18

PASTORAL LETTER FROM BISHOP BRIAN MASCORD TO THE FAITHFUL OF THE DIOCESE OF WOLLONGONG

Diocesan Response to the *Laudato Si'* Action Platform



My Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

One of the most important environmental texts of the 21st century, *Laudato Si'*, was signed by Pope Francis on 24 May 2015. This watershed encyclical called the world's attention to the increasingly precarious state of our common home, the Earth. Six years on in the midst of another watershed moment - a global pandemic, along with the continued crises of climate change, environmental migrants, economic instability, threats to peace and security and displacement, the message of *Laudato Si'* is just as prophetic. Building on the rich and extensive ecological theology of Catholic Tradition and standing on the shoulders of past Popes, such as Saint John Paul II and Benedict XVI, Pope Francis continues to progressively advocate for the care of creation.

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis reflects upon the Gospel of Creation and offers a renewed theology of the natural world in light of Scripture, Tradition and Catholic Social Teaching. Creation is one interrelated community before God and humanity is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined

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relationships: with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself. Our task as human beings is to steward the flourishing of all three relationships.

Over the past eighteen months, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought home to us—in frightening and chaotic ways—the fragility of our lives, and how fleeting are many of the networks on which we have come to depend. We know the world is deeply interconnected and interdependent and there is a particular connection between a society that is good for people and a society that is good for the environment. As we dare to dream of a post-COVID world, we need an integral approach because “today’s problems call for a vision capable of taking into account every aspect of the global crisis” (LS, 137).

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At this time in our human history, we need to reimagine our relationship with the Earth and respond effectively to the urgent call to ecological conversion. As human beings, made in the image and likeness of God (*Gen. 1:27*), we are called to be “channels” of God’s love and care for this world (*LS, 246*). In *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis challenges “every person living on this planet” (*LS, 3*) to enter into a new dialogue and a new solidarity toward building a better future for our common home. We are impelled to advocate, care for and transform our world.

Pope Francis challenges the people of the world to appreciate that we can no longer be in denial, indifferent, or blindly confident in technical solutions to Earth’s crises. Nor can we any longer adopt a simple cosmetic approach to environmental and human crises. Whilst campaigns, recycling and emergency appeals remain compelling, concern for the environment “is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience” (*LS, 217*). The protection of God’s creation must be placed formally and permanently at the centre as part of our faith response. It is a response that realises that we all have an ecological vocation. It is a response that needs to be holistic, based on a broad vision of

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reality that involves not only human beings and their culture, but also plants, animals, habitats, the atmosphere, rivers, seas and mountains. It is a vision based on our relationship with everything that has been created by God. For “*God saw all that God had made, and indeed it was very good*” (*Gen 1:31*).

Building on this challenge, the Vatican’s *Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development* has provided a roadmap or way forward through the ***Laudato Si’ Action Platform***. This is an invitation to the global Catholic family to unite to create a more caring, inclusive, peaceful and sustainable world.

The ***Laudato Si’ Action Platform*** is a seven-year plan. The purpose of which is to create communities around the world that are totally sustainable in the spirit of the integral ecology of *Laudato Si’*. It engages the seven sectors of Families, Dioceses and Parishes, Schools, Universities and Colleges, Hospitals and Health Care Centres, Businesses and Agriculture/Farms and Religious Orders and invites them to publicly commit to a seven-year journey toward ecological conversion and total sustainability that incorporates simpler lifestyles, moving away from fossil fuels and embracing renewable alternatives.

Laudato Si' Action Platform Goals



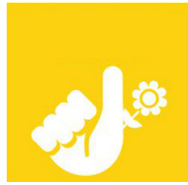
Response to the Cry of the Earth



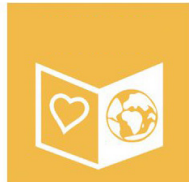
Response to the Cry of the Poor



Ecological Economics



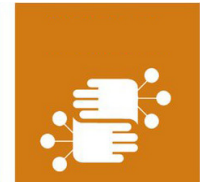
Adoption of Simple Lifestyles



Ecological Education



Ecological Spirituality



Emphasis on Community Involvement and Participatory Action

The Action Platform calls for action at all levels – local, regional, national and international – and suggests seven goals. These goals are a pathway of renewal, a vision and a plan for action.

1. Response to the Cry of the Earth
2. Response to the Cry of the Poor
3. Ecological Economics
4. Adoption of Simple Lifestyles
5. Ecological Education
6. Ecological Spirituality
7. Emphasis on Community Involvement and Participatory Action

This year the Social Justice statement *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* from the Australian Conference of Catholic Bishops reminds us that the call to care for creation goes to the heart of what it means to be human before God and in the world. The statement asserts that the “signs of the times” (*Gaudium et spes*.4) are clear – we know we human beings need a change of heart, mind and behaviour. The Bishops commit to the **Laudato Si' Action Platform** inviting the Australian Church to join in, to participate fully, actively and consciously. One prophetic action they have already taken is the Renaming of the Office for Social Justice to the Office for Justice, Ecology and Peace.

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As we conclude the **Season of Creation**, with the Feast of the Patron Saint of Ecology, St Francis of Assisi, I take this opportunity to officially commit our Diocese of Wollongong to engage in the **Laudato Si'** Action Platform joining the global Catholic family in a seven-year journey of ecological conversion.

As we do this, we recognise that we are not starting from scratch. There are many wonderful environmental and social initiatives and actions that have occurred and are continuing to occur across our Diocese. For a number of years now, all CEDoW schools have been on an intentional, strategic journey of ecological conversion that has involved schools embedding ecological values and formation into school programs and practices that promote an ecological and sustainable culture. A number of parishes have also committed themselves to this journey since the publication of **Laudato Si'** and follow up ecclesial documents and initiatives related to the care for our common home. For over 40 years, CatholicCare has responded to the signs of the times with social service programs, giving special attention to vulnerable and marginalised people and communities.

Involvement in the **Laudato Si' Action Platform** is an opportunity for continued engagement and encouragement as we respond to the global environmental challenges of the 21st Century. A concrete action for the Wollongong Diocese will be the formulation of a working group to plan, write and assist with the implementation of a Diocesan **Laudato Si'** Plan.



St Francis Preaching to the Birds (Giotto 1267–1337)

Foundational to our diocesan response will be finding ways for continued opportunities for formation within areas of ecological theology, spirituality and justice. In doing so, we will collaborate with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and other Australian poets, prophets and pragmatists. Furthermore, we remain committed to promoting the annual celebrations of **Laudato Si' Week** (16-24 May), the **World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation** (1 September) and the **Season of Creation** (1 September – 4 October). All actions we can undertake together.

I hope that each of us will find ways to implement *Laudato Si'* in our home, parish, school and local community. As Pope Francis has said, "We need a new ecological approach that can transform our way of dwelling in the world, our styles of life, our relationship with the resources of the Earth and, in general, our way of looking at humanity and of living life." (May 24th 2021) For the sake of younger generations and their future, and for the sake of all species, human and other, "we must choose to eat, travel, spend, invest and live differently, thinking not only of immediate interest and gains but also of future benefits."

As we consider our own ecological vocation I offer the words of the poet Mary Oliver for your reflection:

What does it mean, say the words,
that the earth is so beautiful?

And what shall I do about it?

What is the gift that I
should bring to the world?

What is the life that I should live?

MARY OLIVER

Yours in Christ

'Through whom all things come into being' (John 1:3)

+ Brian Mascord

Most Rev Brian G Mascord DD

BISHOP OF WOLLONGONG

Given at Wollongong on 4 October 2021

The Feast of St Francis of Assisi

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