



Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

It is my privilege to write to you in all our parishes and schools throughout the land, encouraging you to take up Pope Francis's invitation to engage in an open and honest conversation about our world, and about how we can learn to live on this earth in a way which is sustainable and life-giving for all.

In his Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis noted that our world is "falling into serious disrepair" (61). Our way of living is contaminating the earth's waters, its land and its air; we are losing forests and woodlands, and stripping the world of its natural resources; plant and animal species are disappearing; we are generating millions of tons of waste, much of it non-biodegradable; and our actions are now resulting in changes to the climate that, if unchecked, will have grave implications for future life here.

Pope Francis also draws attention to human dimensions of the current crisis: many parts of the world no longer have access to safe drinking water; increasing economic inequality that leaves billions of people in poverty; the "structurally perverse" way in which the resources of developing nations enhance the quality of life in wealthy nations while the vital needs of their own citizens go unaddressed (52; cf. 95). Environmental degradation has a particularly negative impact on those who are poorest and most vulnerable (48).

The situation is not without hope; "humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home" (13), and God is with us as we do so. But an old saying comes to mind: *if you do not change direction, you are likely to end up where you are heading*. The challenge before us is urgent, and prosperous nations such as Canada bear a special responsibility.

There is an increasing recognition here, as elsewhere, that we are depleting our natural resources (and those of other nations) and are not living in a way which is sustainable; nor are we living in a way which can be replicated the world over. And we are among those who *do* have the human and economic resources to take initiatives both in relation to the environment and in addressing the needs of our sisters and brothers in need in developing nations. But it would require a genuine conversion from us, with personal, corporate, economic and political dimensions.

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Pope Francis raises a few specific challenges to us. Firstly, he asks us to honestly and directly name our current crises concerning the environment, inequality and poverty. Pointing to obstructionist attitudes, the masking of problems and manipulation of information, and the

prioritizing of short-term gain and private or national interests above the global common good, he pleads that we cease treating issues of environmental concern or global poverty as an afterthought (14, 19, 26, 49, 54, 169, 184). Secondly, he summons us to “a new and universal solidarity”, grounded in the conviction that humanity is one people living in a common homeland (14, cf. 164). We have a shared responsibility for others and for our world. This includes a responsibility towards future generations, as the environment “is on loan to each generation, which must then hand it on to the next” (159). **Do we love our children and grandchildren, and their descendants, enough to change our way of living, our economic systems?** In addition to the need for an ‘inter-generational’ solidarity, we stand in urgent need of an ‘intra-generational’ or global solidarity with those of our own day who are deprived of basic human needs. Are we mature and generous enough to value the well-being of those more vulnerable than we are, even at the cost of our nation’s accumulation of wealth and power? Finally, he calls us to a mature faith which integrates and gives priority to justice and care for the environment. “Living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue” (111). Written into creation and the created order is the challenge to live meaningfully together on this planet; God has given us this challenge.

In support of Pope Francis’s appeal, the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace is inviting Catholic parishes and schools throughout the country to take an active part in its ‘Days of Action and Prayer for the Climate’ from Friday, Oct. 23 to Sunday, Oct. 25. The Days of Action and Prayer provide us with an opportunity to do some fresh thinking about our global environmental crisis, and to ask what we can do to facilitate a change of direction, in our personal lives, our parishes and schools, our communities and nation.

Playing our part can be as simple as recycling and as complex as rethinking our unsustainable global systems to discern a more just and human way of living.

Personal and family initiatives:

- Cultivate a simple lifestyle open to joy in living deeply, free of obsession with consumption; foster a spirit of gratitude and generosity, mindful that “the world is God’s loving gift”; create a space for wonder; remember the interconnectedness of things and that we are part of something larger than ourselves; live courageously out of our convictions (220-225).
- Examine our lifestyles and take constructive action (206, 218). Make an inventory of (and try to reduce) our energy and water consumption; be on the lookout for simple daily actions and gestures such as recycling, avoiding styrofoam cups and bottled water, using public transportation or car-pooling, which bring change in humble but genuine ways.
- Trust in God, and be rooted in hope, with your eyes open to seeing the world and our current challenges as they are. Pray before and after meals, giving thanks for the gifts of creation; keep the sabbath as a day to heal our relationships with God, others and the world; and pray for major events, such as the UN Climate Change Summit in Paris in December.

Parish and community:

- Education on the environment can take place in schools, parishes, and in the community. Such teaching can foster a healthy understanding of the relationship between human beings and the natural world, communicate an awareness of current environmental issues and challenges, and encourage a lifestyle attentive to the needs of the environment and the common good (cf. 143, 210-213);
- Support initiatives for renewable energy, energy efficiency, recycling (180); for community gardens and green spaces accessible to all;
- Foster a strong sense of community, a readiness to protect others, an attentiveness to the challenges of living together in communion, a spirit of creativity and a deep love for the land (179, 228).
- Initiate dialogue about the environment within your schools, parish and community. Care for the natural world and for the common good is an appropriate subject of conversation for ecumenical and inter-faith relations, which can lead to common action and witness on environmental and justice issues (201).
- Organize a study or discussion about Pope Francis's *Laudato Si'* in your parish or school or public library; watch a series of videos presenting a faith response to environmental issues, such as Villagers Media's series on Catholic responses to papal teaching on the environment at www.greenspirit.tv or Salt and Light's series 'Creation' at <http://saltandlighttv.org/creation/>.
- Learn about your regional indigenous communities and their cultural traditions, strengthening relations and drawing insight from their relationship with the natural world. Make sure they are principal dialogue partners when large projects affecting their lands are proposed (146);
- Support cooperatives and community organizations which defend the interests of small producers, preserve local ecosystems, and develop renewable sources of energy (180)

National/international/corporate initiatives:

- Encourage our nation and our major energy suppliers to increase their exploration and development of sources of renewable energy, and to enact policies which drastically reduce the emission of carbon dioxide and other highly polluting gases (26; cf. 165);
- Continue to petition our government to appoint an ombudsman to investigate complaints pertaining to the operations of Canadian-based or Canadian-listed mining companies in the developing world (cf. 51);
- By participating in non-governmental organizations and intermediate groups, encourage our government to develop more rigorous regulations, procedures and controls for the protection of our environment (53, 179), and ask its representatives at the forthcoming Paris Summit to strive for meaningful and effective global agreements on the environment, committing Canada to a leadership role that current and future generations can be proud of.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, this work is meant to be carried out with the hope and joy that comes from the Gospel. Let us all, as individuals, families, parishes and dioceses, strive to better integrate environmental concerns into our faith lives, not only during these 'Days of Action and Prayer for the Climate', but always. While the Holy Father speaks of the need for a "bold cultural revolution", (114) the next step may be a very simple one. He reminds us that an integrated faith-based approach to environmental and justice issues is "made up of simple daily gestures which break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness" (230). Rather than resigning ourselves to pessimism or apathy, let us daily ask God's assistance in discerning what the world needs and what we can offer, by living wisely, thinking deeply and loving generously in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Yours in Christ,

+Donald Bolen
Bishop of Saskatoon