



Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development
Committee on International Justice and Peace

3211 FOURTH STREET NE • WASHINGTON DC 20017-1194 • 202-541-3160
WEBSITE: WWW.USCCB.ORG/JPHD • FAX 202-541-3339

Statement on Upcoming World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation

Bishop Frank J. Dewane
Chairman, Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Bishop Oscar Cantú
Chairman, Committee on International Justice and Peace
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

August 31, 2017

September 1 will mark the two-year anniversary of the establishment of the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation in the Catholic Church. We eagerly await Pope Francis' message for the 2017 observance. This day, which has been celebrated by the Orthodox and many other Christian brothers and sisters for some time, offers an important opportunity for solidarity in prayer with people of a variety of religious backgrounds. "Christians or not, as people of faith and goodwill, we should be united in showing mercy to the earth as our common home and cherishing the world in which we live as a place for sharing and communion" (Pope Francis' 2016 Message for the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation).

Last September 1, Pope Francis declared that "the care for our common home" is itself to be recognized as a work of mercy. When one considers the traditional seven corporal and seven spiritual works of mercy it becomes clear that "the object of mercy is human life itself and everything it embraces." The care for our common home is an act of mercy toward the poor, the unborn, future generations, and all of creation.

Participation in this new work of mercy begins in, and is strengthened by, God's own mercy towards humankind. "We love because he first loved us" (1 Jn 4:19), and when this first love is rejected, humans are turning against God's own design for creation. The words of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew come to mind: "to commit a crime against the natural world is a sin against ourselves and a sin against God." Showing mercy to our common home first requires a personal and institutional examination of conscience for the many contributions—both large and small—that are made to the degradation of the world. Acknowledging these sins and bringing

them to God—especially through the sacrament of Penance— is the first step for the “profound interior conversion” needed to respond to the ecological crisis.

It is with contrite hearts that we open the doors to God’s loving mercy and are moved to a sincere desire for change. At first these changes are likely to be “simple daily gestures which break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness (*Laudato Si*’, no. 230).” Through prayer, discernment, and contemplation of God’s presence in creation, each person will find the Holy Spirit inviting him or her to make further changes in his or her daily lives.

“The ecological conversion needed to bring about lasting change is also a community conversion” (*Laudato Si*’, no. 219). Every effort must be made to address the structural causes of the deep scars that humanity continues to inflict on the earth and that contribute greatly to the suffering of the poor. Today there is a particular need to reduce the consumption of energy and the emission of pollutants that are sources of significant wounds to the most vulnerable of our society and the earth as a whole. This year the U.S. Bishops called for an “energy revolution” through investments in infrastructure and technology to achieve energy security and sustainability. “Energy, in its many forms, is a gift of God, made freely available to the whole of humanity,” and not for the excessive use of a privileged few.¹ We must both “till and keep” (*Gen 2:15*) these energy resources in responsible ways. The dignity of work for the human person requires all of us to remember those who labor in the energy industry, from coal miners and solar engineers to legislators and scientists. As energy industries and technologies shift, provisions must be made to retrain workers and to uphold leaders who can be stewards of both the common home and the common good.

St. Francis of Assisi’s compassion for the poor and for creation is a model for all people of good will. His example reminds us that “actions speak louder than words” and that preaching through the language of concrete acts of tenderness and mercy is a powerful leaven to a weary world. On September 1, the Church begins a “Season of Creation” through October 4th, the Feast Day of St. Francis. This is a privileged time for all persons of faith to consider spiritual and corporal acts of mercy towards our common home and all those living in it, so that this may also become a “season of mercy” within our families, our communities and our world.

¹ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Energy, Justice and Peace* (Vatican City: LEV, 2014), 11.