

**PLENARY PRESENTATION ON THE PASTORAL IMPLEMENTATION OF
INTEGRAL ECOLOGY AND THE 10TH ANNIVERSARY OF *LAUDATO SI'***

Remarks of Archbishop Borys Gudziak of the Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy of Philadelphia, Chairman of the Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, and Bishop A. Elias Zaidan of the Maronite Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon, Chairman of the Committee on International Justice and Peace. Delivered to the Plenary Assembly of Bishops in Baltimore, MD, November 12, 2024.

Archbishop Gudziak:

Thank you, Archbishop Broglio.

Brothers, I'm grateful to be here with Bishop Zaidan to speak to you about the tenth anniversary of *Laudato Si'* next year. Today, we want your input on what to do.

In the next few minutes, we will offer some background and give some examples to consider. We will then solicit your feedback through discussions at our tables, and conclude with some time for floor discussion.

All of us have worked to implement *Laudato Si'* over these past nine years. To expand on these efforts, we also have to talk about the challenge. The news is filled with wars, political polarization and violence, threats to life and inequality, to name a few. It can be tempting to let care for creation become less prominent. The response, I believe, is found in *Laudato Si'* itself: "everything is connected." Because creation is related to everything human, our efforts around *Laudato Si'* need not be weighed down by many new programs and tasks. Rather, *Laudato Si'* can be integrated into our core mission of evangelization. Thus, the celebration of the anniversary of *Laudato Si'* presents us with both an important task and a great opportunity.

To see the opportunity, we must accept *evangelization* as the framework, or hermeneutical key, for integral ecology. We can see this with the triptych of *Laudato Si'*, *Fratelli Tutti*, and the Pope's latest encyclical, *Dilexit Nos*. In *Laudato Si'*, the Holy Father offered his vision of integral ecology,

which is nothing less than a comprehensive vision of the common good. In *Fratelli Tutti*, we read what is necessary to reach that vision: dialogue, politics based on civic charity, and fraternity that overcomes divisions and polarization. Finally, with *Dilexit Nos*, Pope Francis emphasizes that in order for these changes to happen at the societal level, there must be conversion of heart at the individual level, a personal encounter with the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

As Pope Francis concludes in *Dilexit Nos*: “the teaching of the social Encyclicals *Laudato Si’* and *Fratelli Tutti* is not unrelated to our encounter with the love of Jesus Christ. For it is by drinking of that same love that we become capable of forging bonds of fraternity, of recognizing the dignity of each human being, and of working together to care for our common home” (no. 217). There is a beautiful harmony here with the first encyclical of Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, which begins with God’s love and progresses towards works of justice and charity and the Church’s social doctrine.

I submit to you that an evangelizing hermeneutic is consistent with the vision of both Pope Francis and Pope Benedict—the latter, you will recall, was sometimes nicknamed the ‘*green pope*’ for his environmental sensibilities.¹ Pope Benedict identified care for creation as one of the three signs of our times, along with the yearning for authenticity and transcendence.² Pope Francis, in turn, presented us **first** with *Evangelii Gaudium* calling the Church “to go out,” and then offered *Laudato Si’* as a preeminent example of how to engage science, ecumenism, ecology, poverty, youth and culture. When it comes to religiously disaffiliated or unaffiliated youth, care for creation is especially potent because it speaks to both the path of justice **and** the path of beauty. Young people are drawn to the environment—they know its importance for them and for future generations. Religious or not, their engagement shows an innate sense of the dignity of life and creation. In this way, we are blessed with a generation of young people who are passionate about the future of life on our planet. When we “walk the walk” on care for creation, we create space for encounter, dialogue, and accompaniment.

¹ Newsweek, *Benedict XVI, The Green Pope*, Apr. 16, 2008, <https://www.newsweek.com/benedict-xvi-green-pope-86391>

² Pope Benedict XVI, “Year of Faith. How to speak about God?”, Nov. 28, 2012, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20121128.html

In this light, the pastoral question before us is: how can we “go out,” rooted in the Gospels, to a world that is so hungry for the message of *Laudato Si’*?

We already have a wonderful tradition of pastoral letters dating back to 1975, engaging topics like Appalachia, the Columbia River and nuclear disarmament. A 2001 pastoral statement by the full body of bishops raised climate change as a central issue, and the Conference has continued a practice of robust public policy engagement on climate. For over 100 years, Catholic Rural Life, begun by the bishops and the laity, has dedicated pastoral attention to farmers and rural communities.

Remembering our past, I’d like to look to the future with two suggestions as conversation starters.

The first proposal concerns care for creation and the Sabbath. The crowning of God’s creation was not action, but rather marveling and rejoicing over creation on the seventh day. We live in a world of constant work and stimulation, with ever-present phones, screens and gadgets. In essence, our world does not rest and struggles with leisure. Perhaps providentially, 2025 memorializes not only *Laudato Si’* but also the Jubilee, a special year rooted in Sabbath rest. Christian care for creation is nourished by the Sabbath precept of rest for the land, forgiveness, restoration, festivity, and freedom. This is a path of salvation.³ Our hyperactive world yearns for the Sabbath, which is expressed in the Sunday Eucharist when the Lord makes “all things new” (Rev 21:5).⁴

On this theme, I would suggest efforts centered on contemplation of creation, leisure, and celebration. This could lead to a pilgrimage to a significant local shrine, basilica or ecological site in your diocese or eparchy that evokes the marvel of God’s creation. Consider a special Mass for care for creation on the Feast of St. Francis, or preaching on the union of creation and the Divine in the Eucharist. To be truly restful, such initiatives should be oriented to the sacraments and overflow with celebration and joy. The goal of this suggestion is *not to do* something, but to **experience** something: the mystery of God’s presence in the sacraments and in creation.

Second suggestion: we could renew the tradition of Friday abstinence from meat. In 2011, the Catholic bishops of England and Wales reintroduced the pre-Vatican II practice of abstaining from

³ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, nos. 71, 237.

⁴ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, no. 243.

meat every Friday. They did this inspired by Pope Benedict's pastoral visit to England that year.⁵ Subsequently, scholars calculated the environmental benefits, and they are significant.⁶ A return to Friday abstinence would be good for the soul and for the planet, uniting our devotion to the Lord and reverence for the Lord's creation. Furthermore, fasting could be an opportunity for synodal engagement, exploring ancient practices in the Latin rite—such as ember days or advent fasts⁷--and other rich eastern Christian practices among Catholics and others.⁸

So far, we have focused on the past and the future. Now, it's my pleasure to introduce Bishop Zaidan, who will outline some present responses to *Laudato Si'*.

⁵ See *Catholic Witness -Friday Penance, Q&A*, <https://cbcew.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2019/07/friday-penance.pdf>

⁶ Larcom et al., *Food for the Soul and the Planet: Measuring the Impact of the Return of Meatless Fridays for (Some) UK Catholics*, 16 Oct. 2022, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4237616

⁷ Catholic Encyclopedia, *Ember Days*, <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05399b.htm> and Liturgical Arts Journal , *The Traditional (Pre-1917) Advent Fast in the USA*, <https://www.liturgicalartsjournal.com/2019/12/the-traditional-pre-1917-advent-fast-in.html>.

⁸ See for example, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, *And when you fast*, <https://www.goarch.org/-/when-you-fast>

Bishop Zaidan:

Thank you, Archbishop Gudziak.

First, let me emphasize the importance of subsidiarity and regional diversity. To be truly integral, and integrated, care for creation must be embedded in the local realities of each community of faith. The unity of collective efforts does not require uniformity in action.

In that spirit, I would like to briefly highlight some best practices already underway in our own Catholic organizations.

The Catholic University of America, for example, has planted 3-4 thousand trees on its campus, installed a major solar project, integrated *Laudato Si'* in its curriculum, and now offers sustainability studies for dioceses and parishes. Catholic Charities USA has installed large solar energy projects in its facilities and supports relief work for natural disasters. Catholic Relief Services made care for creation a pillar of its 2030 vision and implements climate adaptation and resilience projects around the world.

And of course, numerous dioceses have issued *Laudato Si'* guidelines or action plans, created creation care teams or study groups, and installed renewable energy projects or updated buildings for energy efficiency. The *Laudato Si' Action Platform*, supported by the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, provides an excellent forum which many of these organizations have joined to give account of their work and witness.⁹

For its part, the USCCB continues to advocate for bipartisan policies to address climate change, as well as sustainable agriculture, protection for ecosystems and forests, and regulations on pollution, chemicals, nuclear waste, food and public health. We continue to support international efforts for climate mitigation and adaptation, with a specific care for the poor and vulnerable who bear the brunt of disasters around the world. The USCCB has also collaborated with state Catholic conferences on local issues.

⁹ See <https://laudatosiactionplatform.org>.

For many years, even preceding *Laudato Si'*, the Catholic Campaign for Human Development has supported community organizations that address both “the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.” Finally, in 2021, the USCCB Socially Responsible Investment Guidelines were updated, greatly expanding the previous section on the environment to incorporate the structures and categories of *Laudato Si'* and to provide investment policies on climate change, biodiversity, natural resources, technology and environmental impact.¹⁰

Many of these initiatives are documented in a memorandum published by the USCCB in 2020 for the fifth anniversary of *Laudato Si'*. We expect to compile a similar report next year.

These existing efforts can serve as inspiration for future actions. A parish that has already implemented a sustainability report may choose to support CRS or CCUSA for adaptation or relief; a religious order working with urban gardens may wish to begin an education program on integral ecology; a diocese that has sustainably updated its buildings may form prayer groups focused on care for creation; a university that has planted trees may encourage advocacy on climate policy.

Finally, in the spirit of the Jubilee and ecology, many indebted nations are stewards of rich ecosystems, and they face a dilemma of either exploiting their natural resources or preserving them at the cost of economic distress. Pope Francis is calling for debt relief of poor nations,¹¹ and forgiveness can help protect an ecosystem or biome. For example, the recently announced refinancing of 14% - or \$1 Billion dollars - of El Salvador’s debt will be dedicated to wetlands protection and overseen by Catholic Relief Services, JP Morgan and others. This is precisely the kind of debt-swap arrangement that shows the link between *Laudato Si'* and the Jubilee.¹²

To conclude, I would like to acknowledge the United Nations Conference of Parties 29 meeting – also known as the “COP” – taking place today in Azerbaijan. As Archbishop Gudziak, Sean Callahan and I shared in our recent statement on COP29, “adopting effective adaptation investment

¹⁰ See Nasdaq, *Updates to Catholic Investing Guidelines Signal a Shift*, Jul. 12, 2022, <https://www.nasdaq.com/articles/updates-to-catholic-investing-guidelines-signal-a-shift#:~:text=The%20new%20USCCB%20guidelines%20are,and%20Saving%20Our%20Global%20Home.>

¹¹ Pope Francis, *Addressing the debt crisis in the Global South*, June 5, 2024, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2024/june/documents/20240605-incontro-pas.html#:~:text=In%20the%20wake%20of%20mismanaged,possibility%20of%20a%20dignified%20future.>

¹² Juan Martinez, *El Salvador’s \$1B Debt Swap: Saving Forests and Finances*, The Rio Times, October 17, 2024, <https://www.riotimesonline.com/el-salvadors-1b-debt-swap-saving-forests-and-finances/>

strategies is a matter of justice. While resources and proven technologies to withstand many natural and man-made disasters already exist, sadly these are often a privilege for the wealthy... Adaptation benefits developed and developing nations alike.” As we mark the anniversary of *Laudato Si*’, we must keep the “cry of the earth and the cry of the poor” at the center.¹³

Now, I turn to my last slide, which includes the questions for our table discussions.

Each table should assign a notetaker to record the table’s responses to each question. A notetaking sheet, which will be collected, can be found on your tables.

After the twenty- minute table discussions, we will have about ten minutes for discussion from the floor.

Here are the questions:

- 1. What are your best ideas of how your diocese can mark the 10th anniversary of Laudato Si’?*
- 2. What are your best ideas of how the USCCB can mark this anniversary and help Catholics care for our common home?*
- 3. How can these initiatives help advance the mission directive for evangelizing unaffiliated and disaffiliated youth?*

Archbishop Broglio, I believe we may now begin the table discussions for 20 minutes.

¹³ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*’, 49.