

## CRS RESPONDS TO THE CRY OF THE EARTH AND THE CRY OF THE POOR On the fifth anniversary of Pope Francis' Encyclical *Laudato Si*

Rev. Leo Almazan  
Senior Adviser for Clergy Outreach

In a recent video message,<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis invited us once again to ponder the kind of world we want to leave behind for future generations and the concrete ways in which we ought to respond to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.<sup>2</sup> This dual invitation constitutes the backbone of his encyclical *Laudato Si*, which was promulgated five years ago<sup>3</sup> and remains a sobering reminder of how environmental degradation is like a petri dish where hunger, illness, and war fester and kill people, especially the poorest of the poor in the world.

The good news about this anniversary are that, after only five years of *Laudato Si* publication, there have been many concrete actions taken to stop global warming, such as fossil-fuel divestment,<sup>4</sup> the establishment of mitigation and adaption plans related to natural disasters due to climate change,<sup>5</sup> and the expressed commitment of many Catholic and non-Catholic institutions at the local, national, and international levels to address environmental degradation and biodiversity loss.

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) has been at the forefront of said efforts for a very long time. From its very beginning, CRS has witnessed firsthand the harrowing effects of climate change in the most vulnerable populations around the world and has engaged in concrete initiatives and actions to halt them, such as promoting climate smart agriculture, helping people build sustainable livelihoods, and aiding communities to improve nutrition, health, and educational outcomes.

CRS knows that those who are usually most impacted by climate change are the ones who have contributed the least to our carbon footprint, namely, the poorest of the

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<sup>1</sup> 2020 03.03 "Pope Francis invites the Church to celebrate *Laudato Si* Week," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ji1YpDcHncY> April 24, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> This phrase offers echoes of Leonardo Boff's seminal book *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (Orbis Books, 1997)

<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si* (On care of our common home), signed on May 24, 2015 and promulgated on June 18, 2015, [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_encyclica-laudato-si.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_encyclica-laudato-si.html)

<sup>4</sup> Brian Rowe, "Catholic campuses rallying for 'fossil-fuel degrees'," in NCR Online, February 13, 2020, <https://www.nronline.org/news/earthbeat/catholic-campus-rallying-fossil-free-degrees>, April 24, 2020

<sup>5</sup> "Laudato Si - Our common home and the effects of climate change," w/d, [https://www.crs.org/climate-change?\\_ga=2.258470474.159488378.1587755920-1135055156.1587755920](https://www.crs.org/climate-change?_ga=2.258470474.159488378.1587755920-1135055156.1587755920), April 24, 2020.

poor. For that reason, CRS takes to heart Pope Francis' call to promote a sound and sustainable ecology, one capable of bringing about change, which will not work unless people are changed and encouraged to opt for a different lifestyle, one that is less anxious and greedy and more serene, respectful, and fraternal.

For all these reasons CRS welcomes Pope Francis' invitation to engage in a nine day period of private or public prayer (a.k.a. a Novena), from May 16-24, 2020, to commemorate the fifth anniversary of his encyclical *Laudato Si*. This global campaign will be a time to obtain special graces, implore special favors, and make special petitions so that, through our personal and collective **ecological conversion**, we may be willing and able to continue taking concrete actions to stop environmental degradation; that is, ozone depletion, greenhouse effect and global warming,<sup>6</sup> desertification, deforestation, loss of biodiversity, and disposal of wastes.

A [website for this week-long celebration of Laudato Si'](#) has been created, which will serve as a clearinghouse for the various Catholic events and actions planned, even in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic. The site organizers' state, "*Laudato Si'* Week [will] help us reshape the world that will arise after the pandemic has passed. The present crisis is an opportunity to start anew, and to make sure that the world that arises after this crisis has passed is sustainable and just. ... As we prepare for Laudato Si' Week and the journey beyond, let's reflect together on how the encyclical's lessons guide us through the current crisis."

As members of our CRS family we would like to encourage you to get involved, as much as possible, in the celebration of the fifth anniversary of Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si*. Here are some concrete ideas you can use to do so from the safety and comfort of your home:

1. Deepen your spiritual understanding of God's creation and your spiritual response by praying [The Deer's Cry](#) prayer - attributed to St. Patrick - click here:
2. Do a short examination of ecological consciousness:
  - A. **I give thanks to God for creation and for being wonderfully made.**  
*Where did I feel God's presence in creation today?*
  - B. **I ask for the grace to see creation as God does – in all its splendor and suffering.**

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<sup>6</sup> Scientists estimate that in order to avoid the worst impacts of climate change, we must limit average temperature rise to 1.5 degrees C (2.7 F) by 2050.

*Do I see the beauty of creation and hear the cries of the earth and the poor?*

**C. I ask for the grace to look closely to see how my life choices impact creation and the poor and vulnerable.**

*What challenges or joys do I experience as I recall my care for creation? How can I turn away from a throwaway culture and instead stand in solidarity with creation and the poor?*

**D. 4. I ask for the grace of conversion towards ecological justice and reconciliation.**

*Where have I fallen short in caring for creation and my brothers and sisters? How do I ask for a conversion of heart?*

**E. I ask for the grace to reconcile my relationship with God, creation and humanity, and to stand in solidarity through my actions.**

*How can I repair my relationship with creation and make choices consistent with my desire for reconciliation with creation?*

**F. I offer a closing prayer for the earth and the vulnerable in our society.**

3. From May 16-24, 2020 follow the 9 Days of Action.



**Lead the Way on Hunger**  
9 DAYS OF ACTION

1. Watch our Hunger Video
2. Plant a Seed
3. Test Yourself with Our Quiz
4. Make a Meaningful Meal
5. Lift Your Voice
6. Share What You're Thankful For
7. Pray With Your Family
8. Give the Gift of Hope
9. Join the Global Day of Prayer

crs.org/leadtheway #LeadNow

4. Learn more about [CRS' work](#) with organizations around the world to help poor and vulnerable people overcome emergencies, earn a living through agriculture, and access affordable health care.

5. Pray, keeping in mind Pope Francis' words: "As the tragic coronavirus pandemic has taught us, we can overcome global challenges only by showing solidarity with one another and embracing the most vulnerable in our midst."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> CNS, "Pope Francis: Show solidarity, embrace the vulnerable to overcome global challenges," April 24, 2020, <http://www.archstl.org/pope-francis-show-solidarity-embrace-the-vulnerable-to-overcome-global-challenges-5249>, April 25, 2020.