



Manifesto of Youth at WYD 2019 for the Care of Our Common Home

Ecological Conversion in Action

III International Congress on the Care of Creation 21 January 2019, Panama City

We, young Catholics from World Youth Day in Panama, would like to raise our hearts and minds in praise, joy and gratitude for the beautiful gift of our beloved “sister Mother Earth” in the lovely words of St Francis. At the same time we are painfully aware, as Pope Francis reminded us, that “our common home is falling into serious disrepair” (*Laudato Si’* 61). Convinced that “all of us can cooperate as instruments of God for the care of creation” (LS 14), we call on everyone, ourselves first, to act with urgency to protect our planet and the poorest and most vulnerable people.

1) The injustice towards the poor of today and the future generations

Our future and the future of those who will come after us is in grave danger. For a long time, humanity has embarked on an irresponsible path of environmental destruction that still makes our present precarious and affects the future. First, because of climate disruption, we are already seeing devastating impacts across continents with the rise of average global temperature by 1°C. The planet now risks surpassing the catastrophic threshold of 1.5°C of global warming if the Paris Agreement is not implemented urgently and at all levels. Second, the biodiversity crisis has already led us to the sixth mass extinction, with animal and vegetal species going irreversibly extinct. In this respect, we are reminded by the Latin American Bishops¹ and the Preparatory Document of the Amazon Synod² that indigenous peoples have a critical role to play in protecting their ancestral homelands from indiscriminate exploitation. Moreover, related crises such as water scarcity and pollution make the state of our common home even more alarming.

In the encyclical *Laudato Si’* it is emphasized that the “doomsday predictions can no longer be met with irony or disdain. We may well be leaving to coming generations debris, desolation and filth” (LS 161). As bishops from all continents have acknowledged, [the present] “generation is not doing enough to leave them a healthy planet. Being so short-sighted is an unacceptable injustice.”³

We are mindful that the ecological crisis is not only an intergenerational injustice, but also an intragenerational injustice towards the poor and most vulnerable people. As Pope Francis wrote,

¹ CELAM, *Carta Pastoral Discípulos Misioneros de la Casa Común*.

² “*Amazonia: New Paths for the Church and for an Integral Ecology*”: Preparatory Document of the Synod of Bishops for the Special Assembly for the Pan-Amazon Region, 08.06.2018

³ *Joint Statement on Climate Justice by Bishops’ Conferences*, October 2018, <http://bit.ly/bishops-statement>

"[B]oth everyday experience and scientific research show that the gravest effects of all attacks on the environment are suffered by the poorest" (LS 48). Thus, the migration crisis is closely related to environmental destruction: "Many of those who can least afford it are already being forced to leave their homes and migrate to other places that may or may not prove welcoming."⁴ Time is running out and leaders from all sectors are showing very little ambition to embark in the rapid transformation that is needed to protect our precious common home and all its inhabitants.

2) An authentic and urgent ecological conversion

We recognize that the ecological crisis is a symptom of a deeper crisis in the human heart, which reminds us of the prophetic call of St John Paul II to "encourage and support the 'ecological conversion' which has made humanity more sensitive to the catastrophe to which it has been heading."⁵ We pray that this pilgrimage to Panama may prove an important milestone in the ecological conversion of all World Youth Day pilgrims, as it is imperative for us Christians to rediscover that caring for creation is integral to our faith: "Living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience" (LS 217).

Mindful of our share of responsibility in deepening the ecological crisis, there is a profound need for repentance. In the words of Pope Francis, "a healthy relationship with creation is one dimension of overall personal conversion, which entails the recognition of our errors, sins, faults and failures, and leads to heartfelt repentance and desire to change" (LS 218).

The Church has a critical role to play in advancing this ecological conversion, both within the Church itself and in all the social, economic, political and institutional realities. We are encouraged that *Laudato Si'* is a wellspring of effective action to call on everyone to care for creation, with countless initiatives around the globe that are driving transformative action for an integral ecology. But the urgency is such that much more needs to be done, by everyone and with greater immediacy.

3) The role of young Catholics

As the Synodal Fathers recognized, among young people "there is strong and widespread sensitivity to ecological themes and sustainability, that the encyclical *Laudato Si'* has galvanized."⁶ Most importantly, this sensitivity translates into an appeal to the ruling classes to act because "Young people demand change" (LS 13). Indeed, a vibrant youth movement is rising up across the globe, challenging the generation in power to take climate change and the ecological crisis more seriously. Young activists are taking unprecedented action, ranging from "climate strikes" by high school students to lawsuits against governments for not doing enough to tackle climate change.

In this context, we young Catholics are also stepping up as never before. We take seriously the *Laudato Si'* call for "radical decisions to reverse the trend of global warming" (LS 175), and we are inspired by the prophetic voice of fellow young activists for the environment. As the Synodal Fathers aptly summarized it, "young people wish to offer the fruits of their talents, skills and creativity and they are ready to assume responsibility, inspired by the experience of the elderly and the rich cultural and spiritual tradition of our Church."

⁴ Pope Francis, *Discourse*, 9 June 2018.

⁵ St. John Paul II, *Catechesis*, 17 January 2001.

⁶ Final Document of the Synod of Bishops on Young People, *Faith and Vocational Discernment*, 46.

4) Our commitments

We are mindful that we, young Catholics are not doing enough. Despite commitments assumed in earlier *Laudato Si'* conferences on the safeguard of Creation at World Youth Day 2013 and 2016, we still are not mobilizing adequately to care for our common home. Our commitments are the following:

- I. We will strive to live *Laudato Si'* in the concreteness of our own daily lives, by developing an “ecological spirituality” (LS 216) and adopting sustainable lifestyles. Change is possible even with small daily actions like “avoiding the use of plastic and paper, reducing water consumption, separating refuse, cooking only what can reasonably be consumed, showing care for other living beings, using public transport or car-pooling, planting trees, turning off unnecessary lights, or any number of other practices” (LS 211).
- II. We will study and better understand ecological issues, in the quest to better prepare ourselves to advance the transformation that is needed at all levels: in our families, schools, universities, work environments, sport circles, through media and culture etc.
- III. We will faithfully challenge bishops and Church leaders to take more seriously the ecological crisis. Encouraged by Pope Francis’ appeal for us young Catholics to make “Lío” (which means “trouble, mess” in Spanish), we will be creative and positive “troublemakers” in our parishes, dioceses and communities, to help the Church move out of its indifference and comfort zone.
- IV. We will support the Church by offering our time and talents to animate our communities to better care for creation. We will collaborate, also at a wider level, to raise a prophetic voice calling for more action from political leaders, given that the Church “must assert this responsibility in the public sphere [to] protect mankind from self-destruction” (*Caritas in veritate*, 51)
- V. We will stand in solidarity and collaborate, without losing our identity and integral understanding of problems, with all people who are bravely protecting our common home, as the wider environmental movement and other realities.

To make concrete changes, it will be important to work together. Unity is strength. This is the spirit leading to the launch of the “*Laudato Si'* Generation”, a new network of young Catholics committed to coordinate our common efforts, learn from each other and maximize everyone’s contribution.⁷

5) Our demands

We call on bishops and Church leaders to accelerate the implementation of *Laudato Si'* by:

- I. Encouraging ongoing ecological conversion through educational and formation programs at all levels, accompanied by special initiatives to nurture the ecological dimension of our faith such as the annual Season of Creation celebration.⁸ It is, therefore, necessary to overcome an often marginal and episodic interest in creation care and to move towards a systematic

⁷ The “Laudato Si Generation” is a network of young Catholics (including networks as International Movement of Catholic Students, International Young Catholic Students, Catholic Youth Network for Environmental Sustainability in Africa, Don Bosco Green Alliance, Caritas youth initiatives, etc. coordinated by the Global Catholic Climate Movement) to be officially launched on the main stage of WYD on 25 January 2019.

⁸ The Season of Creation, which is promoted by the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development (<http://bit.ly/letter-soc>), runs annually between September 1, World Day of Prayer for Creation, and October 4, Feast of St. Francis of Assisi. For more information: www.seasonofcreation.org

and organic commitment.

- II. Promoting a conversion of lifestyles to simplicity and sustainability, through the commitment of ecclesial structures for a transition to 100% renewable energy and achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2030 or earlier.
- III. Adopting ethical investment guidelines driving assets away from fossil fuels (“divestment”) given that, to respect the temperature limit posed by the Paris Agreement, we need to “keep most fossil fuels underground”⁹; as stated in the Youth Synod final document (153).
- IV. Leveraging the recent Synod on Young People and the preparatory works for the Synod of the Amazon, young people need to be empowered to lead care for creation programs. In particular, advance initiatives to protect the Amazon forest which is the “lung of the planet” (LS 38) and its inhabitants.

We also call on political leaders and all competent institutions to heed the warnings from the scientific community regarding the precarious state of our common home, by:

- I. Achieving 100% renewable energy to “put an end to the fossil fuel era”¹⁰ in line with the Paris Agreement goal of limiting global warming to 1.5°C.
- II. Implementing the Global Compact for Migration, to deal with environmental refugees so that “nobody is left behind”.
- III. Protecting at least 30% of the planet’s ecosystems by 2030, with special attention to the indigenous communities living in those biodiverse regions, in application of the U.N. Convention on Biological Diversity,
- IV. Actively commit to providing for universal and fair access to drinking water by 2030, as foreseen in the SDGs goal 6 (*Sustainable Development Goals* of the UN 2030 Agenda)
- V. Adopting a “circular economy” model, to challenge the “modern myth of unlimited material progress” (LS 78) and the “unlimited growth” (LS 106) paradigm.

We invite young people all over the world to join us, overcoming our differences, to care for our common home.

May St. Francis of Assisi and WYD 2019 Saint Patrons bless us and inspire us in this sacred commitment.

⁹ Pope Francis, *Address to Participants of Energy Executives*, 9 June 2018.

¹⁰ *World bishops' appeal to COP21 negotiating parties*, October 2015.