

HOW CATHOLICS CAN RESPOND TO POPE FRANCIS AND HIS ENCYCLICAL LETTER LAUDATO SI

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Understand: Step outside of your politics, whether they be of the left, right, or the center. Pope Francis is simply doing his job as the Bishop of Rome and instructing us in faith and morals. His message is not new. It goes back to the first chapter of the book of Genesis. St. John Paul II and Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI made similar statements, only not with such visibility. Then, of course, there is St. Francis of Assisi.

Pray: Prayer is the answer to confusion. Open your heart to Christ, pray that the Holy Spirit comes upon you and fills you with understanding. Believe that God will answer your prayers.

Beware: Political factions and the media will manipulate the Pope's words for their own agendas. If your first impulse is to reject what the Pope says, that is a sign of danger! Pope Francis deserves a fair hearing, without the dubious "assistance" of political spin masters who have agendas that may be in opposition to the Church.

Repent: All of us sin against Creation. Our culture makes it easy to pollute and damage the planet. Change begins with the Sacrament of Reconciliation. When we understand that we have sinned against God and His Creation and we confess that sin, we resolve to forsake our sin – so that we live more lightly upon the land.

Change your ways and manners of living: This is an essential fruit of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. We got into the present situation with millions of bad decisions by billions of people over long periods of time. We will get into a better situation as we learn to make good, better, and best decisions. That process begins in each individual heart. It's hard to do good because structures of sin, built up by those billions of sinful decisions, make evil easy. Every time we do the right thing, we create structures of beauty, wisdom and goodness that make it easier for everyone to do good. Never tell yourself that what you do doesn't matter, because it does. It matters to you, to your family, to your community, and to the future.

Pay attention to what is happening: Watch the weather and your local climate and ecology. Discern the signs of these times – politics, economics, culture, community. Give careful thought to necessities, risks, challenges, resources, hazards, and opportunities for both your household and your community. No one is an island! Will your life be a blessing to your community and the planet?

Be careful how you spend your money: Every dollar you spend is a vote – and you get what you pay for. A purchase may also embody other costs: environmental degradation, slave labor or other moral evils. Don't subsidize the work of demons who prowl about the world seeking the ruin of

souls! Buy food from local farmers and locally owned supermarkets, and eat at local restaurants. If you buy stuff because of emotional needs, get counseling. You can't spend your way to prosperity, so don't try. Your life will not improve if you buy more stuff. Your kids will not be smarter if they wear designer stuff. Remember the advice of our grandparents: reduce, reuse, recycle, repair, make it over, and make do. *The borrower is the slave of the lender.*

Walk, take public transportation, carpool, or ride a bicycle. Drive less: If possible, integrate the geographies of your life so you live close to your work, in an area with easy access to schools, church, shopping, and entertainment.

Support public and private initiatives that promote public transportation, carpools, bicycles, walking, organic gardening and farming, free-range and pastured flocks and herds, urban agriculture, local food systems, and community capacities for food security.

Stop, or greatly reduce, your use of toxic chemicals on your lawns: Urban areas apply hazardous fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides at rates that would never be found in farm country. These chemicals are lethal to the planet and its creatures, and hazardous to humans. They destroy the micro flora and fauna in our soils. The chemicals kill beneficial pollinating insects like bees – one third of our food supply is dependent upon pollinating insects! If we kill off all our bees, say goodbye to most nuts, fruit, squash, pumpkins, melons, chocolate, cucumbers, and $\frac{3}{4}$ of our flowers! Since 2006, the commercial bee population has declined **forty percent!** Stop killing bees with lawn chemicals. Never buy a plant contaminated with *neoniconitoid pesticides*. Learn more at <http://www.bettertimesinfo.org/lawncare.htm>. Bishops could request organic lawn care methods for all church properties.

Plant trees and bushes: Shade your parking lots, buildings, and houses with trees. Grow some of your food, even if it is only a tomato plant in a pot. Plant fruit and nut trees and bushes in parks. Line your streets and roads with shade trees.

Do something about energy conservation: The first thing to do is find and seal air leaks. Turn the lights off when not in use. Use fans in the summer, and set your thermostat at a higher temperature. In the winter, dress for the season indoors and lower your thermostat. Beware of “vampire loads” from your electronics. Windows are a major heat gain in the summer and heat loss in the winter. Shade is your friend in the summer – but get your shade from deciduous trees that shed their leaves in the winter, because then the sun is your friend! Find many more energy conservation ideas at <http://www.energyconservationinfo.org/summer.pdf> and <http://www.energyconservationinfo.org/winter.pdf>.

Invest in solar power for your home: If you have money in the bank, a solar hot water system will pay for itself in a few years, and solar electric systems can pay for themselves over about 10 years (depending on the local situation). You will get a better rate of return on money invested in solar power for your house than you will with the money in the bank, and it is much less risky than money in the stock market. Pope Benedict installed solar cells at the Vatican, and he didn't do that because it was going to lose money.

Use a clothes line to air dry your clothes: It's the easiest thing we can do to bless the planet. Your clothes will last longer (dryer lint is the dryer beating your clothes to death!) and smell better. The time involved is minimal, and a little exercise is good for us all. During wet or extremely cold weather, use your dryer if you must, but during most of the year, when it is not wet or extremely cold, allow the sun to dry your clothes and bless the planet with your actions.

Do what you can, with what you have, where you are: Don't let the perfect become the enemy of good. Don't bite off more than you can chew! Making small changes in your life over time will bless Creation and reduce the amount of stress, risk and emotional trouble in your life. Procrastination, however, is the thief of time.

Start projects – big or small – that will save the world, or at least your little corner of it: Work together with your neighbors to increase the safety, security, health, and well-being of your family and community. Laudato Si is a call to a better life, a world with more justice, peace, equity, and sustainability. If we want truth, wisdom, justice, and beauty, then the best thing to do is to practice truth, wisdom, justice, and beauty in our own lives and neighborhoods. Eventually we will get good at it.

Nurture blessings and hope in your own life and in the life of your community: Promote solidarity and cooperation. Trust yourself, respect others and God's Creation. Understand our interdependence with each other and the natural world. Leave nobody behind for the wolves to devour. Turn your back on those who, without ceasing, preach the gospel of greed.