

# MINNESOTA

OUR COMMON HOME



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INTEGRAL ECOLOGY  
everything is connected.

# Minnesota, Our Common Home

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## Introduction

A great cultural, spiritual, and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set out on the long path of renewal.

Pope Francis, *Laudato si'*, 202

## Two distinct crises?

Minnesota—Land of 10,000 Lakes ... though sometimes it feels like it is the Land of 10,000 Debates. Among our many challenges, there are a multitude of environmental disputes: oil pipelines, mining projects, hydraulic fracturing, water quality, and agricultural resources—matters that attract significant media attention and significant controversy. These conversations heat up quickly, too, because most of the time these issues are presented as black-and-white and “either-or,” forcing everyone to take a side; one must choose between the cause of environmental stewardship, or that of workers, industry, and economic growth.

Similarly, a lot of ink gets spilled discussing difficult social questions that drive to the very heart of our identity as human persons—marriage and family, gender and sexuality, reproduction, and end-of-life issues. Again, the conversation is all too often framed in an ideological<sup>2</sup> way, exacerbating conflict rather than facilitating a constructive dialogue in pursuit of truth, human dignity, and the common good.

We find ourselves embroiled in many questions that all ultimately derive from one key issue: our stewardship of creation—not just of the natural environment, but also of our bodies and even of our very lives. Too often, however, the inherent connections between human and environmental questions are obscured because the political and ethical landscape is dominated by ideologies, which substitute a narrow and absolutist vision of reality for the truth. At face value, the two sets of questions—environmental and social—seem distinct. Yet when we step back from the false dichotomies presented to us, we notice that these issues are deeply connected.

## True environmental stewardship

Pope Francis’ encyclical, *Laudato si'*: *on care for our common home*, offers a comprehensive vision of the challenges we face and how to address them.<sup>3</sup> Building on the work of his predecessors,<sup>4</sup> Pope Francis proposes a refreshing and holistic way of looking at our relationships with the earth, one another, and the Creator<sup>5</sup>—one that promotes the well-being of the natural environment while doing justice to the human persons who inhabit it—and encourages us to remember that a good and generous God creates all things. He calls this new approach “integral ecology.”

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*Laudato si'* gives us a framework for understanding the many modern challenges of creation stewardship by reminding us of our true identity as children of God. In our adoption as sons and daughters of God, we are called to care for creation by respecting and cooperating with His design, so that through us, all things may find their ultimate fulfillment in God. Cooperation, not domination, is at the heart of our call “to till and to keep” the garden of creation (cf. Genesis 2:15).<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, Pope Francis clearly states that ecological concern is a critical component of our role as stewards; it is, as he says, not an optional or a secondary aspect of our faith (*LS*, 217). If we have considered the environment to be of little or no importance to us as Christians, it is time to think again; humans are not the only creatures with inherent value, nor is the earth mere raw material to assist us in our pursuits. Rather, all things show forth the goodness of God and have an order that we are called to respect.

This emphasis on ecology may come as a surprise to many Catholics; undeniably, the Church has, in recent decades, focused much of its attention on matters of Christian anthropology. But the Lord is calling us to a deep renewal of our most fundamental beliefs, and our beliefs about creation and our relationship to it lie at the very heart of our Christian faith and our identity as disciples of Christ.

In fact, integral ecology, far from being a new set of truths or principles, might well be called a re-presentation of the natural law, which forms the base of much of the Church’s moral teaching.<sup>7</sup> It clarifies that, above all else, Catholic morality is about right relationships, beginning with a relationship with the Creator and a deep awareness of the identity He gives us.

*Laudato si'* is a crucial moment for the Church and the world. Amid the present swirl of ideologies, this groundbreaking encyclical is an opportunity for the people of God to evangelize by proposing something different, something richer, something deeply rooted in reality. What the Church offers—what the pope is proposing in *Laudato si'*—is *the* authentic vision of creation stewardship, because it is an authentic vision of right relationships in the created order.

### **What to expect in these pages**

In *Minnesota, Our Common Home*, we explore the key principles discussed in the encyclical and propose how we might translate them into our present situation as Minnesotans. *Laudato si'*, which some assume is focused only on the environment, also applies to many other aspects of our life. Some of the ideas presented here may be new or challenging, for Catholics and non-Catholics alike.

As Pope Francis repeats in *Laudato si'*, everything is connected. As Catholics, we believe that even things that at first seem totally unrelated are, in fact, intricately woven together in God’s providential design. This is why the pope’s call for integral ecology is so remarkable. It is an affirmation that we are happiest when our lives are unified, not compartmentalized, when we allow the truths we believe to shape all aspects of our lives, not just some of them. We cannot have a true ecology while human society deteriorates, just as we cannot build up the common good while destroying our common home.

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We will begin in Part One, “A Crisis of Nature,” by exploring what Pope Francis calls the “human roots” of the ecological crisis (*LS*, 101-136). Although *Laudato si’* is framed in terms of environmental problems, the pope is also clear that those problems are only symptoms; the disease exists at the level of the heart, in the way that we as a society have come to see ourselves and our place in creation. This way of seeing is what we call a worldview, and it profoundly shapes the culture we build. Our own cultural narrative is unprecedented in its opposition to biblical faith, especially in the way it champions a view of the human person as master of creation—a “technological worldview” in which one believes we can overcome any problem or limitation by scientific and technological means. This stands in dramatic opposition to the way that human societies, and especially the Church, have looked at the world: as an ordered cosmos created by God with discernable laws and structures. This is the meaning of natural law, and it is what the pope exhorts us to recover in *Laudato si’*.

Second, in Part Two, “Ecological Conversion,” we will unpack two important concepts that appear throughout *Laudato si’*: “ecological conversion” and “integral ecology.” These are key ideas in Pope Francis’ encyclical. They chart the path forward, showing us how to respond to the ecological crisis. *Ecological conversion* is the process by which our encounter with Jesus Christ begins to change the way we relate to the world around us (*LS*, 217). It happens when we begin to adapt our lives to reflect more perfectly our relationship to God, one another, and the earth. If ecological conversion is the road we must travel on, then we might consider integral ecology the destination. *Integral ecology* is a fuller way to live—a flourishing and joyful stewardship, and a way of seeing that considers both environmental and human concerns (*LS*, 137-162).

In other words, everything in human life and society is connected just like in an ecosystem, and the crises we now face are both environmental and spiritual. Just as the soil cries out for renewal, so too does the soul. Citing his predecessor, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, Pope Francis writes, “The external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast” (*LS*, 217). To fully address the ecological crisis, we need more than a few good policies and programs; we need an “ecological spirituality” powerful enough to transform our lives from the inside out—a spirituality rooted in our identity in Christ and, by extension, our identity as stewards.

Finally, Part Three, “Integral Ecology,” is an attempt to apply the principles from Parts One and Two to both the natural and human ecologies of Minnesota. We offer some practical suggestions for how to live out the call to integral ecology in our own lives. The section also looks at bigger challenges that we must face together as a state: environmental policy, agriculture, and protection of our parks and other natural resources. Finally, we look at what *Laudato si’* can say to us as Minnesotans in the face of increasing controversy about gender, sexuality, human dignity in the womb and at the end of life, and human nature itself.

In the spirit of Pope Francis, who addressed *Laudato si’* “to every person living on this planet,” we invite Catholics, our fellow Christians, our brothers and sisters of different faiths, and all persons of good will to consider what the Church has to say to us as Minnesotans about our common home and everything living

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in it. We pray you will find hope and encouragement in these pages and join us as we all become better stewards of creation.

## A Crisis of Nature

### What is our worldview?

Although the future of our planet is a real concern, much more is at stake in the ecological crisis. Human greed, waste, and carelessness have indeed scarred and polluted the earth. But it is not just our actions that need to change; it is our attitudes. As Pope Francis writes, “A certain way of understanding human life and activity has gone awry” (*LS*, 101). We are not just forgetting to recycle; we are forgetting who we are.

During his papacy, Pope Francis has consistently pointed out that the heart of the crisis is a modern worldview (a way of seeing reality) that cannot account for the whole truth about God, the human person, and creation. This worldview, so deep-rooted in our society, makes certain aspects of Christian faith particularly difficult for us as moderns to understand.<sup>8</sup> The pope identifies two main threads that define the contours of modern thought: first, and *individualism* that “tends to see the human person as a being whose sole fulfilment [sic] depends only on his or her own strength,”<sup>9</sup> and second, a *relativism* that creates “a model of salvation that is merely interior, closed off in its own subjectivism.”<sup>10</sup>

The result is a worldview that radically alters how we perceive ourselves in relationship to God, to one another, and to the earth. For example, this worldview effectively separates “the human person from the body and from the material universe, in which traces of the provident hand of the Creator are no longer found, but only a reality deprived of meaning, foreign to the fundamental identity of the person, and easily manipulated by the interests of man.”<sup>11</sup> In other words, we who are influenced by modernity tend to experience a profound alienation from our own “embodiedness”—from the material universe in which we live, and even our very bodies—and thus are unable to perceive God’s presence in those realities. We lose a sense of our own interconnectedness.

Secondly, such a worldview places heavy emphasis on “progress,” understood as the ongoing march toward a utopian future. It champions the belief that human beings can forge their own destiny and create their own identity, eliminating everything that causes suffering, poverty, illness, injustice, war, and even death. Progress is made, by and large, through constant advances in science and technology, which in recent centuries have empowered us to control the forces of nature in ways that no human society before us could have imagined. With more and more knowledge and power at our disposal, it seems there is no limit to what humanity can achieve, no obstacle we cannot eventually overcome.

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## Where is our hope?

If we are honest, we will probably admit this is an appealing way to look at the world. Every human person, in one way or another, is looking for happiness and taking steps to achieve it. We often think we will find the fulfillment we desire in physical health, economic well-being, or peace both within ourselves and with our neighbors.<sup>12</sup> The belief that we can take up our own destiny and create identity and meaning for ourselves promises an exciting future, filled with ever-increasing possibilities. It also promotes hard work and creativity—strong American values—and offers hope in the face of humanity’s perennial enemies: pestilence, disease, natural disasters, and, more fundamentally, suffering altogether.<sup>13</sup>

But this worldview is also deeply opposed to the Christian faith. For one, it practically assumes the non-existence of God, setting up humanity in His place as a radically autonomous, Promethean figure. Thus, it becomes harder to understand our own identity as creatures rather than lords of creation and to let go of the idea that we can create heaven on earth. Likewise, we forget that faith in Christ rejects all claims of self-realization, that only God, by drawing us to Himself, can make the realization of our desire for fulfillment possible.<sup>14</sup>

As Christians, we know that Jesus Christ is our ultimate hope. Scripture teaches us that by God’s mercy, “we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading” (1 Peter 1:3-4). Therefore, a converted Christian will be able to carry on through challenges, suffering, and limitations because he or she is not looking for complete fulfillment in this life.

Make no mistake: not even deeply committed Christians, if constantly exposed to this modern worldview, are immune to its influence. Because we live in a society that operates out of a technological worldview rather than a biblical one, we are constantly fed a message of hope found in progress, not in God. Our age is driven by a vision for a future full of hope in humanity and our own ability to overcome. Hope, according to the modern worldview, ultimately resides in the future—that place where “progress” is realized. A society with such motivations cannot make sense of setbacks, failure, or suffering, and will therefore see anything or anyone who stands between it and the glorious future as an unacceptable obstacle—and crush it if necessary.<sup>15</sup> Progress becomes its own religion, “[a]nd it’s a religion with a simple premise: except for the random detour, civilization instinctively changes for the better. And it’s up to us to get on board or get out of the way; to be part of the change or to get run over by history if we try to obstruct it.”<sup>16</sup>

Instead of acknowledging that “the evil that is most damaging to the human person is that which comes from his or her heart,”<sup>17</sup> those who subscribe to this worldview see the people and institutions that obstruct progress as the true enemies. At the end of the day, they will have no scruples about discarding or even trampling such people. Such intolerance of resistance is what makes this notion—that the world is ours to possess, manipulate, or destroy in the name of progress—not only false but also dangerous.

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## A technological worldview

Let us be clear: scientific and technological progress is not in itself evil or contrary to the Catholic faith.<sup>18</sup> Humans have been using technology to affect the world around them in amazing ways for millennia. Because of the progress we have made, more people have food, clean drinking water, and freedom from epidemic disease than ever before in human history.<sup>19</sup> Better technology can—and often *does*—help us to leave behind a better world and an integrally higher quality of life (*LS*, 194). Creativity and resourcefulness, especially in the face of challenges and limitations, are a necessary part of our identity. They are an exercise of intelligence that express the dignity of the human person and our being made in God’s image.<sup>20</sup>

It is also obvious from Scripture that God’s intention from the beginning was that men and women would exercise dominion over His creation. We are divinely appointed rulers over the earth. Consider the very first command He gave to human beings in the first Genesis creation narrative: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth” (Genesis 1:28). The second version of the story in Genesis 2 contains a similar command: “The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it” (Genesis 2:15).

The farmer who digs to create proper drainage ditches or clears away rocks and weeds and fertilizes the soil, far from violating creation’s integrity, is fulfilling God’s command to subdue the earth. The same can be said of the hunter who, to feed or support his family, takes the life of a deer or an elk. It would be wrong to think that stewardship over creation means that we must do nothing with it.

The question, then, is not whether we should exercise dominion, but rather *how* God wants us to do so—what true dominion is, and what it is not. This distinction between biblical dominion and its modern counterfeits is one of the most pressing questions addressed in *Laudato si’*, and it is an especially important question in light of the rapid advance of technology that characterizes the modern age.

While technology can help us exercise dominion properly, it is not, however, a morally neutral tool.<sup>21</sup> It carries forward a moral vision and determines what kind of a society we build (*LS*, 107). On the one hand is the possibility that we can use technology to unfold the Creator’s plan, seek the advantage of our fellow men and women, and contribute to the realization in history of the divine plan.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand is the frightful prospect that, if we fail to set clear boundaries, we will become technology’s slaves rather than its stewards. In some ways, this is already what we experience in what Pope Francis calls the “technocratic paradigm” (*LS*, 106-114).

The danger is that the logic of technology is seductive and, if unchecked, quickly starts to dominate everything. As we find ourselves with more and more technology at our disposal, we can easily start to think that technology can solve *all* our problems—not just material problems, but social and spiritual problems, too. We can mistakenly equate any increase in power with an increase in progress (*LS*, 105), thinking that technological solutions can cure all disease, put an end to all war and poverty, defeat all suffering, and even eliminate death. This kind of misplaced trust in the promise of scientific progress is

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the hallmark of technocracy. Without a stable ethical framework to shape our use of technology, it is hard to set responsible limits; we quickly forget that while such advances can supply the material for progress, they themselves can never actually bring it about.<sup>23</sup>

Technology is, paradoxically, both a promise and a predicament:<sup>24</sup> just think of the many questions that arise when it comes to genetic modification,<sup>25</sup> surveillance drones, internet algorithms,<sup>26</sup> and “artificial intelligence.” It doesn’t take much thought to recognize that these new capabilities can be used “either for man’s progress or for his degradation.”<sup>27</sup> Advances of this kind cannot be wielded thoughtlessly; their introduction into society must be accompanied—and should be *preceded*—by serious, sustained reflection on their proper use. Just because something is possible does not mean that it is good.

### Masters of creation?

The primary seduction of the technocratic paradigm is to convince us that everything is ours, that we have limitless dominion over the laws of nature, and that we can tamper with those laws to suit our wishes. Scripture, on the other hand, teaches clearly that we have no such “dominion”—that this is a false sense of the dominion God intended for us.<sup>28</sup> *Laudato si’* is an urgent call to reflect deeply on the true meaning of progress, and to consider how to responsibly use our newfound power. Pope Francis reassures us that the Church is not suggesting we go back to the Stone Age, but, he says, “We do need to slow down and look at reality in a different way, to appropriate the positive and sustainable progress which has been made, but also to recover the values and the great goals swept away by our unrestrained delusions of grandeur” (*LS*, 114).

One might ask at this point whether all this talk of technology distracts from the main point of *Laudato si’*, an encyclical written to address the ecological crisis. But this is precisely the point. According to *Laudato si’*, the technocratic paradigm strikes at the very heart of the ecological crisis. Environmental destruction is an outgrowth of a disordered relationship with scientific and technological progress. Our view of ourselves in relationship to God and the world He created informs our use of technology which, in turn, determines how we treat the earth.

At its core, then, *Laudato si’* is a call for all of us to remember our nature as creatures and to recognize our noble call to stewardship and co-creation with God. More than just promoting ecological awareness, the encyclical promotes an ecological view of the human person, a deeper sense of awe at our unique place in the cosmos and of our responsibility to be ministers of the design established by our Creator.<sup>29</sup>

On the surface, it could appear that the concerns raised in *Laudato si’* represent some dramatic shift in Catholic teaching—which may be why it received so much attention, both good and bad. But a deeper look at its message reveals that *Laudato si’* is actually a rediscovery of the great treasures contained in our faith. The wound it addresses is undue confidence in technological solutions and humanity’s false sense of dominion over nature. Pope Francis gives a clear and forceful message: we need a complete transformation—a *conversion* to an ecological vision of the human person, creation, and Creator.

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## What is “nature”?

The central issue raised in *Laudato si'* is the false view that the natural world is nothing but raw material. In this view, material things are either useful to us or an obstacle to our plans, but they possess no intrinsic goodness—which is *not* the way human societies, especially the Church, have looked at the world. The Christian imagination is alive to the God-given *goodness* of creation, over and above its usefulness. Before a thing is useful, a thing *is*, and its existence is good. A technological worldview is blind to the intrinsic value of things, seeing only what is advantageous; a Christian worldview sees the goodness of each created thing and knows that it reveals the goodness of the Creator who brought it into being.

If we have eyes to see, creation becomes a constant declaration of God’s infinite goodness. As the Psalmist writes,

The heavens are telling the glory of God;  
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.  
Day to day pours forth speech,  
and night to night declares knowledge.  
There is no speech, nor are there words;  
their voice is not heard;  
yet their voice goes out through all the earth,  
and their words to the end of the world. (Psalm 19:1-4)

God’s “handiwork” is all around us in the created world. It not only tells of God’s glory, but it also “declares knowledge.” Well, we might ask, knowledge of what?

Part of the goodness of creation is that it has an intrinsic order and harmony. It has a design. This design, the intention and purpose behind every creature and created thing, is what philosophers and Christians alike are often talking about when they use the word “nature.” Everything has a nature: rocks, rose bushes, foxes, and human beings. Because of this, for every creature, there are certain activities that lead to its flourishing and the fullest expression of its being, just as there are certain activities that are harmful to its flourishing.<sup>30</sup> Nature, in this sense, is what makes a creature the kind of thing it is and leads it to the fulfillment of its being.

So, just as we might speak of a tree’s nature and what goods accord with that nature (healthy soil, sunlight, water, and carbon dioxide), we can also speak of human nature and the things that are good or bad for human beings based on our nature. This will mean that some actions should be done and others avoided; similarly, it will mean some goods are pursued because they accord with our flourishing—this is the basis of calling certain actions either morally *good* or morally *evil*.<sup>31</sup>

For example, it is in accordance with our nature that we live in community, so actions that harm the community, like murder and theft, are to be avoided. It is in our nature to seek knowledge, so lying, which impedes another’s ability to know the truth, is morally wrong.

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The moral goodness or badness of an act is thus *not* the decision of an arbitrary lawmaker imposed from the outside, but rather is determined by what brings our nature to perfection and what carries us away from it. Moreover, the morally good life, lived in harmony with one's nature (i.e., the way one is created) has long been understood as the happy life. When we act according to our nature, we not only do what is right, but we also become happy, healthy, and whole human beings. But what happens when this sense of nature is forgotten or ignored?

### **Nature of the crisis: a crisis of nature**

Without a proper sense of nature, we no longer see things as ordered and invested with goodness and meaning when we look upon the world. We can therefore no longer perceive how creation, far from being neutral, makes a moral claim on us to respect and cooperate with its design. Rather, “nature” just looks like raw material. We can do what we want with it. Our wishes and wants become the norm for what should and should not be done with the earth's resources, with other creatures, with other persons, and even with our own bodies.

However, ignoring the laws of nature does not make them disappear, so we can end up making choices and forming habits that are harmful to ourselves, our neighbors, and the earth.<sup>32</sup> We can lose touch with the design of God and become less and less able to realize our own happiness and the greatest good of other creatures. “Once the human being declares *independence from reality* and behaves with absolute dominion,” Pope Francis writes, “the very foundations of our life begin to crumble” (*LS*, 117, emphasis added).

The harm we have done to the environment, Pope Francis writes, “is only the most striking sign of [the deeper problem:] a disregard for *the message contained in the structures of nature itself*” (*LS*, 117, emphasis added). The ecological crisis is certainly urgent, but it is also a symptom of something deeper: the need to recover a strong sense of the nature of things and to see once more that creation is not a blank canvas but God's work of art. We are nature's stewards, not its masters.

*Laudato si'* calls us back to the true worldview, the one that understands creation not as accidental chaos, but as “the Divine jeweler's shop,”<sup>33</sup> a world with divine fingerprints all over it, a cosmos permeated by the loving design of the Creator (*LS*, 84). It is an invitation to step out into the world with renewed confidence in our ability to perceive in its contours an order, an intention, an imprint of the mind of God—and the humility to allow that order to shape our lives. Our participation in that order is the source of our temporal happiness.<sup>34</sup>

### **Ecological Conversion**

In *Laudato si'*, Pope Francis invites the world to a total renewal of human life and society.<sup>35</sup> Such a renewal, however, requires a lively vision of what God intends human life to be. The response proposed by Pope Francis is a life in which we are more aware of our deep interconnectedness with God and all His creatures. It involves all of our life. Conversion will certainly have implications for how we treat the

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environment, but it requires a complete reorientation of every aspect of our lives. This transformation must begin, for each and every person without exception, with a personal, life-changing encounter with the person of Jesus Christ, who modeled human life perfectly.

### **Made for relationship**

“The world,” writes Pope Francis, “is a web of relationships” (*LS*, 240). As we discussed in the previous section, we are woven into the fabric of creation and called to communion with God and with every living thing He has made. Most importantly, because we alone are created in God’s image, we are hard-wired for the communion of love, which can only take place within the context of personal relationships.

Consider the fact that we only know who we are in and through our relationships. There is no such thing as a solitary human person. From the moment of our conception, we are enfolded in the relationship between our parents. Whether or not we were raised by our biological parents, we have been, and always will be, dependent upon and connected to those who have surrounded us, provided for us, taught us, and loved us. Only by encountering a “thou” can we know ourselves as an “I.”

It is, in other words, through relationships—through love, communion, and mutual self-gift—that we grow and progress toward the fullness of our being. Relationship brings about our flourishing because it is core to our nature as human persons. As Pope Francis writes, “The human person grows more, matures more, and is sanctified more to the extent that he or she enters into relationships, going out from themselves to live in communion with God, with others and with all creatures” (*LS*, 240).

### **Sons and daughters**

Our call to live in relationship begins with our relationship with God. But because we live in a fallen world, overshadowed by the reality of sin, right relationship with God no longer comes easily to us; it is something we must learn. That is exactly what Jesus Christ came to teach us. Not only did He atone for our sins on the Cross, canceling our debt of sin, but He also gave us a model of how human beings can abide in loving communion with God. That is why the Vatican II pastoral constitution *Gaudium et spes* says that Jesus Christ “fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear.”<sup>36</sup>

Christ is the fullness of God’s revelation to humankind. His life and teaching sum up everything that God wished to communicate to us in this life about who He is and who we are. One of the most profound truths about God that Jesus taught is that He is the Father. Tertullian notes in his treatise on prayer: “The expression God *the Father* had never been revealed to anyone ... The Father’s name has been revealed to us in the Son.”<sup>37</sup> Jesus spoke continually about doing His Father’s will, addressed His prayers to the Father, and even cried out to the Father from the Cross when He said, “Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!” (Luke 23:46).

Not only is God the Father of Jesus, He is our Father, too. Christ taught us to lift our worship, our praise, our thanksgiving, and all our needs to “Our Father, who art in heaven.”

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For those who have prayed the Lord’s Prayer since childhood, this may not seem very significant, but it is a radical change from the way that religious communities understood God before the coming of Christ. It would have been scandalous for human beings to address Almighty God in such an intimate way. But with Jesus, the paradigm shifted. “At the Savior’s command, and formed by divine teaching, we dare to say, ‘Our Father’”<sup>38</sup> These are the words we pray at every Mass! Jesus has revealed God as our Father; this relationship, the relationship of sons and daughters to their Father, is the core of our identity.

### **Identity leads into mission**

Conversely, if we believe our identity is rooted not in relationships but in our own sense of power and autonomy, it leads to a constant feeling of struggle and burden as we try to gain more and more control over our circumstances and surroundings. Rather than seeing and delighting in the intrinsic goodness of another person or another creature, we apply our own mechanical standards to them and become frustrated when those standards are not met. We begin to measure ourselves and others by ability and to value things by how they can be of use to us. The result is a temptation to impose our own desires and judgments onto reality, bending it according to our will. We can easily take on a “conquering” mindset, wishing to manipulate creation for our own purposes. This, once again, is the fruit of a fundamentally technological worldview.

But Jesus invites us to a different approach. “Unless you turn and become like children,” He said, “you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3). To live in the joy of communion with God, our neighbor, and all of creation, we must first accept our identity as children of the Father. This means allowing God to take control of our lives, which He does in the same way that good earthly parents preside over their young children’s lives: with love, attention, and tenderness. It is Jesus who reveals “the mystery of the Father and of his love” to us.<sup>39</sup>

Learning to surrender in trust to the Father will be a lifelong process for all of us. We tend to be fearful when our fate is in someone else’s hands, often because other people have so painfully let us down in the past. But God can never let us down; He always stands ready to show us His faithfulness and reassure us that we have nothing to fear—not even our own weakness and limitation. Jesus once wept over the city of Jerusalem: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! ... How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!” (Matthew 23:37). The Heart of Jesus makes the same plea to each of us, hungering for us to approach Him in trust and in confidence that we are in safe hands. He has won the final victory. We need not be afraid to yield ourselves to His providential care, but rather we can look to the example Jesus gave when, on the night before His suffering and death, He prayed in loving surrender to the Father: “Not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42; cf. Matthew 26:42).

God has a design for our lives that is not of our own making, but His designs are always good. We will all inevitably have to face the difficult truth that we do not get to decide the meaning of our lives or our own identity, and this may be painful at times. But, if we are open to grace, it can also be a joyful discovery: we do not have to decide the meaning of our lives! “Identity” is not some great and looming task to achieve but a gift to accept from our Creator.

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We are, of course, responsible for devoting ourselves to the task of integral self-development: the proper formation of our conscience and intellect; the cultivation of virtue; and growth in the spiritual life. These are duties proper to all human beings. But the most foundational truths about our identity are not of our making; they are a gift from God. A Christian is not self-made but Christ-made.

Most of us were baptized as infants and were so helpless that someone else had to give consent on our behalf—yet it was precisely in that moment that God chose us and set His seal upon our souls forever. We ought to reflect on this regularly. Our dignity is not something we can earn or increase by doing more things or by doing them better; our worth in the eyes of God is unchangeable because He gave us our dignity as an extravagant, unearned, and undeserved gift.

Before we know what we are to *do*, we must know who we *are*. We are certainly called to be stewards of creation, but this mission flows first and foremost out of our identity, which is the truth about who we are in God’s eyes. As Christians, we know by faith that our fundamental identity is as children of God, and we come to deeper awareness of this identity by growing in our relationship with our Father in heaven. When we rightly understand our identity and inherent dignity as sons and daughters of God, we will consequently be able to see the mission and responsibility of stewardship clearly and in its proper context. We can then live in freedom, because we know that the task of stewardship is not a burden arbitrarily imposed on us, but a response to the love and mercy that God has poured into our lives.

Seeing ourselves as sons or daughters of God, we will seek to imitate Christ, our brother, understanding that working for the good of others and sometimes sacrificing our own temporal needs and comforts will serve our own ultimate good as well.<sup>40</sup>

### Ecological conversion

Today, when we Catholics hear the word “stewardship,” we probably associate it with giving financially to our parish or other charitable organizations. Full Catholic stewardship, however, is *creation stewardship*. It is being aware of the responsibility given to us by the Creator to care for all He has made and using it in a way that bears fruit for the glory of God and love of neighbor. *This* is the true meaning of biblical dominion. As we discussed previously, the authority that God gave us over His earth is not passive; it requires that we work, build, and transform the world around us while at the same time respecting nature’s laws, as well as its limitations. To live as stewards of creation, we have to undergo what Pope Francis calls “ecological conversion.”

Ecological conversion means that the effects of our encounter with Christ become evident in the way we relate to the world around us (*LS*, 217). We must learn to see the created world as God sees it, and to treat created things with the reverence due to God’s design. Unless this happens, we may pray, we may receive the sacraments frequently, we may serve the poor, but our life of Christian discipleship will be incomplete. As Pope Francis teaches, “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*,

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217). We cannot excuse ourselves from the task of caring for our common home or for any creature with whom we dwell in it.

### **Cultivating an ecological spirituality**

*Laudato si'* proposes that Christians cultivate an ecological spirituality. Pope Francis writes that a commitment to environmental stewardship is so lofty that it cannot ultimately be sustained by anything other than a conviction of the heart, rooted in faith. It cannot last “without an ‘interior impulse which encourages, motivates, nourishes, and gives meaning to our individual and communal activity’” (*LS*, 216). Our relationship with God should motivate us to “a more passionate concern for the protection of our world” (*LS*, 216). Far from dismissing God’s earth, we should love it more intensely than even the most fervent secular environmentalist, since our care for creation is also an integral part of our spirituality.

Ecological spirituality is intensely relational, since it means seeing all of creation as deeply connected and interdependent. It is the spirituality of a steward. A Christian steward cares for the environment, first, out of love and respect for the One who made it, and, second, to fulfill the commandment to love his or her neighbor. Stewardship means placing our gifts and creativity at the service of ecological renewal, not only to heal the earth but also, and more importantly, to heal our relationship with creation, our neighbor, and God.

Jesus Christ is the supreme model of ecological spirituality; He, more than anyone else, reveals the heart of a steward. Jesus frequently explains spiritual truths to his disciples by making comparisons to things in nature: a mustard seed, wheat and tares, sheep and sparrows, a vine and its branches (Matthew 13:31-32; 24-30; John 10:27; Matthew 6:25-34; John 15:1-6). Pope Francis writes, “The Lord was able to invite others to be attentive to the beauty that there is in the world because he himself was in constant touch with nature, lending it an attention full of fondness and wonder” (*LS*, 97). As we seek to follow Christ more closely, then, we should ask for the grace of His own attentive gaze.

### **Integral Ecology**

Once we make a conscious decision to let Christ shape the way we look at and relate to the world around us, we can embrace our identity as stewards of God’s design (*LS*, 217). At the heart of the steward’s mission is *respect* for the divinely-arranged wisdom in creation. At the same time, there is work to be done. God instructs us to “till the earth” (cf. Genesis 2:15), meaning to cultivate healthy natural and human ecologies, recognizing the interdependence of each.

### **An ethic of stewardship**

Integral ecology can be summed up in the expression, “everything is connected.” Although we may typically think of ecology as dealing primarily with nature “out there”—rivers, forests, wildlife, etc.—*Laudato si'* teaches that this alone is insufficient. Pope Francis writes that when we speak of the “environment,” we are really talking about a relationship existing between nature and the society living in

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it (*LS*, 139). True ecology, then, must integrate questions of human life and flourishing with concern for the natural environment. We cannot protect the environment at the cost of human development, and we cannot build a better world by means of gluttony, waste, and destruction.

Think of an actual ecosystem. Its foundational principle is life. It is a place where life should flourish. The good of the whole is dependent on the well-being of each living thing in accordance with its nature. When harmful toxins make their way into the ecosystem, everything is affected; some things will even begin to die. If some creature or plant is removed entirely or is unable to flourish as it should, the whole ecosystem is threatened. The same can be said of both human society (moral or human ecology)<sup>41</sup> and the natural environment in which we live (the natural ecology): introduce harmful outside influences and both suffer. When some organism in the system does not fulfill its role or live according to its nature, it will negatively affect the whole.<sup>42</sup>

Because the natural ecology and the human ecology comprise one unified reality in the context of God’s creation, each is dependent on the other—which is why the subtitle of Pope Francis’ encyclical is “on the care for *our common home*” (emphasis added). Human persons are called to live in solidarity with their fellow humans as well as the rest of creation, to hear “*both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor*” (*LS*, 49). Integral ecology proposes the same principles of stewardship that have always been part of Catholic social teaching, and applies those principles more explicitly to contemporary environmental questions.<sup>43</sup>

Creation stewardship—of the earth, of our neighbor, and of our very selves—is the heart of integral ecology. Understanding our identity as children and stewards, then, we turn to the task of our own work in the vineyard of the Lord here in our home state of Minnesota.

### **Stewardship in the Land of 10,000 Lakes**

Change is already happening in Minnesota. Our communities are moving away from reckless consumption and absorption in technology towards a more human way of life. Especially in the metropolitan areas of the state, the “green” movement has built considerable momentum, from a consumer standpoint, as more and more Minnesotans are making conscious efforts to buy organic, locally-sourced, and minimally-processed foods and household products.<sup>44</sup> In 2017, Minnesota reported 545 certified organic farms covering more than 130,000 acres of land,<sup>45</sup> making us a national leader in the organic food movement.<sup>46</sup> These changing consumer preferences towards a “greener” lifestyle have put increasing pressure on the companies that provide everyday products to adapt more environment-friendly practices, and producers are responding.<sup>47</sup>

It is not just Minnesota producers and consumers that are going green—our legislators and environmental advocacy groups have been working tirelessly in recent years to implement policy that serves the ecological good of our state. Since 1991, the Minnesota Legislature has passed multiple major environmental laws, including the Wetland Conservation Act<sup>48</sup> and the Renewable Energy Standard.<sup>49</sup> Thanks to the hard work of these men and women who devote themselves to raising awareness in Minnesota, our state has become a leader in renewable energy, generating nearly 10.9 million megawatt

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hours of wind-generated electricity in 2017 and ranking eighth in the nation in wind energy generation, to name just one example.<sup>50</sup>

Stewardship is a natural fit for Minnesotans. It resonates with us because love of home, concern for our neighbor, and gratitude for the simple things in life are woven into the fabric of our culture. Environmental stewardship is particularly popular and non-partisan here for a reason. We have a social culture that values deep and sincere friendship in communities. Minnesotans are fiercely loyal and ready to drop everything to help a neighbor in need.<sup>51</sup> Like in other Midwestern states, our values are strong: family, faith, hard work, honesty, and modest living.<sup>52</sup>

With this in mind, we now turn to three areas of local concern that are addressed by *Laudato si'* and propose how we might work together to address them. We invite Catholics and all persons of good will to continue to pray, think, and act on the principles of stewardship and integral ecology, translating them into concrete actions and policies that transform our state for the common good. Ultimately, our shared task is to create policy ecosystems where families and communities can flourish.

### **Protecting natural resources**

Here in the Land of 10,000 Lakes, we have many precious natural resources. We take pride in our lakes, streams, and rivers, inseparable from our local culture. We are fishermen, kayakers, wild rice hunters, cabin goers, summertime swimmers, and proud polar bear plungers. Our waters ground us, they cause the joys of childhood memories to well up within us, they breathe much-needed silence into the constant buzz of busy lives, and they restore us to wider horizons when details bog us down.

Minnesotans are lovers of the wilderness, and it shows, even on a map. Our great state is peppered with parks, hiking trails, and campgrounds, from the Boundary Waters to the bluffs of Winona and everywhere in between. We boast 12 million acres of public land—over 20 percent of the state.<sup>53</sup> Our family history is “rife with tales of lakes paddled, trail-miles logged, fish and game pursued, hills topped, and sunsets viewed on lands that are open to the people.”<sup>54</sup>

Pure water, clean air, and lively forests are among our most precious resources, and as Minnesota Catholics, we ought to cherish and protect these gifts; their preservation should be a priority for us. Because of our Catholic faith, we know that God formed this great land and entrusted it lovingly to our care. Our love for God ought to show in the way we treat the land, and our work for ecological renewal should reflect the urgency of our call as stewards. Our Christian witness demands that we uproot the weeds of greed, gluttony, and apathy, sowing in their place seeds of generosity, simplicity, and care. We cannot be indifferent to the gift of our home or any creature living in it.

Still, environmental stewardship does not mean “leave no trace,” as many bumper stickers proclaim. It means, rather, to leave the *right* trace. The responsibilities of stewardship and dominion given to us as human beings means cultivation of the earth’s gifts for their proper usage; it means development and conservation for further generations—to till and to keep.

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In fact, as rational persons made in the image and likeness of God, we participate in the divine life of the Creator when we use the gift of our reason to draw out the potentialities latent within His creation and use them to foster the integral development of peoples. Think of the use of plants to develop medicines, timber to build shelter or houses of worship, or minerals to develop fuels and industrial materials. These are examples of cultivating the earth's potential by cooperating with its inherent goodness to bring about human flourishing; this is how God intends for us to use our natural resources.

Therefore, we can say with confidence that economic progress is not the enemy of environmental stewardship. True creation stewardship does not require us to reject progress for the sake of the environment but to redefine what we mean by progress. Pope Francis teaches that true progress leaves behind “a better world and an integrally higher quality of life” (*LS*, 194). He observes in *Laudato si'* that it would be wrong to believe there is always a necessary tradeoff between economics and ecology (*LS*, 194). As Catholics, we are not forced into an “either-or” between the environment or the economy. Rather, we are motivated by the possibility that when we steward the earth well, both can flourish.

Stewardship of natural resources is a very practical way to express our faith, and it comes down to small decisions we can all make. The Minnesota Environmental Quality Board recently identified several ways that we can do our part to contribute to a healthy environment and the well-being of all Minnesotans. Their recommendations are concrete and, for the most part, realistic for all of us: fixing leaky water fixtures; reducing lawn watering; learning how to sort waste for landfill, recycling, and composting, and implementing that practice in our homes; taking public transportation rather than driving when possible; and getting a home energy audit to learn where insulation, LED lights, or a programmable thermostat might increase our households' energy efficiency.<sup>55</sup>

Doing these things for the sake of the environment is good and noble; doing them for love of God and out of concern for our neighbor is an act of love and praise to the Creator—it makes us holier and permeates our world with that holiness. Of course, we want a healthy environment. We want pure water, clean air, and more renewable energy. Therefore, these goals must be united to real concern for the common good, those conditions that make human flourishing possible, and directed to the glory and praise of God, to whom everything ultimately belongs.

Every decision, whether around the family table or across the aisle at the Capitol, must be guided by both environmental *and* human questions. It is not enough to ask whether this action, policy, or program preserves Minnesota's natural resources if we do not also ask whether it cultivates authentic human development. Therefore, in debates about new oil pipelines, mines that could affect water quality, or the pollution that may exacerbate climate change,<sup>56</sup> to name a few examples, we must carefully discern how to steward our natural resources *and* promote the best interests of the human communities that depend on them.

In the public square, then, our task as Catholics is to ensure a voice for all those who are affected—a voice that contributes to solutions aimed at the common good. There is no black and white ideological answer to the environmental questions we face. Instead, we are called to carefully consider how our choices, both individual and societal, impact both human and natural ecology. On the Iron Range, for

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example, communities are dependent on mining jobs for their livelihood, and modern technology—including renewable energy technology—depends on materials from those mines. On the other hand, many are concerned that the Boundary Waters and other watersheds may be polluted by the mining operations.<sup>57</sup> Here, it is impossible to separate questions of human ecology—labor, livelihood, and lifestyle—from questions of natural ecology and protecting our most precious natural resources.

### Stewardship in agriculture

From great, sprawling fields of corn or soybeans, to family-run berry farms, to small urban plots, growing and sharing the earth's produce provides satisfying work and brings Minnesotans together. Even as winter draws near, farmers markets open for business week after week, offering affordable, locally grown fruits and vegetables and connecting buyers with the hands that produced their food. While supermarkets give the illusion of unlimited access to any food year-round, these Minnesota growers propose a different approach to food. They remind us that we cannot grow sweet corn in February, that the land yields its fruit in due time, and that nature has a rhythm worthy of respect. They bear witness to our creaturely status, our dependence on God's provision for fair weather and abundant harvests, and our connectedness with one another.

Farming families, in particular, have a privileged experience of God's loving provision.<sup>58</sup> The farmer who works the soil first of all "enters into a relationship with God, an order of creation that is itself already intelligently ordered by Him."<sup>59</sup> On the farm, families must also rely on one another for help and support. Spouses, parents, and children must trust one another to do their part and make the necessary sacrifices involved in their own contribution. Finally, farmers live in a cooperative relationship with creation. They cooperate with God's design "that lies hidden in the order of things."<sup>60</sup> Life on the farm, in other words, is a life lived in relationship, immersed in communion.

The family farm advances the common good by strengthening relationships among our families and communities. That is why Pope Francis wrote that "civil authorities have the right and duty to adopt clear and firm measures in support of small producers and differentiated production" (*LS*, 129). As Minnesota Catholics, we should support and promote small-scale, family-friendly, and sustainable agriculture; for generations, the Church proposed the family farm "as a model of agricultural stewardship and cooperation, a human community truly oriented towards the ... good of its members and those beyond it."<sup>61</sup>

To be sure, technological advances and models of heightened efficiency in large-scale agriculture have enabled us to produce more food than ever before. Pope Francis encourages Christians to rejoice in such new possibilities that are opened up by human creativity (*LS*, 102), but he warns us that new technology also requires "a sound ethics, a culture and spirituality genuinely capable of setting limits and teaching clear-minded self-restraint" (*LS*, 105). Science and technology, as we have already discussed, are not neutral; in human hands they become instruments either of authentic human development or the degradation of human dignity. Changing technology must, then, be matched by thoughtful conversation about its proper use. Just because we *can* do something does not mean we *should*.

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Consider trends like excessive reliance on chemical fertilizers and pesticides, or industrialization that stacks the deck in favor of powerful, private interests. What do such things reveal about our priorities, if not that our attention has been diverted from larger questions of human flourishing and care for the poor?<sup>62</sup> The prevalence and often destructive power of such practices, even in the state of Minnesota, make it clear that “the dominant modern approach to agriculture is in need of an ethical foundation, one that prioritizes the dignity of the human person and the common good and connects farming and food to principles beyond economic metrics.”<sup>63</sup>

Our faith provides such an ethical foundation. Our belief in God, who created this earth and entrusted it to our care, enables us to see that relationship and meaning are written into the agricultural enterprise. As the *Vocation of the Agricultural Leader*, a statement from the International Catholic Rural Association, declares, “The task of cultivating the earth is intimately tied to our lives in Christ. The affirmation of the goodness of creation allows us to see the earth from a perspective different from that of mere use and efficiency. It is, rather, a gift to be shared in community with others and humility before God.”<sup>64</sup>

Our priority as faithful citizens of Minnesota ought to be promoting policies that support responsible practices and oppose practices that harm the environment, farming communities, and consumers.<sup>65</sup> Ideological attacks on “factory farming” are not sufficient, nor can we employ simplistic slogans about feeding the world to dismiss criticisms of certain farming practices. Similarly, policymakers and activists need to account for the ways in which a competitive global agricultural marketplace, along with shrinking family sizes, have stimulated farm consolidation. There are no simple solutions to these problems.

What is needed, then, is an ecological conversion that connects proper land stewardship with an appreciation for both local and global food markets that have yielded much abundance and have raised both global living standards and life expectancy. How can we integrate good practices that ensure the land continues to yield in abundance for generations to come? That is the vocation of the agricultural leader.

Though the task at hand is great, even those of us not directly involved in farming can each take important steps toward a more integral ecology in our own lives. For example, we can start asking serious questions about where our food comes from and gratefully call to mind the hands that prepared it at meal times. For some of us, ecological conversion will mean our habits of consumption need to change to more perfectly reflect our Catholic faith.

Nothing is insignificant when seen with eyes of faith; every sustainable choice at the grocery store, every farm-to-table meal ordered at a restaurant, every scrap of food composted rather than wasted, now speaks the language of love; what once seemed mundane is transformed into an opportunity to express our Catholic faith. Everything is connected; even the food we eat has implications for our relationship with God, with our neighbor, and with the earth.

### **An Ecological View of the Human Person**

As we discussed in Part Two, God makes Himself known in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the one who reveals to us who we are and what it means to be human. As we saw earlier, Christ, the Word of God

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made flesh, also speaks to us of our own identity in and through the laws of nature, which reveal the Father’s plan for human flourishing. Nature cannot be considered as something outside ourselves (*LS*, 139). We are a part of nature too, and just as we are responsible for stewarding the environment that surrounds us, so too are we responsible for stewarding our lives and even our bodies. This stewardship involves the work of self-development but also requires respect for what is given and for the mystery of who God created us to be.

In drawing attention to the link between the environment and human nature in *Laudato si’*, Pope Francis does something unexpected: he bridges the gap between environmental concerns and questions of human life and sexuality. While it may seem at times, given the state of public discourse, that the two cannot be connected, the encyclical teaches that, in fact, they are cut out of the same cloth. This is another area where a strict “either-or” approach is inadequate. The environmental crisis and the tragic blowback from the sexual revolution are both born of indifference to nature and a false impression of control over its laws. Put positively, both crises can be resolved if we humbly allow God to instruct us along His paths, which He has etched into the design of creation (*LS*, 117).

Pope Francis explicitly teaches in *Laudato si’* that integral creation stewardship is only possible if it includes respect for our bodies, our sexual nature as male and female. The acceptance of our bodies, he writes, is an essential component of “welcoming and accepting the entire world as a gift from the Father and our common home” (*LS*, 155). On the other hand, when we start thinking and acting as if we enjoy absolute power over our own bodies, that same attitude bleeds (however subtly) into how we view the earth and feeds into the technocratic mindset. Learning to accept and care for our bodies—in our femininity or masculinity—is part of integral ecology (*LS*, 155).

A closer look at the Church’s teaching on human sexuality reveals what may not be immediately obvious to us today: *Laudato si’* is not the first time the Church warned us against the technocratic paradigm. Fifty years ago, Pope Paul VI published the encyclical *Humanae vitae: On the regulation of birth*. Typically, discussion of *Humanae vitae* hinges on the moral question of artificial contraception, and rightfully so, since the letter includes a strict condemnation of such methods of birth control. But the Pill itself was not the key problem the pope was trying to address. Rather, he was pointing to a much wider issue: the underlying, false belief that we can be God. He writes:

The most remarkable development of all is to be seen in man’s stupendous progress in the domination and rational organization of the forces of nature to the point that *he is endeavoring to extend this control over every aspect of his own life*—over his body, over his mind and emotions, over his social life, and even over the laws that regulate the transmission of life.<sup>66</sup>

Clearly, the question of artificial contraception was of interest to the Church at the time *Humanae vitae* was written. But the question itself—Is a couple entitled to regulate birth through artificial means?—springs from deeper questions regarding the human person’s relationship to God’s design in creation. The Church responded to the difficult question of contraception, not simply by condemning it, but first and foremost by reminding the world of the principle that should guide our actions in the sexual realm just as

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in every other area of life: that men and women are not masters of nature but rather ministers of the design established by the Creator.<sup>67</sup>

*Humanae vitae* could have been embraced as promoting an ecological view of the human person. It might have been a first step toward a deeper awareness in the Church of our call to stewardship. But many dismissed the letter as regressive, decrying it as a remnant of medievalism clung to by an out-of-touch elite. The moral controversy surrounding the Pill drowned out the larger questions of nature and creation that the encyclical attempted to highlight, obscuring what might have been extraordinarily compelling to the modern world: a vision for an “ecologically-friendly sexuality.”<sup>68</sup>

This missed opportunity has had devastating consequences for our culture.<sup>69</sup> The Eden of sexual liberation, prophesied at the advent of the Pill, was a mirage; despite unprecedented sexual “freedom,” the scourges of human trafficking and sexual abuse (recently come to light in the #MeToo and #TimesUp campaigns) are still rampant in our society. Pornography—nothing more than sex trafficking with a camera turned on—continues to grow as a multi-billion-dollar industry. Our culture has bought in to the belief that sex, anytime, with anyone (or no one), and without the responsibility of parenthood, is not just morally acceptable but, in fact, a fundamental human right—which at least partially explains over 60 million aborted children in the United States.<sup>70</sup>

Also notable today is the rise of gender ideology, which promotes the belief that a person’s identity is a subjective psychological preference, unattached from biology. It is rooted in a dualistic approach to the human person that severs the link between body and soul—an anthropology of disembodiment—and a rejection of our created nature and our responsibility as stewards.

Increasingly, children are the focus of this transgender moment. In 2007, only one children’s hospital focused on transgender children and adolescents. Since then, more than 45 “gender clinics” for children have opened in the United States, advocating for the use of hormone treatments and puberty blockers in children.<sup>71</sup> It is becoming more and more common to find transgender ideology promoted and even taught to children as early as kindergarten and first grade.<sup>72</sup> The pope himself addressed this issue to the Polish bishops in 2016, warning that it is common for children to be taught in school that everyone is free to choose their own sex. He added that gender theory is the “exact opposite of God’s creation,” and that this “sin against God the Creator” is an example of “ideological colonization” funded by powerful institutions.<sup>73</sup>

Minnesota’s schools currently experience the same pressure from special interest groups to promote these ideologies. In 2017, for example, the Minnesota Department of Education published a “Transgender Toolkit” to implement school policies that align with transgender ideology.<sup>74</sup> Such policies can breed profound confusion and psychological harm in our children at a time when they are most impressionable.

We can all agree that schools should be places that are welcoming to students, regardless of any personal challenges they bring to the classroom. But our response should be to invite students and their families who struggle with these issues into a deeper conversation about the truth of their identity, which is not the

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sum of their experiences—whether sexual, psychological, emotional, or physical—but the unchanging dignity of having been beautifully and wonderfully made as sons or daughters of God (cf. Psalm 139:14).

Again, the Christian is not self-made. We will find the fullest expression of our identity and our deepest happiness when we learn to live God’s plan for us—including the plan written into our very bodies. We need a generation of credible witnesses who live the truth of our embodied nature and invite others to joyfully embrace how God created them—male and female. Acceptance of our bodies in their femininity and masculinity is a crucial aspect of ecological conversion and integral ecology (*LS*, 155).

We cannot leave the present discussion of creation stewardship without also mentioning the efforts to legalize assisted suicide, which is perhaps the ultimate expression of modernity’s distorted sense of dominion and power over creation. The compulsion to have everything—even death itself—on our own terms, reveals our world’s desperate need for a return to acceptance of our own identity as sons and daughters of God and as stewards of the gift of life.

Although it is often characterized as respecting the autonomy of the person, assisted suicide and euthanasia are, in reality, false forms of freedom, an absolute insistence on living and dying on our own terms. They represent a refusal to let our own plan be crossed by illness or suffering, opting instead to play God ourselves and believing that death is preferable to disability or dependence on others. The so-called “death with dignity” movement is rooted in a false sense of our dignity, equating it with our ability to reason and care for ourselves while maintaining our independence and participating in certain types of activities.<sup>75</sup>

As discussed above, our task as stewards and rational agents in God’s creation is an important aspect of our identity. But it is not where our dignity lies. Dignity is inherent to our identity as God’s children. When we forget or deny this truth, however, we become severed from our relationship with God, others, and all of creation, and life becomes a quest to maintain our power and autonomy. This is a great tragedy, since often it is precisely our dependence and weakness that is necessary to manifest love, particularly God’s love, in our world.

Assisted suicide, whatever the motive, is fundamentally a self-centered act—self-centered in that it is a denial of the reality of our relationships—both our dependence on others and their dependence on us. It thwarts the channels of grace and love that flow from those relationships that are formed, healed, and renewed at the end of life. It denies the Christian message that when we are weak, we are strong, and perverts dominion to be absolute domination, even unto the destruction of our own lives. Rather than a collaboration in creation, it is a rejection of the Creator and His creation—creation that is fundamentally good, even if at times we cannot see its goodness.

### **The cry of the earth and the cry of the poor**

It would be wrong to conclude these pages without highlighting the Church’s preferential option for the poor,<sup>76</sup> and the need to consider what has come earlier in this document in that light. According to Pope Francis: “This option entails recognizing the implications of the universal destination of the world’s

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goods, but ... it demands before all else an appreciation of the immense dignity of the poor in the light of our deepest convictions as believers. We need only look around us to see that, today, this option is in fact an ethical imperative essential for effectively attaining the common good” (LS, 158).

As the United States bishops have said in *Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good*, greater attention must be given to “the needs of the poor, the weak and the vulnerable, in a debate often dominated by more powerful interests.”<sup>77</sup> Our ongoing challenge is to consider, first, the impact on the poor and vulnerable, those in both the physical and existential peripheries, when considering the issues of integral ecology addressed by this document. To be close to the poor is to be close to Christ.

“Both everyday experience and scientific research show that the gravest effects of all attacks on the environment are suffered by the poorest” (LS, 48). Similarly, those most affected by phenomena such as gender theory, the contraceptive mentality, and both human and reproductive trafficking are the poor and vulnerable—those at the peripheries who are subject to the ideological colonization of powerful interests, as Pope Francis describes it.

The urgency of the impact of environmental degradation and ideological colonization on the poor highlights the importance of fostering ecological conversion through life in Christ. In doing so, we will nurture an ethic of integral ecology that can respond to both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor, as Francis calls us to do in *Laudato si’*.

Fortunately, Francis offers us a model in our efforts: his namesake and the inspiration for the title of the encyclical, *Laudato si’*, St. Francis of Assisi. He writes,

I believe that Saint Francis is the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically. He is the patron saint of all who study and work in the area of ecology, and he is also much loved by non-Christians. He was particularly concerned for God’s creation and for the poor and outcast. He loved, and was deeply loved for his joy, his generous self-giving, his openheartedness. He was a mystic and a pilgrim who lived in simplicity and in wonderful harmony with God, with others, with nature and with himself. He shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace. (LS, 10)

Let us embrace an ecological conversion rooted in the witness of St. Francis, who, in turn, sought to offer the world a vision of a Christ who was poor and was close to the poor—in owning nothing, he could embrace everything.

### “Let us sing as we go”

Pope Benedict XVI wrote in his encyclical, *Spe salvi*: “The one who has hope lives differently; the one who hopes has been granted the gift of a new life.”<sup>78</sup> We might consider this a motto for stewardship,

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which is profoundly rooted in hope. It draws new strength from the joy of expectation that because of Christ, our greatest joys and glories are ahead of us.

That is why our ecology, derived first and foremost from love for the Creator, need never be worried or anxious—whether over greenhouse gases, apocalyptic weather events, or even our own extinction—but always filled with hope. We are not called to make heaven on earth; heaven has already come to earth in Christ and has imbued every one of our actions with eternal significance. Now, “in everything God works for good with those who love him” (Romans 8:28). No crisis that we face is greater than the sovereign Providence of God, who draws everything in love to Himself.

Therefore, “let us sing as we go,” as Pope Francis writes at the close of *Laudato si’* (LS, 244). He continues, “May our struggles and our concern for this planet never take away the joy of our hope” (LS, 244). These struggles and concerns drive us forward. But only hope will renew the face of the earth.

And what is this hope? It is the hope that comes from knowing it is never too late—no matter how dramatic our situation may seem, no matter how helpless we feel to make a difference, no matter how wide the gulf between where we are and where we need to be. It is hope born of the firm conviction that we are part of God’s story, the Story of the triumph of love and mercy over sin, death, and despair. Above all, it is the hope of a people on the way to our true Homeland, of which the glittering shores of Superior are but a glimpse.

The steward, then, is one who cares tenderly for all that has been entrusted to him because he perceives in each thing its belonging to the One on whom he waits. He loves with urgency, because the One he loves is present to him in his task, no matter how arduous, no matter how small; everything is connected. He knows that all he will have when the Master returns will be what he stands prepared to offer back to Him. He is therefore prepared to empty his hands, for all that he has is a gift, and he can say with St. Paul: “I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord ... and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him” (Philippians 3:8-9). His heart awaits the loving gaze of his Master and the words spoken to him: “Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master” (Matthew 25:23).

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Minnesota, Our Common Home* was a collaborative effort between the staff of the Minnesota Catholic Conference and a team of consulting reviewers. It was approved for publication as an educational resource by the Catholic bishops of Minnesota in December 2018. In June 2019, a small number of minor edits were made for clarity.

<sup>2</sup> By “ideological,” a term used throughout, we mean a perspective filtered through or by a body of ideas, myths, beliefs, etc., that guide an individual, social movement, institution, class, or large group.

<sup>3</sup> Francis, *Laudato si’* (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2015).

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<sup>4</sup> See John Paul II and Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople, “Common Declaration on Environmental Ethics,” Vatican website, November 30, 2006, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2002/june/documents/hf\\_ip-ii\\_spe\\_20020610\\_venice-declaration.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2002/june/documents/hf_ip-ii_spe_20020610_venice-declaration.html). See also, Pope Benedict XVI, *The Environment*, ed. Jacquelyn Lindsey (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor, 2012).

<sup>5</sup> Francis, *Laudato si'*, sec. 137. “Since everything is closely interrelated, and today’s problems call for a vision capable of taking into account every aspect of the global crisis, I suggest that we now consider some elements of an *integral ecology*, one which clearly respects its human and social dimensions.”

<sup>6</sup> All Scripture references taken from the Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition translation.

<sup>7</sup> See Christopher Thompson, “The Gift of *Laudato si'*,” in *The Joyful Mystery: Field Notes Toward a Green Thomism* (Steubenville: Emmaus Road Publishing, 2018).

<sup>8</sup> See Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Letter *Placuit Deo* to the Bishops of the Catholic Church On Certain Aspects of Christian Salvation,” Vatican website, 2017, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20180222\\_placuit-deo\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20180222_placuit-deo_en.html). The opening of the letter states: “[T]he present Letter is intended, in light of the greater tradition of the faith and with particular reference to the teachings of Pope Francis, to demonstrate certain aspects of Christian salvation that can be difficult to understand today because of recent cultural changes” (1). It continues by noting, “Pope Francis, in his ordinary magisterium, often has made reference to the two tendencies described above, that resemble certain aspects of two ancient heresies, Pelagianism and Gnosticism” (3). References to *Placuit Deo* are thus to be interpreted as explaining the Holy Father’s teaching on these two heretical strains in contemporary Catholicism.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 2.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 3.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, sec. 5.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, sec. 6.

<sup>15</sup> Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger writes that in modern society, there is “an obligation to be optimistic, and the failure to observe this obligation does not go unpunished. For example, anyone who expresses the view that not everything in the intellectual development of the modern period has been correct, that it is necessary in some essential areas to reflect on the shared wisdom of the great cultures, has chosen to make the wrong kind of criticism. [...] he is not permitted to call into question the view that the fundamental trajectory of historical development is progress and that the good lies in the future—and nowhere else.” Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *A Turning Point for Europe?*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010), 21-22.

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- <sup>16</sup> Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M., *Strangers in a Strange Land: Living the Catholic Faith in a Post-Christian World* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2017), 157.
- <sup>17</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Placuit Deo*, sec. 7.
- <sup>18</sup> The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church* states, “*The results of science and technology are, in themselves, positive. Far from thinking that works produced by man’s own talent and energy are in opposition to God’s power, and that the rational creature exists as a kind of rival to the Creator, Christians are convinced that the triumphs of the human race are a sign of God’s grace and the flowering of His own mysterious design.*” Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church* (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2004), sec. 457.
- <sup>19</sup> Decreases in global poverty have been a consistent trend for at least three decades, despite significant increases in global population, a development that should not be dismissed. See Max Roser and Esteban Ortiz-Espina, “Global Extreme Poverty,” *Our World in Data*, last modified March 27, 2017, <https://ourworldindata.org/extreme-poverty>.
- <sup>20</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Council, “Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*,” Vatican website, December 7, 1965, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_cons\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html), sec. 34.
- <sup>21</sup> John Paul II, “Meeting with scientists and representatives of the United Nations University, Hiroshima, February 25, 1981,” [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1981/february/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_19810225\\_giappone-hiroshima-scienziati-univ.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1981/february/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19810225_giappone-hiroshima-scienziati-univ.html), sec. 3. “Science and technology are a wonderful product of a God-given human creativity, since they have provided us with wonderful possibilities, and we all gratefully benefit from them. But we know that this potential is not a neutral one: it can be used either for man’s progress or for his degradation.”
- <sup>22</sup> Cf. *Gaudium et spes*, sec. 34.
- <sup>23</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, sec. 35.
- <sup>24</sup> Notion of “promise and predicament” taken from Michael Sandel, “The Case Against Perfection: What’s wrong with designer babies, bionic athletes, and genetic engineering?” *The Atlantic*, April 2004, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2004/04/the-case-against-perfection/302927/>.
- <sup>25</sup> See Michael Sandel, *The Case Against Perfection: Ethics in the Age of Genetic Engineering* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).
- <sup>26</sup> See Zeynep Tufekci, “Machine intelligence makes human morals more important,” TEDSummit, June 2016, 17:38, [https://www.ted.com/talks/zeynep\\_tufekci\\_machine\\_intelligence\\_makes\\_human\\_morals\\_more\\_important/transcript](https://www.ted.com/talks/zeynep_tufekci_machine_intelligence_makes_human_morals_more_important/transcript).
- <sup>27</sup> John Paul II, “Meeting with scientists and representatives of the United Nations University, Hiroshima,” sec. 3.

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- <sup>28</sup> Cf. Paul VI, *Humanae vitae*, encyclical letter, Vatican website, July 25, 1968, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_enc\\_25071968\\_humanae-vitae.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_25071968_humanae-vitae.html), sec. 13.
- <sup>29</sup> Cf. Ibid. More in-depth discussion of the connection between *Humanae vitae* and *Laudato si'* will come later in this document. For now, it is enough to note that the two encyclicals are connected in their central theme, which is the human person's responsibility to be aware of and cooperate with the natural order.
- <sup>30</sup> For further discussion on the natural law, see International Theological Commission, "In Search of a Universal Ethic: A New Look at the Natural Law" (2009), [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20090520\\_legge-naturale\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20090520_legge-naturale_en.html), sec. 63. "Creatures are animated by a dynamism that carries them to fulfil [sic] themselves, each in its own way, in the union with God. This dynamism is transcendent, to the extent to which it proceeds from the eternal law, i.e., from the plan of divine providence that exists in the mind of the Creator. But it is also immanent, because it is not imposed on creatures from without, but is inscribed in their very nature. Purely material creatures realize spontaneously the law of their being, while spiritual creatures realize it in a personal manner. In fact, they interiorize the dynamisms that define them and freely orient them towards their own complete realization. They formulate them to themselves, as fundamental norms of their moral action—this is the natural law properly stated—and they strive to realize them freely. The natural law is therefore defined as a participation in the eternal law."
- <sup>31</sup> Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1911-1925), I-II, q. 94, art. 2.
- <sup>32</sup> Cf. John Paul II, *Centesimus annus*, encyclical letter, Vatican website, May 1, 1991, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_01051991\\_centesimus-annus.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_01051991_centesimus-annus.html), sec. 37. "Equally worrying is the ecological question which accompanies the problem of consumerism and which is closely connected to it. In his desire to have and to enjoy rather than to be and to grow, man consumes the resources of the earth and his own life in an excessive and disordered way. At the root of the senseless destruction of the natural environment lies an anthropological error, which unfortunately is widespread in our day. Man, who discovers his capacity to transform and in a certain sense create the world through his own work, forgets that this is always based on God's prior and original gift of the things that are. Man thinks that he can make arbitrary use of the earth, subjecting it without restraint to his will, as though it did not have its own requisites and a prior God-given purpose, which man can indeed develop but must not betray. Instead of carrying out his role as a co-operator with God in the work of creation, man sets himself up in place of God and thus ends up provoking a rebellion on the part of nature, which is more tyrannized than governed by him."
- <sup>33</sup> Thompson, *The Joyful Mystery*, 93.
- <sup>34</sup> Cf. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church*, sec. 452.
- <sup>35</sup> Francis, *Laudato si'*, sec. 118. "There can be no renewal of our relationship with nature without a renewal of humanity itself. There can be no ecology without an adequate anthropology." This adequate anthropology includes an awareness of the unique dignity of human beings as well as their interpersonal and interconnected nature.

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- <sup>36</sup> *Gaudium et spes*, sec. 22.
- <sup>37</sup> Tertullian, *De oratio*, 3: PL 1, 1155.
- <sup>38</sup> Communion Rite, in *The Roman Missal*, trans. The International Commission on English in the Liturgy, 3rd typical ed., Communion Rite (Washington D.C.: United States Catholic Conference of Bishops, 2011), <http://catholic-resources.org/ChurchDocs/Mass-RM3.htm#Eucharist>.
- <sup>39</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference of Bishops, 2000), § 1701.
- <sup>40</sup> Cf. Jeremiah 29:7. “Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.”
- <sup>41</sup> Benjamin Wiker, *In Defense of Nature: The Catholic Unity of Environmental, Economic, and Moral Ecology* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Road Publishing, 2017), 8. Wiker writes, “Very few take the astounding position that there is both a natural ecology and a moral ecology, and that these two are intimately interdependent. . . . that is, in fact, the Catholic Church’s position, and it has been for two thousand years.”
- <sup>42</sup> To illustrate this interconnectedness, consider briefly some of the less obvious effects of artificial contraception and its widespread use. Firstly, how it has impacted the human ecology: its encouragement of the degradation of women seen in the prevalence of sexual assault; the increasing use of surrogacy; and the confusion surrounding gender identity. But let us also consider its unexpected impact on the natural environment: its stimulation of farming consolidation because of smaller family size and its effects on water quality and aquatic life. The prevalence of the pill has had a significant impact on both the natural environment and our moral ecology. Ignoring God’s plan for human sexuality and seeking to be its master rather than its steward has had a profound impact on our communities.
- <sup>43</sup> Cf. Vincent Miller, “Integral ecology: Francis’ spiritual and moral vision of interconnectedness,” *The Theological and Ecological Vision of Laudato si’: Everything is Connected*, edited by Vincent J. Miller (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 19.
- <sup>44</sup> See Kristen Leigh Painter, “Changing consumers ignite food revolution,” *Star Tribune*, December 17, 2017, <http://www.startribune.com/changing-consumers-ignite-food-revolution/457733433/>.
- <sup>45</sup> While this number of organic farms makes Minnesota a leader in the organic food movement, it is important to note that these figures also represent an overall decline in the percentage of Minnesota farms that grow organic. Just over sixty years ago, all our farms were organic; new farming science and technology has shifted the tide. For now, organic agriculture exists as a niche, and the complexity of decades of agricultural change will be difficult to transform, especially considering the economic advantage that industrial and other large-scale farming have made possible. A unified vision of how to integrate different farming models will present a significant challenge for us here in Minnesota.

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- <sup>46</sup> See Tom Meersman, “Minnesota’s organic farming industry shows steady growth, USDA survey says,” *Star Tribune*, October 3, 2017, <http://www.startribune.com/organic-farming-shows-slow-steady-growth-in-minnesota-u-s-annual-survey-shows/449280623/>.
- <sup>47</sup> See Painter, “Changing consumers,” 2017.
- <sup>48</sup> The Wetland Conservation Act (WCA) was enacted in 1991 with bipartisan support and established Minnesota’s commitment to no net loss of wetlands. Protection of wetlands is vital, according to the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy, because they “provide important wildlife habitat, help filter runoff, retain flood waters, keep our waters clean, and recharge our drinking water supplies.” See Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy (MCEA), “ABCs of Environmental Policy,” August 2016, [http://www.mncenter.org/uploads/7/9/3/5/79357940/2016candidateprimer--invourdistrict\\_finalaw-forprint\\_layout.pdf](http://www.mncenter.org/uploads/7/9/3/5/79357940/2016candidateprimer--invourdistrict_finalaw-forprint_layout.pdf).
- <sup>49</sup> MCEA states that the 2007 bipartisan Renewable Energy Standard “requires Minnesota’s investor-owned utilities to generate a minimum of 25% of power from renewable sources by 2025 (30% by 2020 for Xcel Energy).” Its goal is to create incentives for a strong renewable energy plan.
- <sup>50</sup> See U.S. Energy Information Administration, “Minnesota State Energy Profile,” March 15, 2018, <https://www.eia.gov/state/print.php?sid=MN>.
- <sup>51</sup> See Laura Yuen, “Minnesota Nice, explained,” MPR News: The Cities, March 15, 2012, <https://blogs.mprnews.org/cities/2012/03/minnesota-not-welcoming-blame-the-scandinavians/>.
- <sup>52</sup> A qualification is needed here. Traditionally, this has been an accurate description of life in Minnesota and the greater Midwest. Of course, today we experience shifting cultural ground with strong support for Planned Parenthood, abortion “rights,” and same-sex marriage. Certainly, Minnesotans stand by their families; they desire a strong family unit, but for what seems to be a growing number of people, the understanding of what family is and how families can and ought to be formed has been distorted. This trend is strong enough in our state to justify acknowledging it, lest the reader misunderstand our intention. Our traditional Minnesota values and culture are, to be sure, under significant threat from these cultural changes.
- <sup>53</sup> See Michael A. Kollok, “Acres for All of Us,” *Minnesota Conservation Volunteer*, November-December 2017, <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/mcvmagazine/issues/2017/nov-dec/public-lands.html>.
- <sup>54</sup> Keith Goetzman, “These Lands Are Your Lands,” *Minnesota Conservation Volunteer*, November-December 2017, <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/mcvmagazine/issues/2017/nov-dec/from-the-editor.html>.
- <sup>55</sup> See Minnesota Environmental Quality Board, “2017 Minnesota Environment and Energy Report Card,” 2017, <https://www.leg.state.mn.us/docs/2017/other/171044.pdf>.
- <sup>56</sup> We acknowledge that this document does not include a discussion of climate change. Although much of the public conversation surrounding the encyclical has centered on climate change, that conversation has sometimes obscured the profound way in which *Laudato si’* speaks to the more general themes of stewardship and a call to ecological conversion. Thus, the exclusion of global climate change as a topic for these pages is intentional, but not because it is unimportant. Climate change is an important issue to discuss and address, but we do not focus

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on it here because the very thing which can empower an adequate response to the problem is ecological conversion. For more information and resources on climate change, we encourage review of the U.S. bishops' 2001 pastoral statement, *Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good*, as well as the website of the Catholic Climate Covenant, <https://catholicclimatecovenant.org/>.

- <sup>57</sup> See Dan Kraker, "Feds reopen forests near Boundary Waters to mining," *MPR News*, September 6, 2018, <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2018/09/06/boundary-waters-mining>.
- <sup>58</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, "Message to the Director General of the Food and Agriculture Organization for the Celebration of World Food Day, October 16, 2006," in Pope Benedict XVI, *The Environment* (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc.), sec. 25.
- <sup>59</sup> Catholic Rural Life (CRL) and International Catholic Rural Association (ICRA), *Vocation of the Agricultural Leader: Integrating Faith with Agriculture and the Environment* (Rome/St. Paul: CRL and ICRA, November 2016), sec. 9.
- <sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 12.
- <sup>62</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, sec. 3.
- <sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, page 2.
- <sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 73.
- <sup>65</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, sec. 72.
- <sup>66</sup> Paul VI, *Humanae vitae*, sec. 2. Emphasis added.
- <sup>67</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 13.
- <sup>68</sup> See Marc Barnes, "Reverence and Contraception," *Bad Catholic* (blog), July 20, 2018, <https://bad-catholic.com/2018/07/20/reverence-and-contraception/>.
- <sup>69</sup> Consider also the potential impact on the environment caused by the birth control pill. Already, it has been linked to mutations and collapses in the freshwater fish population in both Europe and North America. See Gerald Migeon, "Something in the water: the Pill and feminised fish debate continues," *Mercatornet.com*, September 12, 2017, <https://www.mercatornet.com/features/view/something-in-the-water-the-pill-and-feminised-fish-debate-continues/20392>.
- <sup>70</sup> Space does not permit a deeper discussion, but in this context it should be noted that the Pill's severing of procreation from sex has also contributed to the growth in the use of assisted reproductive technologies and practices, such as commercial surrogacy, which often commodifies and objectifies low-income women as "gestational carriers" and turns children into products to be manufactured in labs and bought and sold by prospective parents. See [surrogacyawareness.com](http://surrogacyawareness.com) for more information.

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- <sup>71</sup> See Ryan T. Anderson, “Transgender Ideology Hurts Kids,” *The Heritage Foundation*, January 30, 2018, <https://www.heritage.org/gender/commentary/transgender-ideology-hurts-kids>.
- <sup>72</sup> See Ryan T. Anderson, “Understanding and Responding to Our Transgender Moment,” *Fellowship of Catholic Scholars Quarterly*, 41, no. 1 (May 2, 2018), <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3172277>.
- <sup>73</sup> “Pope Francis: It’s ‘terrible’ children taught they can choose gender,” *Catholic Herald*, August 3, 2016, <http://catholicherald.co.uk/news/2016/08/03/pope-francis-its-terrible-children-taught-they-can-choose-gender/>.
- <sup>74</sup> See “A Toolkit for Ensuring Safe and Supportive Schools for Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Students,” Minnesota Department of Education, September 25, 2017, [https://education.mn.gov/mdeprod/idcplg?IdcService=GET\\_FILE&dDocName=MDE072543&RevisionSelectionMethod=latestReleased&Rendition=primary](https://education.mn.gov/mdeprod/idcplg?IdcService=GET_FILE&dDocName=MDE072543&RevisionSelectionMethod=latestReleased&Rendition=primary).
- <sup>75</sup> Catholic teaching does not require preserving life at all costs. In fact, death is a natural part of life, and one has many options and control over end-of-life care. But in that process of dying, there are important parameters for how we steward the gift of life, which must be observed. See Minnesota Catholic Conference, *A Guide to End-of-Life Care Decisions*, MCC website, September 2018, available at <https://www.mncatholic.org/advocacyarea/catholic-end-of-life-care-decisions/>.
- <sup>76</sup> See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, § 2443.
- <sup>77</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good,” USCCB website, June 15, 2001, <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/environment/global-climate-change-a-plea-for-dialogue-prudence-and-the-common-good.cfm>.
- <sup>78</sup> Benedict XVI, *Spe salvi*, encyclical letter, Vatican website, November 30, 2007, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20071130\\_spe-salvi.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20071130_spe-salvi.html), sec. 2.

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