

Hearing the Cry of the Poor and of the Earth: A Diocesan Social and Environmental Justice Policy that seeks the Common Good for the whole of God's Creation

- In his encyclical *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis calls for the Church to hear the cries of both the poor and the earth. Our response to these cries is to live out as an essential dimension of our Christian discipleship what Pope Francis calls an 'integral ecology'; that seeks the common good of all God's creation. The demands of peace, justice and valuing of all God's creation need to be integrated with the life and mission of our diocese.
- *Laudato Si* plainly states "We are not God. The earth was here before us and it has been given to us." Francis is clear that although we as humans are made in the image of God, we are still part of God's creation and we cannot justify absolute domination over other creatures. This means that in our worship and prayer we acknowledge God as our sole creator. Therefore, since we are sharers in God's creation, as creatures we are limited and finite, dependent on God. This calls from us a loving response to God, which includes a duty to neighbourly love and careful stewardship over all of God's creation.
- This entails that as a Catholic community, we are all called by our faith to be attentive to the needs of the whole of God's creation, which includes the poorest and most vulnerable in our world and the earth's fragile ecology. This policy offers each one of us the opportunity to reflect, act and pray for social and environmental justice.

Communal Discipleship

As we seek to reflect on our shared diocesan mission as part of the Moving Forward Together in Hope process, it is important that seeking justice, peace and the flourishing of 'our common home', becomes a central part and not just an optional aspect of that mission. Each parish and diocesan department is invited to reflect on how the following tasks relate to our shared mission:

- ❖ Our worship and prayer to encourage a reflective attentiveness to the cries of the poor and the earth
- ❖ Raising awareness and educating people on situations and issues that result in injustice, violence and damage to the environment
- ❖ Being open to, and engaging with, victims of injustice and damage to the environment, building relationships of mutuality and respect
- ❖ A commitment to campaign against unjust policies and structures that are detrimental to people and the environment
- ❖ Collaborating with those who have similar concerns within and beyond the Christian family, such as the Tyne and Wear Citizens Alliance
- ❖ Encouraging acts of service, care and hospitality ('works of mercy') to those in need especially to the hungry, homeless and destitute
- ❖ Collecting and sharing money and resources for those in need, especially those affected by damage done to the environment
- ❖ Ensuring that our parishes and our diocesan departments have a collective lifestyle that respects others and God's creation. To ensure this the following steps could be taken:
 - Become a 'Fair Trade' Parish and 'Live Simply' Parish
 - Since our diocese is accredited as 'Living Wage Employer' encourage other organisation and companies to seek this accreditation as well
 - Adopt a suitable Ethical Investment policy for diocesan funds
 - Support the local credit union
 - Collect and distribute food and clothes for refugee projects and foodbanks

- Encourage recycling and composting
 - Use washable dinnerware in our church halls
 - Share electronically instead of printing
 - Carry out an energy audit and explore the possibility of installing solar panels.
 - Provide bicycle racks in our church and support initiatives to encourage cycling
 - Ensure that Church grounds and church yards are mini nature reserves
 - Seek to purchase our energy from 'Green Providers'
- ❖ Celebrate and give thanks for signs of God's Kingdom among us and for the wonder and beauty of God's Creation

Personal Discipleship

Laudato Si also calls for a personal response in hearing the cries of the earth and the poor

A Suitable Lifestyle

Living a life that is committed to this vision of integral ecology demands a personal conversion. Pope Francis invites us all to look at our lifestyles. He is concerned with our obsession with a consumerist lifestyle, above all when only a few people are capable of maintaining it. He believes this can only lead to violence and mutual destruction. In order to avoid this mind-set we can commit to the following:

- Buy what we genuinely need and not get caught up in "a whirlwind of needless buying and spending"
- Consider consuming less, making a conscious decision to donate the money saved to charities for the relief of poverty and care of the environment, including CAFOD.
- Consider investing some of our savings in organisations like Newcastle-based Shared Interest
- Purchasing, as far as possible, items that are ethically resourced and fairly traded.
- Purchasing items organically grown and locally produced.
- Consuming less energy and fuel including by recycling waste. Purchasing our energy from green providers.
- Eating less meat. Reducing our consumption of meat will help reduce the levels of methane (a greenhouse gas) produced by cattle that also eat grain that could be directed to human consumption.
- Using our car less and increasing our use of public transport.
- Using less water.

Educating Ourselves

- Educate ourselves more on Catholic Social Teaching
- Learn more about the state of the world and environment;
- Take time to reflect on the significance of what we learn in relation to Gospel values;
- Appreciate the beauty of the earth.

Living out a Spirituality of peace, justice and ecology

Pope Francis calls us to live a life of humility and simplicity where 'less is more'. This inner conversion is important if we are to hear and respond to the cries of the poor and the earth. We are called to reflect on how the resources we are blessed with such as our time, gifts, and finances can be used for the Common Good of all God's creation, attentive to the cries of the earth and the poor.