

Q & A

Pope Francis' Encyclical - **Laudato Si**



Do you have questions about the Pope's upcoming encyclical?
Find the answers here!

What is an encyclical?

An encyclical is a letter circulated by the Pope to Catholic churches worldwide. It is sent directly from our Holy Father in Rome to Catholics all over the world and is addressed to all people of good will, namely non-Catholics who may also want to read the document. Papal encyclicals provide analysis, in the light of the Gospel and of the Tradition of the Church, on relevant issues for the faithful. Previous popes have issued encyclicals on a variety of topics, from the study of Scripture (Leo XIII, 1893) to the Redemption of Christ and the dignity of human beings (John Paul II, 1979). From 1891 onwards, many encyclicals were issued as a response to social problems, from the struggles of workers during the industrial revolution (Leo XII, 1891) to the need for peace in the post-World War II era (John XXIII, 1963). These later encyclicals are part of what is known as Catholic Social Teaching documents.

What kind of encyclical are we expecting from Pope Francis?

No one apart from Pope Francis' closest advisers knows the exact contents of the encyclical until it is published, but we can expect a strong focus on human development and its relationship to current environmental issues. For this reason, the encyclical will be considered part of the Catholic Social Teaching tradition. Although there are many previous statements by Popes and Bishops on the question of the environment and faith, this will be the first social encyclical in the Catholic Church to address care for the environment and environmental justice in a direct and specific way. Francis' document is expected to further what the Catechism of the Catholic Church says, which is that our responsibility as good stewards of creation is to care for our world and not 'steal' resources from future generations.

Is this the climate change encyclical people are hoping for?

Pope Francis has spoken openly about the devastating effects of climate change on people and our world. During his trip to the Philippines, journalists asked him whether he thought that mankind was responsible for climate change, to which he replied: "I don't know if it is all [man's fault] but the majority is, for the most part, it is man who continuously slaps down nature." He has also expressed relief that there is a growing movement to tackle climate change. He said, "Thank God that today there are voices that are speaking out about this." Despite the Pope's strong stance, the nature of papal encyclicals means the letter is more likely to focus on the broader issues of human ecology and stewardship of God's creation.



What is Pope Francis' encyclical going to be about?

We cannot anticipate the contents of an encyclical but, based on previous social teachings of the Church and by what the Church witnesses through the conditions of communities living in poverty worldwide, Francis may emphasize the connection between environmental degradation and poverty, or between the love for creation and poverty reduction. The interconnection between human dignity, human development and human ecology is expected to be a critical topic of the encyclical.

What is human ecology?

The phrase 'human ecology' is a combination of the concepts of human development and ecological care. It suggests a holistic approach to both human growth and environmental protection, realizing that the former cannot exist without the latter.

Is Pope Francis going to talk about climate science?

An encyclical is not a scientific document, but rather a faith-based one. As John Paul II said, "the ecological crisis is a moral issue" and all men and women have an obligation to contribute to the restoration of a healthy environment. Having said this, encyclicals are always attentive to what science is saying on a topic. The scientific view will be complemented by the lived experience of Christian communities worldwide. This is what is known in Catholic Social Teaching as 'seeing' the signs of the times. What is 'seen' is afterwards analyzed in the light of the Gospel and of the Tradition of the Church.

The Pontifical Academy of Sciences, whose members advise the Pope on scientific issues, confirmed last year what most scientists have agreed on, which is that our planet's temperature is increasing at unprecedented speed, mainly due to human activity and burning fossil fuels, in particular. The scientific question, however pertinent, will not be the main point of the encyclical. It will have a more theological and moral approach to the environmental dilemmas that threaten human development. As Bishop Sánchez Sorondo, Chancellor of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences has said: "The challenge of climate change has become not only economic, political or social. It is also an issue of morals, religion, values such as justice and social inclusion, the obligation of solidarity with future generations and the moral obligation to care for the earth, namely creation, which is our habitat."

Why is the Pope's encyclical so important?

Love and care for creation are an essential dimension of our faith. A social encyclical on human development and the environment will help Catholic believers address, reflect and respond to the environmental challenges our world is facing today. It will help us answer difficult questions such as: how do we love our neighbours in need by sharing wealth and at the same time love our earth by promoting sustainability? How do we promote economic growth and respect the common good?

In September, global leaders will negotiate new sustainable development goals that will set the direction and targets for development for the next 15 years. Pope Francis will be speaking at

this meeting. In December, international leaders will also meet in Paris to secure a global climate deal. In both meetings, international decision makers will make critical choices about development and the environment that could impact the lives of millions of people, especially our brothers and sisters living in the poorest countries. In this context, the timing of the Pope's encyclical couldn't be more poignant

What can I do to tackle climate change?

Tackling climate change is part of our duty as Christians to love and care for God's creation; it's an important dimension of our stewardship of the earth. Our sisters and brothers across the world are being pushed deeper into poverty due to the changing climate and our faith moves us to speak out in solidarity. There are many different ways to tackle climate change, either individually or in a group, and one effective way is campaigning for change. This fall, Development and Peace is launching its Create a Climate of Change campaign, which will call of Canadians to take action individually, locally and politically to address climate change and be in solidarity with our sisters and brothers in the Global South. You too can take part in this campaign! Visit our website this fall to learn more!

What will the encyclical mean for the Catholic community?

As with all Church teachings, Catholics have a particular responsibility to engage with and reflect upon the message of the encyclical and find ways to apply it to our lives. By gathering together the main faith statements on love for creation in one document, and by bringing a novel and refreshing view on them, Pope Francis' encyclical could motivate Catholic communities to promote environmental justice in an unprecedented way. Once the encyclical is published, we will continue to make resources on this page to encourage prayer and reflection on some of the themes of the encyclical. Make sure to check this page regularly!

How can I prepare for the encyclical?

Prayer and reflection on God's gift of creation are good ways to prepare for the papal encyclical, and we have put together some prayers to get you started. Use the prayer individually or with a group to come to a deeper understanding of what care for the environment has to do with our faith. You can also watch these [videos produced by Green Spirit TV](#) to get sound theological context for the stewardship of creation. Leading up to the publication of the encyclical, you might be interested in reading this [Bishops' letter](#), signed by Bishops from all over the world and published during the UN climate talks that took place in Lima in December 2014. In the letter, the Bishops cite their first-hand experience of working alongside vulnerable communities suffering as a result of climate change as their reason for demanding urgent action. You can also read this [speech given by Cardinal Peter Turkson](#), President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, at the Caritas General Assembly that took place in Rome in May 2015.

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