



RESPECT LIFE SUNDAY PASTORAL LETTER – CARE FOR OUR ENVIRONMENT

13 October 2019

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ - E te whānau whakapono a te Karaiti

Pope Francis has set October 2019 aside as an “Extraordinary Missionary Month” to help us all reflect on the missionary nature of the Christian life, and for each of us to consider anew what it means to be baptised and sent on mission. Reflecting on taking Christ’s message of healing and hope to the people, we might not think immediately about healing the environment as a missionary activity. But everything is interconnected.

Four years ago, Pope Francis wrote in his encyclical *Laudato Si’: On Care For Our Common Home* about the necessity of hearing “both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor,” an insight beautifully expressed in this traditional Māori whakataukī:

Ka mate te whenua, ka mate te tangata. Ka ora te whenua, ka ora te tangata.

If the earth dies, the people die. If the earth lives, the people live.

In the past year, this whakataukī has been given renewed vigour by the voices of young people taking on Pope Francis’ words in *Christus Vivit #41*: You “are meant to dream great things, to seek vast horizons, to aim higher, to take on the world, to accept challenges and to offer the best of yourselves to the building of something better” (*Christus Vivit #15*)

Pope Francis has explicitly acknowledged the prophetic actions of young people in his recent message for the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation.

“Many young people all over the world are making their voices heard and calling for courageous decisions. They feel let down by too many unfulfilled promises, by commitments made and then ignored for selfish interests or out of expediency.

The young remind us that the earth is not a possession to be squandered, but an inheritance to be handed down. They remind us that hope for tomorrow is not a noble sentiment, but a task calling for concrete actions here and now. We owe them real answers, not empty words, actions not illusions.”

Young people of Aotearoa New Zealand, we acknowledge that you have been among those who have taken to the streets to articulate their dreams for the planet and to demand greater action to address the climate crisis we are facing. You have added your voices for a sustainable better future on-line, in print, and in person. You have demanded that we listen.

We see that many of you are practicing what you preach – reducing waste inside and outside the classroom; taking part in conservation projects; asking your schools and parishes to look at how we use energy.



You are challenging all of us to hear and support you; to recognise that all life on earth – humans, animals, plants, and the rest of God’s creation – is threatened by the dangers of human-induced climate change. You are holding us, together with decision makers in government, civil society and the community, to account. You inspire us – and many others – to act.

We also acknowledge the voices of many others who care about God’s creation; individuals and groups of New Zealanders who have faithfully advocated over many decades for action to protect the environment – the voices of those of you who have witnessed, over your lifetimes, significant degradation of landscape, farms, gardens, waterways, and weather patterns in our land. And in our Pacific region, we hear the voices of the Bishops and communities of Oceania speaking out with urgency about the loss of land and communities due to rising seas, increasingly severe storms, and dying sea life in our warming oceans.

Respect Life Sunday is a time when, traditionally, we have focused on those threats to human life that people face at the beginning and end of life. These threats remain real – New Zealand is currently facing the possibility of significant changes to abortion and euthanasia laws. However, we also recognise that our responsibility to protect life extends beyond those issues and that these issues are interwoven.

It is time for an “integral ecology” that recognises the connection between the cry of our most vulnerable and the cry of the earth; an ecology that embraces the God-given dignity of all creatures; an ecology that responds to the effects of critical global warming seen in growing numbers of displaced refugees; an ecology that acknowledges that the roots of the environmental crisis lie in our rampant consumerism and a “throwaway culture” stemming from economic models that privilege certain people and certain stages of life; an ecology that addresses the marginalisation and exclusion of vulnerable persons, in particular at the beginning and end of life.

It is time to heed Pope Francis’ message for a fundamental lifestyle change.

For our part, we need to reflect more deeply as Bishops about the fundamental changes we need to make around such things as energy use in our churches and school buildings and the transport choices we make around our parishes and Dioceses. This reflection needs to happen alongside all Catholic parishes, organisations and communities. These matters are not just about good stewardship of our assets, but about good stewardship of the Earth as our common home.

Let us all be missionaries of healing and hope and offer the best of ourselves to the building of a better world. Together, young and old, we can, and must, save our planet, our people and all God’s creatures.

✠ **Stephen M Lowe, Bishop of Hamilton**

On behalf of all Bishops of Aotearoa New Zealand