



A Call for Unity and Action amid a Climate Emergency and Planetary Crisis

“Then God spoke to Noah, saying, “Go out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and your sons’ wives with you. Bring out with you every living thing of all flesh that is with you, birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, that they may breed abundantly on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth.”

Genesis 8:15-17

Today, COVID-19 has taken more than 5.62 million¹ lives globally and plunged nations into economic devastation. As we strive to recover from this crisis, the pause imposed by the pandemic on industrial and economic activity encourages us to reflect on the decades of polluting practices our Common Home has had to suffer at the hands of humanity - practices which nations around the world are now, sadly, swiftly returning to.

This is concerning as, while suffering from the impact of the pandemic, climate-vulnerable nations have also experienced intensifying calamities due to the instability of our biosphere. The Philippines, for example, was battered by multiple tropical storms including some declared to be the deadliest in the world from 2013 to 2021.

This has happened even after almost two years of the issuance of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) Pastoral Letter on Ecology entitled “An Urgent Call for Ecological Conversion, Hope in the Face of Climate Emergency”.²

The Pastoral Letter is a testimony of the Church’s long-standing regard for the care of God’s creation. It is guided by the wisdom of our Holy Father Pope Francis’s encyclical, *Laudato Si’ On Care for Our Common Home*, which calls “for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet” (LS, 14).

Time and again, we consider and listen to the findings of competent ecological scientists as they “are in a good position to tell us” about the “magnitude of the destruction taking place in our time”.³

Even with the pastoral letter and the Pope’s encyclical, we continue to suffer an increasingly warming world and ailing biosphere triggered by exploitative practices that benefit the wealthy few but cause poverty and hunger to many.⁴

At the same time, we are saddened that many of our faithful and partners taking peaceful actions toward ecological conversion are also experiencing increasing harassment and violence.⁵

The proposed measures and policies for addressing the impacts of this crisis should always place social and ecological justice at the forefront. As one of the most vulnerable nations in this era of global emergency, the Philippines has the moral imperative of pursuing the most sustainable development pathway possible for the sake of current and future generations, ensuring that the voices of everyone are accounted for. The task of ensuring this becomes all the more apparent in the context of an upcoming national election that will shape governance in our country during this critical decade for climate and ecological action.

¹ [World Health Organization](#), as of January 27, 2022.

² 2019 CBCP Pastoral Letter on Ecology, July 16, 2019

³ 1988 CBCP Pastoral Letter on Ecology: *What is Happening to Our Beautiful Land?* January 29, 1988

⁴ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). “[AR6 Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis](#),” August 9, 2021.

⁵ Global Witness. “[Last Line of Defence](#),” September 13, 2021.

We are committed to advance the teachings of the *Laudato Si'* and be bearers of hope in the face of an ecological crisis, following our Lord Jesus, our redeemer. As such, we commit to “integrate the care of creation as our common home in our teaching and practice of Christian discipleship” through concrete ecological actions in caring for our Common Home.⁶ In 2019, the CBCP Pastoral Letter on Ecology detailed 13 such action points; in 2020, the celebration of the special anniversary year of Pope Francis’s encyclical led to the creation of [Laudato Si' Goals](#) (LSGs) to guide our work towards integral ecology.

Today, we strongly enjoin all our brothers and sisters in dioceses across the country to be further guided by the following reflections:

1. Ecological Conversion through Stewardship of our Resources

Laudato Si' Goals: Response to Cry of the Earth and Ecological Economics

We believe that the full alignment of all nations to the 1.5°C goal of the Paris Agreement is necessary to truly respect our planet’s ecological limits. In the 2021 United Nations climate conference (COP 26), countries around the world agreed that there is an “urgency of enhancing ambition and action in relation to [climate] mitigation, adaptation, and finance“, including phasing down coal and deeply cutting both carbon and non-carbon emissions by 2030.⁷ As a climate vulnerable country that must lead in demanding the fruition of this goal, the Philippines must ensure that its greenhouse gas emissions, especially those from fossil fuels, peak much earlier than the year 2030.

The peak in our country’s use of coal, the dirtiest of all fossil fuels, should pave the way for a complete phase-out of all other polluting energy. This will happen only if financial resources are re-channeled so as to disable the coal industry. Financing for fossil gas, which is expanding greatly in the Philippines today and threatening vital life systems, must also be done away with.

Hence, re-echoing the statement of the civil society on the submission of the country’s Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC), the climate commitment should “include clear decarbonization pathways, indicative of a just transition in the energy sector, with a higher share of unconditional commitments, established timeline for reducing the reliance on fossil fuels, a rejection of nuclear power, and ambitious targets for renewable energy development and efficiency by 2050”.⁸

In our recent Pastoral Letter on Ecology, we wrote that we must “not allow the financial resources of our Catholic institutions to be invested in favor of coal-fired power plants, mining companies and other destructive extractive projects.” This was strengthened by the Holy See’s *Laudato Si'* manual for Church leaders and workers which includes calls for pollution reduction, decarbonization of energy and economic sectors, and investing in clean and renewable energy which is accessible to all.⁹

Through efforts by many members of the Church and civil society, we are now all the more aware that many of the financial institutions in whom we place our trust have been instrumental in the rise of fossil fuels, as well as other destructive and exploitative industries like mining and logging.

⁶ CBCP Pastoral Letter on Ecology 2019, page 8

⁷ [COP 26 Cover Decision](#), November 13, 2021.

⁸ “Highest possible climate ambition, substance and compliance”, Aksyon Klima, et al., February 15, 2021

⁹ *Journeying Towards Care for Our Common Home: five years after Laudato Si*, Holy See, June 18, 2020

It is unacceptable that finances so graciously provided to us are used for such industries. Financial resources must be used solely for the Common Good, Integrity of Creation, and the Glory of our Creator. Thus, we affirm our commitment to divest from coal and other destructive industries, and urge the whole Body of the Church to:

- Examine all banks and institutions in whom we have entrusted financial resources, and assess the social and environmental implications of their financing activities;
- Use our position as shareholders, clients, or stakeholders of financial institutions in and beyond the Philippines, but especially towards domestic banks, to demand for policies and plans to phase out their exposure to coal, fossil gas, and destructive energy in line with the 1.5°C ambition. The CBCP National Laudato Si Program, together with partners and experts, is asked to strategically engage with Catholic institutions, such as but not limited to archdioceses, dioceses, and religious congregations and communities, to act on ecological financial stewardship, and provide technical support and capacity building;
- Without clear commitments and policies from these banks to divest from fossil fuels, we commit to withdraw all our resources that are with them not later than 2025, and hold them accountable to their fiduciary duties and moral obligations as climate actors;
- Steer resources of the Church to genuinely sustainable ventures by actively urging financial entities to adopt sustainable finance policies and invest in renewable energy and ecological restoration and protection efforts;
- Lead by example by promoting the use of renewable energy and other sustainable systems in our own facilities and communities;
- Urge all institutions holding the Church's financial resources to move away from extractive industries, including logging and mining, with haste. We will not support any activity that leads to promoting destructive mining, recognizing the suffering it has and continues to bring upon the environment and affected communities;
- Assert a CBCP-initiated non-acceptance policy of donations of whatever kind, from owners or operators and any representative of extractive industries especially coal, fossil gas, mining, quarrying, logging, etc. (regardless of scale of operation); and
- Build the knowledge and capacity of our congregations, schools, communities, and organizations to meaningfully contribute to the call for divestment through education campaigns and programs.

2. Laudato Si' Formation and the National Laudato Si' Program

Laudato Si' Goals: Ecological Education, Ecological Spirituality, and Community Resilience and Empowerment

The Pastoral Letter of 2019 and the steadfast commitment of our brothers and sisters in Christ have birthed a National Laudato Si' Program that will guide ecclesial communities to live the teachings of Laudato Si'.

We have sowed beginnings of what could be a thriving network of workers for our Common Home across all dioceses, including the establishment of 15 Ecology Desks across the Philippines. Let us build on these through the following:

- Continue the creation of an Ecology Desk in every diocese, a mandate first initiated by our predecessors during the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines in 1991 and later affirmed with urgency by the Pastoral Letter of 2019, and strengthen the capacities of existing Ecology Desks. This would require our respective bishops and religious superiors to prioritize the allocation of budget and financial support for the desk and its activities aligning with the 13 ecological actions of the 2019 Pastoral Letter on Ecology in which the National Laudato Si' Program is also instructed to conduct a stocktaking of such actions;

- Institutionalize the celebration of the Season of Creation and Laudato Si' Week to nourish our spirituality and awaken our identity as members of a single, sacred Earth-community called to care for our Common Home and all life in it; and
- Strengthen and participate in the National Laudato Si' Program, where representatives of dioceses, members of communities of faith, and civil society can work together in national and sub-regional levels. This ecological convergence is expected to support and promote the Church's Laudato Si' Action Platform (LSAP).¹⁰
- Through the National Laudato Si' Program, mandate pursuit of and participation in education campaigns, such as the Deep Journey to Laudato Si', which will deepen our collective understanding of the challenges faced by our Common Home and strengthen our unity to take action.
- Intensify existing efforts to establish Laudato Si' schools framework or guidance where civil society, faith-based organizations and the academe led by the Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines (CEAP) work together in synergy; and popularize the Holy Father's suggested "little daily actions" highlighted in Laudato Si' passage 211 in campuses and community partners.¹¹

3. Advancement of the Rights of Nature and the Defense of Life

Laudato Si' Goals: Response to the Cry of the Poor and Adoption of Sustainable Lifestyles

We renew our commitment to advance the Rights of Nature campaign. This is our contribution to the preservation of the delicate interdependence among all forms of life, recognizing that all elements of nature have the common right to exist and flourish.

We believe that the proposed piece of legislation for the recognition of the rights of nature that is now awaiting decision in both houses of Congress can push forward a Philippine society where mining, fossil fuels, development aggression, and other forms of ecological destruction are cast away.

It would serve as a barrier to detrimental projects that would only benefit the few while exacerbating the climate vulnerability of many.

Moreover, we affirm the vigilance of many indigenous groups, local and faith communities, members of civil society, and others who are risking their lives so that projects that mar nature may be derailed.

However, we are alarmed by the persisting culture of impunity that threatens environmental defenders. As such, we call on the whole body of the Church to:

- Support the Rights of Nature Bill in Congress and Senate, and push for environmental local ordinances that promote the same;
- Implement education and information campaigns on the Rights of Nature and Integral Ecology;
- Establish coordination and dialogue platforms with local government units for eco-governance initiatives and programs;

¹⁰ <https://laudatosiactionplatform.org/about/>

¹¹ "There is a nobility in the duty to care for creation through little daily actions, and it is wonderful how education can bring about real changes in lifestyle. Education in environmental responsibility can encourage ways of acting which directly and significantly affect the world around us, such as avoiding the use of plastic and paper, reducing water consumption, separating refuse, cooking only what can reasonably be consumed, showing care for other living beings, using public transport or car-pooling, planting trees, turning off unnecessary lights, or any number of other practices. All of these reflect a generous and worthy creativity which brings out the best in human beings. Reusing something instead of immediately discarding it, when done for the right reasons, can be an act of love which expresses our own dignity." (LS 211)

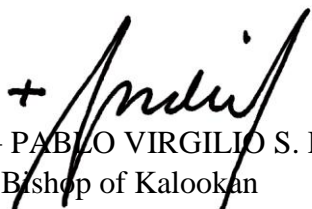
- Call on the national government and its line agencies to respect and support the environmental code of local government units, especially those that ban destructive extractive and polluting projects;
- Demand transparency and genuine stakeholder involvement from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) in all decisions made relative to ecologically and socially hazardous endeavors including mining, logging, construction or operation of infrastructure and energy or other industrial facilities, and others;
- Hold dialogues and learning platforms with the perspectives and wisdom of indigenous peoples;
- Call for the protection of environmental defenders and push for local and national policies that will turn the nation into a ‘sanctuary’ for both the environment and its defenders;
- Push for ecological protection and restorative actions and programs in communities, parishes, and dioceses; and
- Support the initiation and implementation of the Sapat Lifestyle Campaign.

We turn to Roman 8:23 for guidance in our reflections and commitments: “We know that all creation is groaning in labor pains even until now; and not only that ... we also groan within ourselves as we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. (Pastoral Letter on Ecology of 2019)”

Brothers and sisters, as we wait for the blessings of redemption and liberation, let us take to heart our Christian duty of uniting in prayer and decisive action for a just and green recovery from the climate crisis amid the planetary emergency we are in today due to COVID-19.

“God, who calls us to generous commitment and to give him our all, offers us the light and the strength needed to continue on our way. In the heart of this world, the Lord of life, who loves us so much, is always present. He does not abandon us, he does not leave us alone, for he has united himself definitively to our earth, and his love constantly impels us to find new ways forward. Praise be to him!” (LS 245)

For the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines:


 + PABLO VIRGILIO S. DAVID, D.D.
 Bishop of Kalookan
 CBCP President

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