

honest engagement. The Church teaches that the Earth is a gift for all; thus, all have a role in its use and its protection.

In light of this understanding, Michigan Catholics are encouraged to discern the lessons the document provides, especially in response to the following questions: *What should our responsibility be to one another and to the environment? What kind of world do we want to leave to future generations?* This **focus** reflects on insights from Pope Francis and offers opportunities for Catholics to consider their role in the Church's commitment to care for all creation. ●

HUMANITY'S PLACE IN CREATION



Backyards and public spaces frequently provide a setting for children playing with their friends. Michigan parks and trails offer a respite from the indoors, as well as an opportunity for adventure and exercise. For so many, the fresh air and natural landscapes help Michiganders feel a sense of peace and restoration, marveling in the beautiful world God created for all to enjoy. In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis recognizes the ability to discover God within nature and in other creatures, whether it be “in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person's face” (no. 233). Unfortunately, the Holy Father writes, people have misunderstood their role in the world, which has led to painful consequences (no. 66–70, 115). God gave humans unique worth that separated them from the animals (no. 90). At the same time, alongside that special worth also came greater responsibility. Called to cultivate and care for the world, Pope Francis describes human beings as the “instruments used by God to bring out the potential he inscribed in things” (no. 124). Michigan farmers have a unique calling in this regard, as they prepare,

grow, and harvest crops and livestock that are essential for society. Unfortunately, humanity too often acts as if the environment has and will dole out a never-ending supply of resources: as if trees will always grow and provide the materials for large homes, as if water will always keep flowing to nurture lawns and carry away waste, and as if the wind will always clear the pollution from the air people breathe. It has become too easy for humans to exploit natural resources, “giving priority to [their own] immediate convenience” rather than exercising responsible stewardship (no. 122). ●

“In the family we first learn how to show love and respect for life; we are taught...respect for the local ecosystem and care for all creatures.”

—*Laudato Si'*, No. 213

ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS



In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis critically assesses the real difficulties the world is facing before encouraging conversation about potential next steps. He specifically names the following issues:

- Pollution and waste
- Climate change
- Water contamination and access
- The depletion of natural resources

CATHOLIC “CARE OF CREATION” TEACHING

The Catholic Church's environmental teaching did not begin with *Laudato Si'*. Pope Francis builds upon the examples and writings of venerable saints and pontiffs, including

St. Francis of Assisi, St. John of the Cross, St. Bonaventure, St. Paul VI, St. John Paul II, and Pope Benedict XVI. In *Laudato Si'*, the Holy Father offers a moral perspective to the wider environmental discussion and raises awareness among Catholics about their personal responsibility to care for God's creation. The themes Pope Francis develops are consistent with his predecessors and with the Church's environmental teaching over time. ●