



PASTORAL LETTER OF THE LATIN AMERICAN EPISCOPAL COUNCIL (CELAM)

MISSIONARY DISCIPLES: CUSTODIANS OF OUR COMMON HOME
Discernment in Light of the Encyclical *Laudato Si'*

Bogotá, Colombia, January 2018

PASTORAL LETTER

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Discernment in Light of *Laudato Si'*

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Carrera 5 N ° 118 - 31. Bogotá - Colombia Apartado 5106

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Bogotá, Colombia

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INTRODUCTION

Discerning the “Signs of the Times” is a characteristic feature of the Church’s pastoral theological task. St. John XXIII, based on Mt 16:3, used it in the Apostolic Constitution “*Humanae Salutis*” when convoking the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council and it was assumed in the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* (1965). In fulfillment of this permanent mission of the Church, we the Bishops of CELAM want to *scrutinize the signs of the time and interpret them in the light of the Gospel*,¹ so that the Church can respond to humanity’s questions.

With the wisdom of its Social Doctrine, the Church *sharing the noblest aspirations of men and suffering when she sees these aspirations not satisfied, she wishes to help them to attain their full realization. So she offers man her distinctive contribution: a global perspective on man and human realities*.²

Precisely as we are celebrating 50 years of the Encyclical *Populorum Progressio* and are still experiencing in the first fruits of the Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, it is our duty to *guarantee man’s authentic development—his transition from less than human conditions to truly human ones*.³

Now then, no genuine development will be won if it has a negative impact on the common home, this Planet Earth that is the creation of God. For that reason we emphasize, as does the Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, that *[t]he urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change*⁴ if we are united, if we entrust ourselves to the merciful love of God and humbly assume our dignity as brothers and sisters, children of God.

The Latin American bishops, in communion with Pope Francis, want to use this Pastoral Letter to *enter into dialogue with all people about our common home*⁵ and especially *about the way*

¹ GS 4

² PP 13

³ PP 20

⁴ LS 13

⁵ LS 3

*we are shaping the future of the planet,*⁶ which implies that *together we can seek paths of liberation*⁷ that lead to *true wisdom*⁸ and to the approach of *comprehensive solutions*.⁹

To that end, it is crucial to behold the world with the gaze of Jesus. That is to say, with a loving gaze that is farsighted;¹⁰ it has a comprehensive approach,¹¹ a more integral and integrating vision;¹² *a distinctive way of looking at things, a way of thinking, policies, an educational programme, a lifestyle and a spirituality*¹³ that takes into account every aspect of the global crisis.¹⁴ It is the vision of Integral Ecology that surpasses the conception of ecology referring only to animals and plants, without considering human beings and their existential searches.

It is a gaze that is not limited to the “green” but assumes the “polychromy” of life in its various aspects and integrates ethical principles and human spiritual depth, as the Pope explains in Chapter IV of the Encyclical.

It is the gaze that discovers that the cry of the Earth joins the cry of the impoverished, the vulnerable, the marginalized and those who are discriminated against. Such a vision allows the members of the Church to have the same feelings as Jesus Christ (Phil 2:5-8).

May this Pastoral Letter be an instrument to encourage our commitment to be a missionary Church, poor for the poor, missionary disciples, custodians of the Common Home.

Mons. Juan Espinoza
Auxiliary Bishop of Morelia, Mexico
General Secretary of the Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM)

⁶ LS 14

⁷ LS 64

⁸ LS 47

⁹ LS 60

¹⁰ LS 36

¹¹ LS 135

¹² LS 141

¹³ LS 111

¹⁴ LS 137

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*“Everything is interconnected,
and this invites us to develop a spirituality of that global solidarity
which flows from the mystery of the Trinity” (LS 240)*

1. Because we are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental,¹⁵ a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.¹⁶

Integral Ecology always includes human beings and their spiritual dimension, it considers that the depth of the ecological crisis reveals the seriousness of the moral crisis of man (Saint John Paul II) and how inseparable the bond is between *concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society and interior peace*¹⁷ as demonstrated by Saint Francis of Assisi with his life choices. If *the external deserts in the world are growing* it is because *the internal deserts have become so vast* (Benedict XVI).

2. In this way it is understood that Integral Ecology is not a passing fancy, a superficial fashion or a deviation from the faith. On the contrary, *Living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience.*¹⁸ ... [W]hat is at stake is our own dignity.¹⁹

Environmental issues can not be handled in isolation, in piecemeal, incidental or even complementary ways. These issues are at the root of human existence and that is why questions are being raised regarding the general orientation of life, its meaning, its values in relation to the conditions of the common home and the environment that we as a human family establish within the home God has entrusted us in his immense kindness. *Intergenerational solidarity is not optional, but rather a basic question of justice, since the world we have received also belongs to those who will follow us.*²⁰ Therefore, taking the missionary discipleship of the Gospel seriously involves assuming responsibility for safeguarding creation, considering that human beings are an integral part of it.

3. The expression "*Laudato Si'*" means "Praise be to you," and was said in the language of the Umbria region (Italy) by Saint Francis of Assisi eight centuries ago. It is part of the "Canticle

¹⁵ LS 139

¹⁶ LS 49

¹⁷ LS 10

¹⁸ LS 217

¹⁹ LS 160

²⁰ LS 159

of Creatures” (also known as Canticle of the Sun). Francis, overcoming a moment of his life in which he experienced a “dark night” and had serious health problems with his sight, discovers that Brother Sun contains a special significance of Father God.

Contemplating the Sun leads him to experience the greatness of the Lord. He finds in the beings of nature a way to live in communion with God. And so he sings for Sister Moon and the stars, Sister Water, Sister Mother Earth. Also, he praises the Lord for Sister Bodily Death, for those who forgive, for those who suffer tribulation. Such contemplative and praising attitude is at the base of the missionary discipleship of the Gospel of Life. Taking care of creation is a way of praising God the Creator. It is to thank him for his wonderful work and the responsibility he has entrusted to us.

4. Creation is a Gospel, a Good News from God for humanity. We can “read with admiration and happiness the mystery of the universe”²¹ in the exercise of a sublime capacity to strengthen the bond of love with the Holy Trinity that is the source of all life. This capacity for wonder, the gift of marveling at the magnificence of God who reveals himself, communicates, gives of himself through his creatures, is a very necessary aspect to cultivate in Christian spirituality. Reverence to God. Give glory to God for making the human being live (Saint Irenaeus of Lyon). Give glory to God by promoting the poor to live fully (Blessed Oscar Arnulfo Romero). Recognizing that *the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she “groans in travail”* (Rm 8:22). These groans of Creation challenge us, awaken a holy indignation, lead us also to rebel against injustice, to work for social transformation. For the contemplation of reality moves us and leads us to recognize the voice of God in the cry of the excluded of America and the world. “So, if we do realize all this, let’s not be afraid to say it: we need change; we want change”, the Pope said in Bolivia before the Popular Movements.²²

5. To that purpose, the Church – as well as the other religious organizations – should spur a dialogue among themselves *for the sake of protecting nature, defending the poor and building networks of respect and fraternity*.²³ This dialogue would also include such participants as the inhabitants, the different environmental movements, businesspeople, governors, communication media, and research centres. In addition, academic establishments with an interdisciplinary focus²⁴ would bring together *the scientific-technical language and the language of the people*²⁵ in which “science and religion”,²⁶ faith and reason,²⁷ politics and economics would come together to work in pursuit of human fulfillment.

²¹ LS 243

²² Message of the Pope at the Second World Meeting of Popular Movements. Santa Cruz de la Sierra (Bolivia). Thursday, 9 July 2015. http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/july/documents/papa-francesco_20150709_bolivia-movimenti-popolari.html

²³ LS 201

²⁴ LS 195

²⁵ LS 143

²⁶ LS 62

²⁷ LS 63

It goes without saying that *the Church does not presume to settle scientific questions or to replace politics* but the Pope encourages *an honest and open debate so that particular interests or ideologies will not prejudice the common good.*²⁸

6. Consequently, the ecological crisis is a call to a profound interior conversion.²⁹ We won't achieve anything if the change in economic systems and production models does not reflect a change of mentality, awareness, habits and heart. Authentic evangelization is apparent in an ecological conversion.

Such ecological conversion is referred to as integral ecology. The ecological has to do with the home.³⁰ Next, "metanoia" or conversion implies a "going home," to the family of God, to recognize ourselves as part of Creation. We forget that we ourselves are earth (see Gen 2:7 and LS 2). Our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters.³¹ It also implies feeling mercy for this sister who *cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her*, thus our oppressed and devastated Mother Earth finds herself among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor, and she "groans in travail" (cf. Rm 8:22).

7. Pope Francis invites us to sing *Laudato Si'* as we go, without losing the joy of our hope.³² That living joyfully in the love of God and in hope, is to perceive each creature singing the hymn of its existence.³³ We humans are not singing *Laudato Si'* alone. It is a song that all of creation needs to sing through the caring we provide. The creatures sing because they have an intrinsic value, they give glory to God with their existence and communicate their own message,³⁴ that *each organism, as a creature of God, is good and admirable in itself; the same is true of the harmonious ensemble of organisms existing in a defined space and functioning as a system.*³⁵ *Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth* (LS 92).

8. In order to get the choir of Creation to sing the hymn to its Creator, there needs to be a *distinctive way of looking at things, a way of thinking, policies, an educational programme, a lifestyle and a spirituality which together generate resistance to the assault of the technocratic paradigm.*³⁶

²⁸ LS 188

²⁹ LS 217

³⁰ Let us recall that the root of the words ecology, economy, ecumenism, etc. is the Greek prefix "oikos," which means house (home, household, hearth).

³¹ LS 2

³² LS 244

³³ LS 85

³⁴ Cf. LS 33

³⁵ LS 140

³⁶ LS 111

It is the vision of Integral Ecology, which covers five dimensions: environmental, economic, social, cultural and everyday life,³⁷ in relation to the ethical principle of the common good and justice between generations. Beyond the abstraction of explanatory terms, integral ecology is a human experience, an experience of mercy, which “calls for openness to categories which transcend the language of mathematics and biology, and take us to the heart of what it is to be human” (LS 11).

9. Our appeal as Pastors that we should all take care of our common home together draws from testimonies, data and analysis collected by experts, then looks at the issue in light of the Gospel and the Social Doctrine of the Church – especially from the perspectives contained in the Concluding Document from the Aparecida Conference (2007) and the Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* – to analyze the reality, proposing our own reflections and orientations, as well as several concrete commitments for our communities for the well-being of our peoples and the earth, understood as God's creation.

Given that the ecological crisis has human roots and must be understood from a complex and systemic perspective, we feel it is very important to take into account the lines of orientation and action proposed in Chapter Five of *Laudato Si'*, because discerning the attacks against the common home requires dialogue and transparency in decision-making processes on the environment, and in the formulation of new international, national and local policies.

The Challenge of Extractive Industries

10. In the period since the Aparecida Conference (2007) and the present, the rate of conflicts on the continent has increased significantly, arising chiefly from projects exploiting underground assets. Many ecclesial communities are confused and perplexed, divided over trying to assess the value of activities in mining, oil, hydroelectricity, agriculture, road works, tourist infrastructures, and many others. This is a cause of deep pastoral concern and merits a conscientious approach since “as disciples of Jesus Christ, we feel challenged to discern the ‘signs of the times’ in the light of the Holy Spirit, to place ourselves in service of the Kingdom proclaimed by Jesus who came so that all may have life and ‘have it more abundantly’” (Jn 10:10).³⁸

Therefore, in this Pastoral Exhortation, in addressing the great challenges that Integral Ecology poses on our Continent, we will pay particular attention to analyzing the impact that extractive activities—especially those related to mining—have on our Common Home.

11. By “extractivism” we understand an unbridled tendency of the economic system to convert the goods of nature into capital. The action of “extracting” the greatest amount of materials in the shortest possible time, converting them into raw materials and inputs that industry will use, that will then be transformed into products and services that others will market, society will

³⁷ LS 137-162

³⁸ AD 33 [Translator's note: AD = Aparecida Document — Concluding Document from the 2007 conference. Available in English at: <http://www.celam.org/aparecida/Ingles.pdf>]

consume and then nature itself will receive in the form of polluting waste—that is the consumerist loop that is being generated at ever greater speed and ever greater risk.

What is most serious about this logic of relationship with nature is that the resources are running out and we are rapidly approaching the physical limits of the Earth. Since the 1970s, it's been being said that the pretense of infinite growth in an infinite world is not sustainable. Neither is it sustainable that, in the eagerness to generate material wealth, the living conditions of entire peoples are being sacrificed and valuable ecosystems are being deteriorated, as reiterated by the Pope in *Laudato Si'*. The greedy interest in exploiting Mother Earth until the last drop is leading to drastically transformed landscapes—cutting down forests, diverting rivers, tracing roads, destroying the vegetation layer, and finally, generating a series of impacts that deserve to be subjected to an ethical and moral evaluation in dialogue with the sciences.

12. This approach to reality leads us to reflect on the meaning of human work and, in general, to question ourselves about the meaning of human existence.³⁹ As humanity, we have the great challenge of satisfying human needs without exhausting the possibilities of life for future generations. The intention to take care of the garden of the world so that we all have land, roof and work, requires an effort of ingenuity and creativity, based on the spiritual greatness of an economy of communion. *The Creator does not abandon us; he never forsakes his loving plan or repents of having created us.*⁴⁰ . . . *[F]or he has united himself definitively to our earth, and his love constantly impels us to find new ways forward.*⁴¹

Faithful to the Latin American and Caribbean pastoral theological tradition, from an attitude of discernment of the “signs of the times”, calling for honest, plural and argued dialogue, and from the perspective of integral ecology, we bishops urge the Catholic communities of the continent to: see and touch reality, contemplating in it the Gospel of Creation and perceiving the action of the Holy Spirit in human history, in order to analyze, interpret and discern what are appropriate or inappropriate extractive activities in the territories; then, propose, plan, and act to transform our own way of life, to influence the mining and energy policies of states and governments, and in the policies and strategies of companies dedicated to extractivism, all for the purpose of achieving the common good and a genuine human development that is integral and sustainable.⁴²

13. From that perspective, once these general principles of approaching the situation have been set out, we bring out our vocation and mission as pastors (Chapter I), we do an historical stocktaking of milestones along the Church's path regarding extractive activities (Chapter II), we go into the details of the reality that challenges us (Chapter III), we analyze those details in the light of faith from CSD (Church Social Doctrine) (Chapter IV "Word and Life"), we propose lines of action relevant to our Catholic identity to strengthen the commitment to take care of our common home (Chapter V "Faith without Works is Dead") and we will finish with some guidelines on achieving an integral ecological conversion.

³⁹ LS 160

⁴⁰ LS 13

⁴¹ LS 245

⁴² LS 18

I. OUR WORD AS PASTORS

14. As pastors accompanying our peoples, we cannot be indifferent to their anguish and suffering, their struggles and profound hopes. We welcome them in our heart. That is why we pay attention to their cries throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, and we are impelled by the Gospel to speak out before this painful, conflictive and challenging situation. We share Pope Francis' conviction that *no one can demand that religion should be relegated to the inner sanctum of personal life, without influence on societal and national life ... without a right to offer an opinion on events affecting society. ... We love this magnificent planet on which God has put us, and we love the human family which dwells here. ... If indeed "the just ordering of society and of the state is a central responsibility of politics", the Church "cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice"* (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 183).

We wish to discern the signs of our time, one of which is the accelerated and large-scale advancement of extractive activities and the industries that derive from them, causing multiple impacts on the lives and health of populations close to the projects, on the environment and throughout our region, paying special attention to the strategic biomes to maintain life on the planet.

15. We consider as a sign of our time the growing awareness among believers that their responsibility within creation, and their duty towards nature and the Creator, are an essential part of their faith (LS 64). Care of the common home is no longer a fad or an option that may or may not be done. It is an essential part of our condition as Christians.

Some 500 years and counting after the Protestant reformation and questioned by the manifestations of religious fanaticism, the common home is turning into a meeting place for many: most of the planet's inhabitants profess to be believers, and this should spur religions to dialogue among themselves for the sake of protecting nature, defending the poor, and building networks of respect and fraternity (LS 201).

16. The Catholic Church values the historical importance of extractive activities in humanity's historical process, it is aware of the contribution of mining companies and the service they can provide to the human community, to the economies and progress of all societies.⁴³ It is aware that, through income from royalties and the different types of taxes that these companies pay, the State could finance infrastructure, as well as public health and education works. It recognizes that some actors (businessmen, state officials, professional engineers and technicians) are responsible people who strive to go beyond mere compliance with legal norms to protect the physical integrity of workers, local populations and indigenous peoples and to take care of the environment.

At the same time, [the Church] fosters responsible practices that promote the welfare of people based on law and democratic means. Nevertheless, it maintains the evangelical criterion of putting human beings above any economic goal as a priority because *the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath* (Mk 2:27).

⁴³ Message of Pope Francis "A Day of Reflection — United to God, We Hear a Cry." <https://zenit.org/articles/pope-s-message-for-a-day-of-reflection-united-to-god-we-hear-a-cry/>

17. Concrete evidence of joint work between ecclesiastical sectors and entrepreneurs must be reflected in inhabitants' living conditions, in reparations for victims that are just and generous and sustainability of the affected ecosystems. Any other form of relationship is lacking in charity and puts at risk the autonomy that the Church must have to be self-critical with its lifestyles and the ability of affecting and *as it were, upsetting, through the power of the Gospel, mankind's criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life...*⁴⁴

Hence our appeal to entrepreneurs, investors and governments to review the scope of economic activities based on extractivism, so that the sustainability of the life of the territories and its inhabitants is prioritized over any other financial interest. This requires a deep reflection, but it is also an exercise that invites creativity in the search for human fulfillment. To that end, it is very important to listen respectfully to the stories of those affected by mining projects, assertively adopt the scientific data and design platforms for transparent and honest dialogue aimed at caring for life in our common home.

18. Mercy nourishes and gives meaning to our pastoral service. We are worried about the situation of the fallen person at the edge of the road. We feel called upon to behave like the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37). In that context, we echo the words of the Supreme Pontiff: *The world's poor, though least responsible for climate change, are most vulnerable and already suffering its impact. As an integral ecology emphasizes, human beings are deeply connected with all of creation. When we mistreat nature, we also mistreat human beings. At the same time, each creature has its own intrinsic value that must be respected. Let us hear "both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor"* (*Laudato Si'*, 49), and do our best to ensure an appropriate and timely response.⁴⁵

II. MILESTONES ON A ROAD TRAVELLED

19. Extractivist activities have expanded a great deal in Latin America and the Caribbean. They include mining and the exploitation of hydrocarbons, industrial-scale fishing, forestry and agricultural exploitation, as well as the generation of hydroelectric, photovoltaic and wind energy on a large scale. Most of the countries on the continent have made a political choice to promote the extraction of materials from the ground as the main foundation of economic growth. Therefore, it is not surprising that, in recent years at the global level, Latin America has been one of the regions of the world that has received the most investments, especially private investments from companies in the so-called extractivist sector.

⁴⁴ *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 19

⁴⁵ Message of the Holy Father for the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation. 1 September 2016. "Show Mercy to our Common Home"

http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2016/documents/papa-francesco_20160901_messaggio-giornata-cura-creato.html

20. Over the last ten years, the Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM) has organized meetings and symposiums on the topic. One that stood out was the international seminar held in Lima in 2011, which concluded with a public statement on “Extractive industries (mining and hydrocarbons): the Problem of Non-renewable Natural Resources in Latin America and the Mission of the Church”. This seminar was held at a time when the prices of minerals and oil were very high on the world market and, as a consequence, investments in extractive companies were experiencing a significant boom.

At the same time, socio-environmental conflicts increased alarmingly. There were reports of serious human rights violations and negative repercussions from extractive activities on the health of neighbouring communities and the land. Many National Episcopal Conferences—like those in Bolivia, Brazil,⁴⁶ Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras and Panama—spoke out on this topic. The highest number of statements in response to these serious situations occurred in 2012.

21. CELAM also sought dialogue with business representatives and, to that end, sponsored two meetings with Catholic entrepreneurs from UNIAPAC:⁴⁷ In September 2012, the XI CELAM-UNIAPAC Symposium was held in Tegucigalpa, Honduras; its main theme was *The Company: Source of Development and Hope*.⁴⁸ An analysis was carried out on the subject within the framework of both Catholic Social Doctrine and the *Aparecida Document*, leading to the demand for a *highly productive, fully human and socially responsible company*.⁴⁹ Two years later, in October 2014, the XII CELAM-UNIAPAC Symposium took place in Santiago de los Caballeros, Dominican Republic on the theme “Responsibility of Business Leaders for the Construction of a More Just, Peaceful and Fraternal Society”. The theme was reflected upon in light of the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* and a document from the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace “The Vocation of the Business Leader: A Reflection”.⁵⁰

22. In September of the same year, the Pan-Amazon Ecclesial Network (REPAM) was founded as an *organization of structure and communion that seeks to strengthen the bonds of collaboration, and seeks to achieve a common vision of missionary and evangelizing work in the region*.⁵¹

REPAM was created to serve the peoples of Pan-Amazonia and seeks to defend their ancestral wisdom, their territories and their right to effective participation in the decisions made regarding their lives and their future.⁵²

REPAM's creation is a very important milestone in the path of the Latin American Church, and has caused several ripple effects, so much so that today there is an Ecclesial Network of Congo

⁴⁶ In 2016, the Bishops' Conference of Brazil created a Working Group on mining, seeking advisers for the bishops and local churches in order to support the demands of the affected communities.

⁴⁷ This group is an international association of Christian Business Leaders, a non-profit created in Europe in 1931.

⁴⁸ <http://www.simposioempresarialhn.com/>, visited 28 January 2017.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ The document was published in September of 2012.

⁵¹ Founding charter of REPAM, September 2014.

⁵² *Ibid.*

Basin Forest (REBAC, for its acronym in French), another in the Guaraní Aquifer (REICOSUR, Integral Ecology Network of the Southern Cone), another in the Mesoamerican biological corridor (REMAM, Mesoamerican Ecclesial Network) and there are already ecclesiastical provinces such as Bogotá, Colombia, that have taken steps to carry out a joint ministry focusing on water.

This is due to the fact that, in January 2016, during the seminar “Church on the Way Out: Poor and for the Poor”, held in Bogotá, the Department of Justice and Solidarity (DEJUSOL) of CELAM and the Latin American and Caribbean Secretariat of Caritas (SELACC), chose to consider REPAM as a model for evangelization in specific territories.

With the prospect of the Synod on the Amazon that the Pope has announced for October 2019,⁵³ REPAM is in a transcendental space for the evangelizing process in the 21st century. Pope Francis’s meeting with Indigenous peoples in Puerto Maldonado during his visit to Peru (January 2018) stands out as a milestone of this synodal journey; it was at this meeting that representatives of the Aboriginal Peoples asked the Holy Father—and through him the entire Church—to defend them and accompany them in the struggles for their territories, their traditions, their language and their Life. Responding to this call is an unavoidable task for the Church’s evangelizing mission in Latin America and the Caribbean.

23. Another relevant event was the meeting of Bishops of the Americas on February 11 and 12, 2014, in the city of Tampa, United States. At that meeting, representatives of the Episcopal Conferences of the United States and of Canada explicitly supported the initiatives of the Catholic Church in Latin America in regards to extractive industries. This had a subsequent impact, with the participation of the Catholic Church in a public hearing of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) in Washington D.C. on March 19, 2015. This was the first time that the Catholic Church of the Americas participated in a forum at that level. At the hearing, DEJUSOL of CELAM, SELACC, the Latin American and Caribbean Confederation of Men and Women Religious (CLAR), the Amazon Commission of the National Confederation of Bishops of Brazil (CNBB) and REPAM presented five cases that were emblematic of the human rights violations and negative environmental impacts being perpetrated by extractive companies in Latin America and the Caribbean.⁵⁴ They were supported in this by the bishops representing the Episcopal Conferences of the USA and Canada who attended the hearing.

In August 2016, an agreement was signed between CELAM and the IACHR, in which both parties mutually committed themselves to work together in defending human rights. In March 2017, REPAM presented—to the IACHR and other forums in the United States of America—other complaints of human rights violations committed by extractive companies against Indigenous peoples.

⁵³ Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazon Region in October 2019
http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2017/10/15/pope_announces_synod_of_bishops_for_the_pan-amazon_region/1343151.

⁵⁴ These were: the Piquiá de Baxio case (Açailândia, Brazil), the San José del Progreso and Magdalena de Teitipac cases (Oaxaca, Mexico), the Yasuní National Park case (Ecuador), the case of the Nueva Esperanza community (Atlántida, Honduras), and the Lote petrolero No. 116 case (Amazonas, Peru).

24. Publication of the Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* by Pope Francis is another historic milestone, because with this important document the Supreme Pontiff continues developing the Church's Social Doctrine, enriching it with an outlook from integral ecology that involves environmental aspects. To the fundamental relationships with God, with oneself and with one's neighbour, it adds the relationship with the environment; hence, this integral ecology perspective invites us to move from the throwaway culture⁵⁵ to the culture of care⁵⁶ and from the culture of premature death⁵⁷ to the culture of life.⁵⁸ Likewise, he insistently calls on not only Christians, but on all people of good will, to commit themselves to the care of our common home. In communion with the Holy Father, we make a discernment of reality with an attitude of dialogue to seek integral alternatives for the populations and territories affected by extraction projects.

25. One month after the publication of *Laudato Si'*, the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (PCJP) organized—in July 2015, in collaboration with the Latin American Churches and Mining Network—a meeting in Rome of representatives from communities affected by mining activities. The meeting was held under the motto “United to God, We Hear a Cry” and included the participation of leaders from 18 countries from around the world. From the Americas, there were leaders from Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, El Salvador, the United States, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Peru and the Dominican Republic. Representatives from communities affected by mining denounced the serious violations of human rights and the contamination and destruction of their territories, of which they were victims.

Peter Cardinal Turkson, President of the PCJP (which, since January 1, 2017, has been included in the work of the new Dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human Development, of which Cardinal Turkson is its first prefect) reported that the principal objective of this meeting was to recognize the dignity of the people and communities affected.

He stressed: “We are aware of their isolation, of the violation of their human rights, of the persecution, of the imbalance of power.”

26. In April 2017, El Salvador passed the Law for the Prohibition of Metal Mining. This ban was the result of more than a decade of struggle, of the joint effort of social, environmental and educational organizations and the decisive influence of the Catholic Church. The Law establishes the principle that mining metals affects the environment and the health of people and constitutes “a threat to the development and welfare of families”. The prohibition includes the activities of exploration, extraction, exploitation and processing, both open air and underground, and also bans the use of toxic chemicals in any metallic mining process.

⁵⁵ LS 22, 43

⁵⁶ LS 231

⁵⁷ LS 48

⁵⁸ LS 213

III. A REALITY THAT CHALLENGES US

27. The Pope affirms in *Laudato Si'* that *the violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life.*⁵⁹ The problem resides in seeing nature only as a useful resource for consumption and not valuing it for its other meanings—symbolic, cultural and religious.⁶⁰ Such a mentality is at the base of the technocratic paradigm, the anthropocentrism and moral crisis that is reflected in the severity of the ecological crisis, according to what St. John Paul II said several decades ago.⁶¹

As a contribution to the study that each ecclesial community must carry out from the particular context of its own reality, without losing sight of the major tendencies in the global situation, the vision of integral ecology that we are proposing is an invitation to discern the signs of the times, taking each particular case and listening to the perspectives of the different actors until we are able to identify which position is most faithful to the will of God, One and True.

For this, we consider it important to highlight:

- a) The connection between the extractivism economic model and the environment
- b) The impact of extractivism on climate and water
- c) The relationship between extractive activities and poverty
- d) Socio-environmental conflicts
- e) The role of the State
- f) The responsibility of companies
- g) The commitment of the communities

a) The economic model, extractivism and the environment

28. We see the crisis of an economic model whose policies have led, in many countries, to accentuate the levels of poverty, inequality, depletion of natural assets and environmental destruction, and that it is happening on a planetary scale. There is an irrational exploitation *that is leaving ruin and even death in its wake, throughout our region.*⁶²

Such a model responds to a technocratic paradigm⁶³ that has become globalized and whose fundamental problem is *the concept of a subject who, using logical and rational procedures, progressively approaches and gains control over an external object.*⁶⁴ As has been said, it is the human being who “seems” *to see no other meaning in their natural environment than what*

⁵⁹ LS 2

⁶⁰ LS 5

⁶¹ “Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All of Creation”. Message for the World Day of Peace. 1 January 1990.

⁶² AD 473

⁶³ LS 53, 203

⁶⁴ LS 106

serves for immediate use and consumption, according to a thought expressed by Saint John Paul II, quoted in the Encyclical *Laudato Si'*.⁶⁵

A utilitarian mindset idolizes capital, where it loses all sense of the sacredness of and reconnection with nature; that is why Pope Francis devotes Chapter 3 of *Laudato Si'* to analyzing the human roots of the ecological crisis that are reflected in that perverse alliance between technology and finances that has given rise to a throwaway culture,⁶⁶ feeds a reductionist and skewed anthropocentrism⁶⁷ and facilitates a moral relativism that leads to the exploitation of people as if they were merchandise.⁶⁸ The destruction of ecosystems, human trafficking, labour exploitation and other forms of modern slavery follow the same pattern of social sin.

29. We are concerned about the economic logic imposed by this technocratic paradigm that is based on the principle that all human activity has no other purpose than producing and consuming, setting a price and obtaining monetary benefits—displacing to the background the right of every person to a dignified life based on the just distribution of goods, both material and spiritual. We note that *economic interests easily end up trumping the common good and manipulating information so that their own plans will not be affected*.⁶⁹

For that reason, the *Aparecida Document* demands that *the interests of economic groups that irrationally demolish sources of life are not to prevail in dealing with natural resources*.⁷⁰

30. ²We observe that, in Latin America and the Caribbean, the same logic has generated an “extractive” production pattern, i.e., oriented towards the exploitation of nature's goods under three basic characteristics: as non-exhaustible sources (unlimited production), occupation of broad geographical areas (extensive production) and high productivity (intensive production). The tendency is to exploit the largest amount of material in the shortest possible time, causing huge impacts on ecosystems and affecting the lives of the inhabitants of the territories.

The ecological imbalance resulting from this utilitarian pursuit of natural resources both underground and on the surface tends to become irreversible, given the fact that climate change, loss of biodiversity and desertification are advancing at an accelerated pace. This way of understanding the economy is putting at risk the lives of present and future generations, by leading the planet to exceed its limits in what constitute the three essential sources that the planet has—water, air and soil—for humanity's survival.

31. Market competition has made maximization of profits the measure by which satisfaction of human needs is judged, under the logic of producing goods and services at the lowest possible cost and in the least time possible. In extractive companies, cost reduction has

⁶⁵ LS 5

⁶⁶ LS 109

⁶⁷ LS 122

⁶⁸ LS 123

⁶⁹ LS 54

⁷⁰ AD 471

become a widespread practice due to the use of new technologies, the contracting of third-party services (outsourcing) and the fact that some governments have reduced their environmental standards.

32. Even recognizing that the use of new technologies helps reduce the harmful effects caused by extractive activities, we still consider that their impact on employment is negative. Similarly, we are concerned that the practice of hiring third-party services may be subverting labour rights, reducing human beings to the category of merely being a resource for production. And, in terms of the reduction in established environmental-protection standards, we see that this practice not only leaves the environment unprotected, but it also contributes to unfair competition between companies, putting at a disadvantage those that, for ethical reasons, assume their responsibilities and take environmental protections seriously.

33. We note with interest that environmental issues under debate now include the issue of the causes and effects on land and the people living on that land of the extraction of natural resources of diverse origins—whether carried out by companies large or small (informal and illegal). Likewise, we observe that this debate enables the ecological issue to be addressed not just from its biological, economic, social, political, legal, educational and cultural dimensions, but from its ethical dimension as well. We believe that this contributes to public opinion—because it is better informed and more aware of the problem—being able to make the commitment to prompt companies to: carry out their extractive activities in conformance with environmental standards; respect the rights of the communities who live there; and demand that States fully assume their responsibility to protect natural assets and defend the rights of those who live on the territories.

b) The impact of extractive activities on climate and water

34. The Encyclical *Laudato Si'* was published prior to COP 21 (United Nations Climate Summit), in December 2015 and was instrumental in achieving the Paris Agreement on climate change, after two decades of fruitless talks. *The climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all.*⁷¹

*Climate change is a global problem with grave implications: environmental, social, economic, political and for the distribution of goods. It represents one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day.*⁷² ... *If present trends continue, this century may well witness extraordinary climate change and the unprecedented destruction of ecosystems, with serious consequences for all of us. A rise in the sea level, for example, can create extremely serious situations, if we consider that a quarter of the world's population lives on the coast or nearby, and that the majority of our megacities are situated in coastal areas.*⁷³

⁷¹ LS 23

⁷² LS 25

⁷³ LS 25

35. ... [M]any of these symptoms indicate that such effects will continue to worsen if we continue with current models of production and consumption.⁷⁴ In that framework, it is necessary to understand that extractive megaprojects transform the landscape through the construction of roads, the setting-up of camps, the felling of trees, the changing of land use, among others, all of which is directly related to climate change, all the more so when the pattern of development is based on *the intensive use of fossil fuels* (oil, coal, natural gas).⁷⁵

36. We add our voices to the concerns expressed by priests, women religious, lay women and men from congregations, movements and diverse organizations who share the lives of communities affected by extractive activities. They perceive that *climate change is making water management more complex, as it is causing more severe droughts, has accelerated glacial retreat and increased sea levels, among other impacts. This situation is aggravated by extractive activities (mining and hydrocarbons in particular), which require the removal of the vegetation cover in the area around such projects, affecting ecosystems where water courses originate. In addition, these activities largely account for the disappearance of bodies of water, such as lagoons, and can affect even groundwater and aquifer courses, by removing soils, by the depths of quarries, the release of acid waters and tailings. . . . Despite all this, during the useful life of the mining project, no measure is considered to compensate for the impacts generated.*⁷⁶

37. In a continent that has the most abundant aquifers on the planet, *international extractive industries and agribusiness often do not respect the economic, social, cultural, and environmental rights of the local populations, and do not assume their responsibilities. Preserving nature is very often subordinated to economic development, with damage to biodiversity, exhaustion of water reserves and other natural resources, air pollution and climate change.*⁷⁷

38. We also join the call of specialists on the need to put limits on the intensive extraction of natural assets through megaprojects, especially those related to mining and energy, because their continent-wide expansion is contributing, indirectly, to significant changes in climate processes, seriously affecting biodiversity and the use of land for agriculture for the purpose of food security.

c) Extractive activities and poverty

39. The relationship between climate change and food production and distribution is well-known. Likewise, we also understand the high degree of vulnerability of the most impoverished

⁷⁴ LS 26

⁷⁵ LS 23

⁷⁶ Declaration of priests, women religious, lay men and women from congregations, movements and diverse organizations from thirteen countries of Latin America (a total of 65 organizations signed this declaration), within the framework of the international seminar "Church and Mining" that took place in Brasilia, Brazil from December 2 to 5, 2014, and intended for the occasion of the holding of COP 20, which was taking place during those same days in Lima, Peru.

⁷⁷ AD 66

sectors facing the rigours of the climate. Many of them are forced to migrate.⁷⁸ Forced displacement due to famine or drastic changes in ecosystem conditions is a new facet of human mobility. *Our world has a grave social debt towards the poor who lack access to drinking water, because they are denied the right to a life consistent with their inalienable dignity.*⁷⁹ This is a fundamental right that overrides any economic enterprise.⁸⁰

40. We acknowledge that the current model of economic growth has contributed to reducing monetary poverty rates and has improved health and education conditions as a result of the expanded coverage of social programs. Nevertheless, we note with concern that, in parallel with these policies of poverty reduction, inequality has been accentuated due to a greater concentration of productive activity and business profits, which leads us to conclude that said model is far from being able to demonstrate clear signs of an effective and fair distribution of wealth.

41. In that context, we denounce the violations of the human rights – both individual and collective – of Indigenous or native peoples, both traditional and farming populations, principally those of the Amazon, caused by companies that carry out extractive activities, whether they involve agriculture, forestry, mining or energy. These companies, usually with transnational capital, tend to occupy, without prior consultation and with the support of States, the territories of these populations, confining them to increasingly reduced living spaces, thus limiting the possibilities of access to their traditional means of subsistence and destroying their cultures.

d) Socio-environmental conflicts and State action

42. We express our concern about the growing number of social conflicts that have become recurrent in Latin America, particularly those of a socio-environmental nature, caused by the presence of large companies. These companies, protected by concession contracts granted by the States and without conducting prior consultations or receiving free and informed consent, carry out extractive activities in territories that constitute the basic sources of life (land, water, forests, etc.) for the populations who live there.

43. We note that, faced with the fact that they find themselves dispossessed of their territories and livelihoods, these people have to face, in a number of cases, the inaction of government entities, including situations in which these government entities take a stand in favour of the private interests of the companies. Even when we recognize that, in some countries, the State enforces the applicable law to resolve socio-environmental conflicts, in others, said conflicts are not resolved with fair, timely and effective measures. We believe that, faced with these situations, States should be guided by principles and criteria of justice and equity, so that their actions respond to the public interest and the common good.

⁷⁸ LS 25

⁷⁹ LS 30

⁸⁰ LS 185

44. We are struck by the position of some businesses which persist in ensuring that private interests prevail in carrying out extractive activities, justifying this action with the argument about the high costs involved in [respecting] social and environmental protection measures. We consider that business activity is a privileged place to praise God, which requires a great dose of creativity and ingenuity to produce wealth without harming human beings and their environment.

45. [We are struck as well by] the attitude of indifference from broad sectors of society regarding the drama being experienced by the communities most directly affected by extractive activities. We also observe with concern, with few exceptions, the indifference shown by the media about the situations of social injustice that the communities are experiencing; the lack of objectivity and openness to exposing different points of view on these problems, and the pretension of ignoring or diverting the attention of public opinion in a tendentious way.

46. We note that some governments have been losing the confidence of the populations affected by extractive projects, because said governments have allowed policies to prevail that have been imposed by international organizations, with said policies being in practice contrary to the proper management of natural assets and environmental protection. In this context of mistrust of government-adopted measures, we are particularly concerned that the demand for protection by Indigenous or native populations settled in territories close to exploitation areas is being threatened with measures which criminalize protests.

e) State responsibility

47. For a long time, legal vacuums, corrupt interests and lack of political will have been complicit factors in injustices that have placed entire groups of human beings in vulnerable situations, groups threatened not just with losing their way of life but with losing their very means of subsistence. We will not stop calling upon States to fully assume their responsibility to protect the most vulnerable members of their population, and to assert the common good of all its members⁸¹ above any particular interest, a particularly critical issue when it comes to matters such as territorial regulation, the exploitation of the goods of nature, water rights and the rights of native communities.

48. We welcome the fact that progress has been made in several Latin American countries in legislation and regulations regarding prior and informed consultation as required by ILO Convention 169. But many claims have come to us from Indigenous populations, from people of African descent and from Mestizos in Latin America, because in practice their right to this consultation prior to the State granting concessions to companies to carry out extractive activities in their territories has been violated by these very same States. We regret to note that, in several cases, in which prior and informed consultation was carried out by the State, the State did not fulfill its role of ensuring that the population adjacent to the extractive projects had

⁸¹ The common good must include the effective good of minorities. See *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 169.

been widely informed, in accessible language and with materials that facilitated their understanding of complex matters so that they could weigh the arguments for and against.

49. Complaints continue to come in from populations in different regions of our continent, informing us that their State is not fulfilling its responsibility to guarantee an impartial and reliable environmental impact study. We want to remind the States of their great responsibility to ensure that companies do not pollute the environment by the spreading and deposition of chemical substances and toxic waste of different natures, thus risking degradation of the environment and serious damage to the health of the population. It is also their responsibility to enforce social, labour and environmental laws and to sanction companies that do not comply.

50. The problems of extractivism – and ecological problems in general – cannot be addressed in all their complexity and magnitude by private individuals, nor even by individual states. The repercussions of these problems are so great that they require continental and global consensus, which translates into supranational normative bodies and an authority that oversees their realization and application. We call on the relevant international bodies to put more effort into working towards that goal.

51. Because of the high international prices that metals such as gold and coltan have experienced in recent years and the lack of employment opportunities, informal mining has expanded. This type of mining has also been involved in pillaging nature, without our states having been thus far able either to stop it or even to regulate it properly. We strongly criticize the practice of illegal mining. It causes very serious damage to the ecology, it leaves vast areas completely polluted, it contaminates workers' lives and damages the health of people living in the affected areas. In addition, it evades payment of taxes, thus affecting the common good and public morals.

52. We are concerned that illegal mining is being promoted as a prelude to weakening governance of territories, thereby facilitating the entry of mega-projects financed by transnational corporations under free trade agreements. At the same time and with the same force, we criticize those companies who carry out practices that are considered illegal in their countries of origin, yet they carry them out with impunity in Latin American countries. Ultimately, the effect of the destruction of life prevails over the debate on the legality and illegality of extractive practices. Both artisanal mining and large mechanized mining should be subject to a criterion of justice and be reoriented according to criteria that favour life in our Common Home. Environmental legislation must protect both human rights and the rights of Mother Earth, over and above any economic discourse that does not take into account the principles of Integral Ecology.

f) Responsibility of businesses

53. We have heard numerous testimonies from our priests and pastoral agents that companies – transnational and national, private and state – often do not comply with internationally recognized socio-cultural and environmental standards. There are complaints of corrupt practices, of causing discord among communities adjacent to extractive projects, of intimidation and even serious violations of human rights in pursuit of the company's goals, at any human, social or environmental cost. We observe that what often prevails is the only criterion of action is the maximum benefit in production⁸² and not human beings, their just needs or the common good.

54. We want to warn you about the existence of initiatives to reflect on mining and faith, and proposals of carrying out mining operations “in alliance”, in which extractivist companies purport that sectors of the Church are supporters of their megaprojects, in exchange for infrastructure, money, benefits, etc. Fittingly, this pastoral letter provides tools for the communities to discern each particular case, without manipulating the principles of faith and the criteria of the Social Doctrine of the Church, but always keeping in mind the common good for the weaker, the abandoned and the mistreated of society, among whom is our “burdened and laid waste” Mother Earth.⁸³

g) The commitment of communities

55. Pope Francis calls for the construction of an ecological citizenship.⁸⁴ The permissiveness or tolerance of communities and the passivity of states in the face of abuses by extractivist companies are often factors that aggravate conflicts. There are deterministic attitudes that feed imaginings of conformism and little determination to defend common goods. There are those who, faced with a danger of pollution or damage from an extractivist initiative, say simply “well, we have to die of something,” or faced with the risks of a business activity that poses a threat for the lives of the present generation and for generations to come, they affirm “at least we have work.”

56. The Puebla Document is very emphatic in rejecting those anthropological reductionisms. The rich Magisterium of the Social Doctrine of the Church invites us to value work as a place of sanctification; therefore, the search for better political programs that are aimed at the common benefit and sustainability of life is part of the Christian identity and of the responsibility of the Church to influence state policies and the practices of extractive companies.

57. At the same time, the testimony of organized communities is highly commendable; with criteria of openness to other creeds and spiritualities, they are fighting to defend territory and its inhabitants. The Churches and Mining Network is a good example of this. Triumphs achieved through prior, free and informed consent, working in tandem with legal advisors and technical

⁸² *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church.*

⁸³ LS 2

⁸⁴ LS 211

consultants, leaning on public officials to carry out their work properly, forging alliances with independent media, using social networks, supporting communities, forming territorial and thematic networks—these all constitute milestones that encourage hope and motivate us to continue strengthening processes to take care of our common home within the framework of an integral ecology.

IV. WORD AND LIFE

58. Faced with the serious ecological crisis before us, the growing global warming of the planet's surface temperature and climate change, which in their extreme effects endanger human survival on earth, we are called upon to discern our place as human beings in creation and our responsibility for it, because this crisis is basically a cultural and spiritual crisis.

59. In the Judeo-Christian tradition we speak of "creation;" when we use this word, we mean more than nature or natural resources, because creation "*has to do with God's loving plan in which every creature has its own value and significance*" (LS 76) and is full of signs of the great solicitous love, of the tenderness and the unfathomable wisdom of the Creator.

60. In his Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis emphasizes that we are called upon to live in a respectful relationship with the earth because *the earth was here before us* (LS 67) and we have been entrusted to take care of it. We do not own the land but are called upon to be its stewards and custodians. For the biblical mandate to cultivate and take care of creation (see Gen 2:15), *it means making the world increase with responsibility, transforming it so that it may be ... an inhabitable place for us all.*⁸⁵

It is worth emphasizing that the Bible, correctly understood, *has no place for a tyrannical anthropocentrism unconcerned for other creatures*" (LS 68).

61. Rather, because all life was *called into being by one Father, all of us are linked by unseen bonds and together form a kind of universal family, a sublime communion which fills us with a sacred, affectionate and humble respect.* (LS 89). In stating this, it is important to clarify that *this is not to put all living beings on the same level nor to deprive human beings of their unique worth and the tremendous responsibility it entails. Nor does it imply a divinization of the earth which would prevent us from working on it and protecting it in its fragility.* (LS 90).

62. The main message of the biblical texts on the creation of the world (Gen 1 and 2, Psalm 8, Psalm 104 and others) reminds us that we are called upon to live "in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself" (LS 66). The Gospels bear witness to the gaze of Jesus who knew how to discover in creation the signs of the solicitous and generous love of the Father.

⁸⁵ Pope Francis at the General Audience of 5 June 2013, in Saint Peter's Square, Rome.

63. *Laudato Si'* speaks to us of the "Gospel of Creation" (LS 62). Jesus invited his disciples and through them he invites us today to *recognize the message hidden in things* (cf. Lk 12:24-27; Jn 4:35) (*Aparecida Document* 470). A contemplative and respectful look leads human beings to value other creatures and to "make use of them with care and sensitivity" (*Aparecida Document*, 470).

Let us not forget that the New Testament communicates to us the Good News that the fullness of God was pleased to dwell in Jesus Christ *and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross* (Col 1:19-20). In Christ, all creation will be brought to its fullness (cf. Rom 8:22). This faith demands a relationship of deep respect with creation.

64. Faith offers us a light that enables us to see more clearly that creation is our "common home", the gift of God the Creator for all men and women (or all human beings). And from that there follows a greater responsibility and a greater commitment on the part of believers in the care of our "common home".

The first chapter of the Bible just begins with this presentation of the creation of the world and everything that inhabits it by God. Without going into the different nuances of a certainly archaic story, it remains as revealed in this text that everything created has its origin in the infinite goodness of God and, precisely because of this, everything created is very good. Later on, the sages will affirm that the fundamental motive of this creative act is the love of God: *For you love all things that exist, and detest none of the things that you have made; for you would not have made anything if you had hated it* (Wis 11:24).

65. This goodness and beauty of creation is a constant invitation to praise the Creator for the wonderful world that He has given us (cf. Ps 136). And also, the human person, as a creature, feels the need to invite all created beings to join this chorus of praise to the God the Creator (cf. Ps 148).

In addition, this text of Chapter 1 of Genesis reveals that there is diversity in the world that came from the hands of God, which is what allows communion. It also teaches us that with the creation of man and woman, the story reaches its climax; and they are entrusted with the special mission of having "dominion" over the rest of creation (Gen 1:26-28). Now then, this superiority over the rest of creation should not be understood as a right to exploit the created; on the contrary, since man is in the image of God, man is his steward or delegate; and his mission is to govern nature, making present the power of God, that is, serving, caring, respecting, healing, by following the laws that the Creator has inscribed in his creation (cf. Prov 3:19).

66. In that sense, the rabbinic tradition, taking into account that the expression "*and said*" is repeated 10 times in the text, sees a relationship between those 10 words and the famous 10 words of the Decalogue. From that, a moral conclusion is drawn: just as in Gen 1 life arises out of obedience to the 10 words that God has spoken, so it is in obedience to the 10 words of the Decalogue that man finds life and creation is kept in order.

Finally, this text makes it very clear that between God and the world is the “word” separating them both, so that *the world is not divine and God is not worldly*. But in addition to separating, this “word” relates the creature with the Creator, giving the creation a dialogical character. Therefore, creation being an 'expression or diction of God', it is in a way a *natural manifestation* of God.

67. The account in Genesis 2 is complementary to the previous one; and here it is specified that the activity of man is 'to cultivate and care for' [*Translator's note: or 'keep it and till it', depending on the version consulted*] the “Eden or place of delights” where God has placed it. In this story, the relationship between man and creation is better illustrated because man was created from the mud or dust of the earth and will return to it. Expressed in our current language, it is clearly stated that the relationship with creation is essential to man; and even that they have a common destiny, as we shall see. In effect, this second story includes the drama of the sin of the human being that not only affects him himself; but it also affects his link with the created and creation itself. In a mysterious way, creation has become united to the sin of humankind and has also been wounded by that sin (Gen 3:17-19).

68. In particular it is the violence of men that stains and pollutes the good earth created by God; and that is why the voice of the blood shed by the righteous—like Abel—cries out to heaven for justice (Gen 4:6-9).

Man fills the earth with his violence and that is why God has to purify it with the flood (cf. Gen 6:13). All because of the wickedness of humankind (cf. Gen 6:5-6). The prophets will continue to denounce the people for ruining the land that God has given them in custody (Ezek 8:17, 9:9); but the earth will suffer the consequences of the human's sin, becoming a desert, a desolation (cf. Ezek 12:20; 15:8). Now, by the mercy of God, sin can be forgiven, guilt repaired and the earth restored (cf. Ezek 36:34-35).

Because of this wound received through the sin of humankind, creation itself is also groaning, waiting for the redemption of God (Rm 8:22).

69. In conclusion, *these ancient stories, full of symbolism, bear witness to a conviction which we today share, that everything is interconnected, and that genuine care for our own lives and our relationships with nature is inseparable from fraternity, justice and faithfulness to others* (LS 70).

Everything said can be assumed as the very gaze of Jesus towards creation, being heir to the tradition of Israel. Jesus sees creation as the work of his Father, which continues to be current and permanent, for *he causes his sun to rise on the bad as well as the good, and sends down rain to fall on the upright and wicked alike* (Mt 5:45).

70. In the Gospels, we see that Jesus lived in perfect harmony with creation, with a dominion over it proper to the Creator (“What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?” Mt 8:27). In fact, the first witnesses of the Christian faith like Saint Paul and Saint John recognized in their writings that Christ as the Eternal Word of the Father is the architect and

final meaning of creation itself “All things have been created through him and for him” (Col 1:16); “Through him all things came into being, not one thing came into being, except through him”, Jn1:3). And they also recognize to the Risen Christ a universal lordship over everything created, involving all the creation of the redemption through his death and resurrection: “For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross” (Col 1:19-20).

71. Thanks to the redemption worked by Christ through the Holy Spirit, all creation regains its original orientation towards the fullness that will be given at the end of time, when the Son gives the Father all things and “God may be everything to every one” (1 Cor 15: 28). It will then be the final fulfillment of what we are waiting for, which, according to his promise, “is the new heavens and new earth, in which justice dwells” (2 Pet 3:13).

We can say that concern for the care of creation is also a way of expressing our Christian faith in the resurrection, our hope for those “new heavens and new earth” (Rev 21).

“Everything is related” (LS 90)

72. In our world, everything is related. Questions about extractive activities, their benefits and negative impacts must be addressed from a systemic vision that overcomes the shortcomings of fragmentary visions, for they do not allow us to perceive that “everything is related”⁸⁶ to everything else. In his Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis calls upon us to assume the vision of an integral ecology (LS 10, 62, 124, 137), *one which clearly respects its human and social dimensions* (LS 137). Faced with growing pollution and a deep ecological and social crisis, it is urgent to become more aware of the close relationship that exists between the “environment,” that is, *nature and the society which lives in it. Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live. We are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it* (LS 139).

73. Multiple scientific studies have alerted us to the fact that many of the repercussions stemming from our interventions on the environment have delayed effects that are only noticed in the medium and long term. That fact must be carefully taken into account in the case of extractive companies with their projects, which are highly impactful on nature. Environmental impact studies must be carried out with the utmost care and scientific rigour from an integral ecology perspective before the projects are started.

74. As “prophets of life” (AD 471), we denounce *the current economic model which prizes unfettered pursuit of riches over the life of individual persons and peoples and rational respect for nature* (AD 473). Nor does this model respect the relations of interdependence and constant interaction between nature and human society. Many times a utilitarian vision of nature and ambition is imposed for maximum profit that leads to a large-scale extraction of renewable and

⁸⁶ LS 23, 70, 92, 120, 137 and 142.

non-renewable natural goods, *when they fail to control and offset their harmful effects on the surrounding environment* (AD 473) or do so highly inadequately.

75. Our planet can no longer withstand the multiple negative impacts on the fragile equilibriums of its ecosystems and on their capacity for self-regeneration. These impacts are caused by an economy and a lifestyle that are leading to unbridled exploitation of the earth's natural assets, that are severely and increasingly polluting the environment in many regions of our world, and that are converting an ever-increasing percentage of our earth into a big garbage dump. Such impacts are undermining the foundations of life for human beings and other living beings on earth and are bringing ecosystems to the verge of collapse in an alarming way. *Interdependence obliges us to think of **one world with a common plan*** (LS 164).

76. For fostering and strengthening the vision of an integral ecology and the full development of humanity, religions have their spiritual and moral riches to offer (cfr. LS 62). This also applies to the religions of indigenous peoples on our continent. *If we are truly concerned to develop an ecology capable of remedying the damage we have done, no branch of the sciences and no form of wisdom can be left out, and that includes religion and the language particular to it* (LS 63). Hence, as a church, we must put special emphasis on helping to rescue, know and value the religious traditions and theology of indigenous peoples.

The central role of the Common Good

77. We wish to emphasize that an *integral ecology is inseparable from the notion of the common good, a central and unifying principle of social ethics* (LS 156). Together with the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity, this principle must be taken into account in decisions about extractive projects. *For underlying the principle of the common good is respect for the human person as such, endowed with basic and inalienable rights ordered to his or her integral development. It has also to do with the overall welfare of society and the development of a variety of intermediate groups, applying the principle of subsidiarity.*⁸⁷

78. The common good is the responsibility and duty of society as a whole, but the State has a particular obligation to *defend and promote the common good* (LS 157). That implies that it is the responsibility of the State to keep watch to ensure that decisions concerning the projects of extractive companies are not dominated by selfish and short-term visions guided by maximum return in a minimum time, but rather by the sincere concern for the good of all citizens, especially the poor, the marginalized and the most vulnerable sectors of the population as well as for the good of the earth, our common home.

⁸⁷ LS 157

Common good and intergenerational justice

79. At the same time, the notion of the common good is closely linked to the responsibility for future generations. To give them a habitable world is a demand of justice (cf. AD 471). We join with the bishops of Portugal in their exhortation to assume this duty of justice, emphasizing that *the environment is placed in the logic of reception. It is a loan that each generation receives and must transmit to the next generation.*⁸⁸

Caring for common goods: land, water, climate

80. In the Christian tradition, private property is not an absolute and untouchable right. Rather, it is subordinated to the universal destiny of goods. Therefore, all forms of private property have a social function. For *God gave the earth to the whole human race for the sustenance of all its members, without excluding or favouring anyone*⁸⁹ (LS 93). Businesses also *perform a social function and should be characterized by their capacity to serve the common good* (CSDC 338).

81. We remind everyone that the environment with its water sources, ecosystems and biodiversity *is a collective good, the patrimony of all humanity and the responsibility of everyone. If we make something our own, it is only to administer it for the good of all. If we do not, we burden our consciences with the weight of having denied the existence of others* (LS 95). Therefore, as pastors of our peoples, we want to express our great concern about the reality that in several Latin American countries there are thousands of high-risk environmental liabilities that, in addition to polluting water, soil and air, affect the health of people living in the surrounding areas.

In many cases, extractivist activities are polluting both surface and underground waters. This puts at risk *access to drinking water in adequate quantity and quality.*⁹⁰

82. We would like to draw special attention to the fact that the Amazon has been affected by oil spills that have polluted river and underground water at alarming levels, with serious consequences for the health of the nearby population and the flora and fauna in the region. In the case of mining, water is often the cause of persistent disputes and conflicts because of the high amount required for mining activities while at the same time the adjacent population suffers severe water shortages.

83. We urge States to use justice, prudence and foresight in administering water and other environmental factors that are 'public goods' and as such contribute to the global common good.

⁸⁸ Portuguese Episcopal Conference, Pastoral Letter *Responsabilidade solidária pelo bemcomum* (15 septiembre 2003), 20.

⁸⁹ Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus* (1 May 1991), 31: AAS 83 (1991), 831.

⁹⁰ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *El agua, un elemento esencial para la vida. Plantear soluciones eficaces*. [Spanish, French and Italian only, not available in English] Contribution of the Holy See to the Sixth World Water Forum (Marseille, France, March 2012).

It is an inescapable task of governments *to guarantee the universal destiny of these goods*⁹¹ because *water is a universal good that is essential for the integral development of peoples and for peace.*⁹²

84. The lack of drinking water puts human life and health at great risk. Clean water in satisfactory quantities is equally essential for the support of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems (see LS 28) and to prevent the advance of global warming and climate change. As the bishops of Ecuador affirmed in their pastoral letter: *We can live without gold, but never without water.*⁹³

85. In the Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, the Pope motivates us to become more aware that *the climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all. At the global level, it is a complex system linked to many of the essential conditions for human life* (LS 23). From the viewpoint of the Christian faith, facing increasing climate change, we have the responsibility to collaborate with others to take care of the climate and significantly reduce activities that increase the emission of greenhouse gases, which exacerbate the situation, causing global warming, with severe consequences on the planetary environment.

86. From the perspective of our preferential option for the poor, we insist that States and businesses must do everything in their power to effectively protect the climate and, together with many other civil society actors, we join those efforts. Those countries with fewer resources and who have contributed least to climate change, and especially the poor in those countries, are the ones most affected by the disastrous consequences of climate change (cf. LS 25).

Faced with this reality, there are demands for justice between the countries of the North that bear the greatest responsibility for the generation of greenhouse gases and the countries of the Global South that suffer the greatest harmful impacts of climate change. The care of collective goods [or so-called “global commons”] must be a priority and a critical factor in decisions about possible extractive projects.

Caring for biodiversity

87. In Latin America and the Caribbean, we enjoy great biodiversity. We are aware that it is a *free legacy that we receive to protect* (AD 471). But *this legacy often proves to be weak and defenseless against economic and technological powers* (AD 471). Providing it responsible care demands a vision that goes beyond the maximum economic gains in the short term, it requires an integral view of nature with its rhythms, potentialities, fragilities and limits. This implies, when considering economic calculations for projects of extractive companies, including the cost of all the services of nature that are reduced or totally lost by the operations. One must

⁹¹ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *El agua, un elemento esencial para la vida. Plantear soluciones eficaces*. Contribution of the Holy See to the Sixth World Water Forum (Marseille, France, March 2012, p.13.

⁹² Ibid, p. 16.

⁹³ Declaration of the Ecuadorian Episcopal Conference, entitled “*Cuidemos nuestro planeta*” [Caring for our planet], 20 April 2012, p. 5.

keep foremost in mind that *the cost of the damage caused by such selfish lack of concern is much greater than the economic benefits to be obtained. Where certain species are destroyed or seriously harmed, the values involved are incalculable* (LS 36).

88. We greatly appreciate that several countries in Latin America and the Caribbean *have made significant progress in establishing sanctuaries on land and in the oceans where any human intervention is prohibited which might modify their features or alter their original structures* (LS 37). By doing that, they make an effective contribution to the care of biodiversity, especially of endemic or rare species.

In defense of the Amazon

89. The Amazon is certainly among the places that are of enormous importance for the world, both in terms of ecosystems and the global climate; together with the tropical forests of the equatorial belt in Africa and Asia, these regions balance life on the planet. They capture the water evaporated from the ocean and keep it in circulation. They take carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and, through photosynthesis, transform it into oxygen. The Amazon is a very significant reserve of fresh water worldwide and is a biome with an immense and complex biodiversity, one of the largest in the world (see LS 37). Its forests house essential plants and herbs for the production of many medicines. So far, the enormous variety of plants in the Amazon and their healing qualities are still not completely known.

90. The Amazon is of great importance for the entire planet and for the whole of humanity and its future. As *Laudato Si'* warns, *when these forests are burned down ... within the space of a few years⁹⁴ countless species are lost and the areas frequently become arid wastelands* (LS 38). The increasing destruction of the Amazon and the radical changes in the Amazonian ecosystem threaten the existence of nearly 30 million people, members of numerous indigenous peoples, African-American and riverside-dwelling peoples and many other populations.

The danger of “technocracy”

91. Cutting-edge technologies play a prominent role in extractive companies. They are an expression of human intelligence and creativity. These technologies can bring many benefits; in the case of mining and the exploitation of hydrocarbons, for example, they can minimize the negative impacts on the environment and the health of people. At the same time, they give a great deal of power to human beings. Never in the history of humanity has man had as much power as now thanks to new technologies.

92. That is why, along with Pope Francis, we want to warn of the great danger in our time that technology is no longer only a means, but that it has been transformed into an end in itself. The

⁹⁴ Highlighted in the Encyclical's text.

Pope speaks of 'technocracy', that is, a situation in which the human being does not dominate technology, but is dominated by it and wrongly believes that technology is the solution to all the serious ecological and social problems that we suffer in the present (see LS 106-114).

93. We also want to draw attention to the fact that the “reductionist” and “efficiency-driven” paradigm (LS 104) of technocracy is absolutely contrary to an economy at the service of human life and the ecosystems with their great biodiversity. It is necessary to bear in mind that the causes of the dramatic ecological crisis are precisely the large-scale technical interventions of human being in our world. In mining, for example, new technologies can enable thousands of tons of earth to be removed in a very short time and thus immense impacts on the environment are generated. But there are also frequent risks, such as the rupture of tailing dams (that was the case of the environmental crime in Mariana, Brazil). The multiple oil spills are a sad manifestation that no technology is perfect and that every technology, including the most developed, has its risks of failure, which are often irreversible. Because of the great power that technology gives to human beings, they have to use great care and caution to discern its use and its multiple impacts.

94. Our affirmations should not be understood as a rejection of technology in general; on the contrary, the Church greatly appreciates a *well-directed technoscience* (LS 103), one that is developed with ethical criteria at the service of human life and care for the environment. Only in this way can we counteract the high risk that *the alliance between the economy and technology ends up sidelining anything unrelated to its immediate interests* (LS 54).

Active participation of communities in project decisions

95. Our Christian faith commits us to respect all cultures and to appreciate cultural diversity (see LS 144). We join Pope Francis in insisting that *There is a need to respect the rights of peoples and cultures, and to appreciate that the development of a social group presupposes an historical process which takes place within a cultural context and demands the constant and active involvement of local people from within their proper culture. Nor can the notion of the quality of life be imposed from without, for quality of life must be understood within the world of symbols and customs proper to each human group.*⁹⁵

96. Whether one is talking about large projects of environmental exploitation under an extractivist standard (mining, hydrocarbon exploitation, monocultures and agroindustry, timber, tourism, among many others) or about clean energy projects (hydroelectric, photovoltaic and wind), they affect the vital spaces of indigenous communities in multiple ways. We emphasize that these communities should not be considered as *merely one minority among others, but should be the principal dialogue partners, especially when large projects affecting their land are proposed* (LS 146).

⁹⁵ LS 144

97. As required by International Labour Organization Convention C169 of the UN, indigenous peoples should be consulted from the initial phase of project planning. We note with great concern that: *There are too many special interests, and economic interests easily end up trumping the common good and manipulating information so that their own plans will not be affected* (LS 54).

98. We must respect the fact that for the indigenous communities *land is not a commodity but rather a gift from God and from their ancestors who rest there, a sacred space with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identity and values* (LS 146). As we can see in many parts of Latin America, when these communities *remain on their land, they themselves care for it best* (LS 146).

99. Despite that, we know that because of the great interest companies have in obtaining the greatest possible economic gains by extracting natural assets in their territories, these communities are subjected to strong and continuous pressure *being put on them to abandon their homelands to make room for agriculture or mining projects which are undertaken without regard for the degradation of nature and culture* (LS 146).

100. We are witnesses to the fact that, in many places, indigenous and Afro-American communities are exposed to a highly concentrated exploitation of their territories and, as a consequence, to the degradation of their environment and the loss of their local resources; in addition, they are also exposed to the threat of losing a way of life that they have developed over many generations in close relationship with the environment and its goods. Their culture gives them identity, a sense of life and belonging. Along with Pope Francis, we want to affirm with determination that: *The disappearance of a culture can be just as serious, or even more serious, than the disappearance of a species of plant or animal. The imposition of a dominant lifestyle linked to a single form of production can be just as harmful as the altering of ecosystems* (LS 145).

101. With their conceptions of Good Living (*Buen Vivir*), indigenous peoples in Latin America present an alternative vision and radically question a purely economic vision of development. They have a much more comprehensive vision and *have a great store of traditional knowledge of the sustainable use of natural resources*⁹⁶ (DA 83).

102. We want to reaffirm that their wisdom and experience are *an irreplaceable resource for all humanity* (CSDC 471). Indigenous peoples have the full right to participate on an equal basis in local, national and international debates and decisions on so-called development projects.

⁹⁶ AD 83.

Radical change in the understanding and practice of the economy

103. It is absolutely necessary *to change models of global development* (LS 194). This will require a responsible reflection *on the meaning of the economy and its goals with an eye to correcting its malfunctions and misappropriations* (LS 194).

104. In our current context of a big boom in extractive companies with their potential benefits and high risks, we want to emphasize that *environmental protection cannot be assured solely on the basis of financial calculations of costs and benefits. The environment is one of those goods that cannot be adequately safeguarded or promoted by market forces.*⁹⁷ Let us avoid a *magical conception of the market, which would suggest that problems can be solved simply by an increase in the profits of companies or individuals* (LS 190).

105. We have received testimonies from many communities affected by extractive activities which show us clearly that within the technocratic scheme that guarantees maximum profits *there can be no thinking about the rhythms of nature, its phases of decay and regeneration, or the complexity of ecosystems which may be gravely upset by human intervention* (LS 190).

106. The critical situation of our planet, the threat of collapsing ecosystems and the extinction of life on our earth urgently require us to make a profound change in the understanding and current practice of the economy, towards an economy at the service of man and in harmony with nature and the limits of our planet. Remember that: *Economy, as the very word indicates, should be the art of achieving a fitting management of our common home, which is the world as a whole. Each meaningful economic decision made in one part of the world has repercussions everywhere else; consequently, no government can act without regard for shared responsibility* (EG 206).

107. We need an 'economic ecology' *capable of appealing to a broader vision of reality. The protection of the environment is in fact 'an integral part of the development process and cannot be considered in isolation from it'*⁹⁸ (LS 141). The market requires an ethical framework to guarantee integral human development, sustainable development and social inclusion. The market does not do that by itself. (see LS 109).

108. Furthermore, the myth of unlimited growth must be urgently dismantled by showing that unlimited growth on a finite planet is unsustainable for physical, ecological and social reasons. In order to achieve fulfillment of the common good, care for collective goods and climate, *there is urgent need for politics and economics to enter into a frank dialogue in the service of life, especially human life* (LS 189).

⁹⁷ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 470.

⁹⁸ *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development* (14 June 1992), Principle 4.

Making well-discerned decisions

109. As the Ecuadorian Episcopal Conference has already said, *it is not a matter of responding with an outright and uncritical Yes or No to mining and oil exploitation, but rather to inform oneself in a broad and detailed manner about their benefits and harms and then to make intelligent, timely and courageous decisions, keeping in mind that the life and health of human beings and the balance of the environment are more important than all the metals.*⁹⁹

110. For all of the above, it is essential that interventions in nature and the exploitation of land assets by companies respect the rules and legislation enacted by States; the States, in turn, must be guided by solidarity between different social groups—especially with the most impoverished and marginalized, who are far more vulnerable to having their fundamental rights violated—as well as solidarity with future generations.

Need for “a bold cultural revolution”

111. A consumerist vision of what it means to be a human being generates an insatiable hunger for natural goods and energy, with a dangerous voracity, indifferent to the ecological and social damage that this lifestyle generates; it easily leads people to a very self-centred way of living, with their focus fixed solely on their individualistic interests, without taking into account that everything is related and, for that reason, that there is a shared responsibility for our land and for others, especially for the most vulnerable.

112. We need a *bold cultural revolution* (LS 114) and therefore an ecological conversion towards the care of the earth, our common home, and of the people, especially of the poor. This integral ecological conversion must lead us to concrete and lasting commitments at a personal, family, local, regional, national and international level.

113. The ancestral wisdom of the indigenous peoples is a living memory of an alternative to the throwaway culture,¹⁰⁰ that is why the dialogue proposed regarding a cultural ecology enriches the processes of evangelization. With the Synod of the Amazon planned for 2019, a horizon of theological renewal and pastoral creativity is opening up, inviting an ecological conversion, a spirituality of communion and a commitment to Good Living (*Buen Vivir*), in harmony with the cycles of nature, with water as a fundamental right and intrinsic value for each and every creature. This vision, based on God's desire for all his creation, illuminates every place on the continent to engage in intercultural dialogues and assume commitments that lead to the fullness of life in our common home.

⁹⁹ Declaration of the Ecuadorian Episcopal Conference, entitled *Cuidemos nuestro planeta* [Caring for our planet], 20 April 2012, p. 5.

¹⁰⁰ LS 22, 43, 123

V. FAITH WITHOUT WORKS IS DEAD

114. Our vocation to be prophets of life in word and deed impels us to wager on a lifestyle different from a compulsive consumerism like the one promoted by the market. We will strengthen in our communities and in the different ecclesial bodies and works the awareness that commitment for the care of creation *is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience* (LS 217). Rather, it is inseparable from an authentic love for God and neighbour, as well as being inseparable from a consistent experience of following Jesus. We commit ourselves to generating greater awareness that *a crime against the natural world is a sin against ourselves and a sin against God* (LS 8).

115. We urge Christian communities to live their mission of caring for Earth and the lives of people, particularly the poor, in partnership with many other people and organizations that share this commitment. The important thing is to ‘start at home’ and review what needs to be changed to generate a new culture of caring for life.

Some concrete actions suggested by the Pope in LS 211 are:

- Surveillance of one's own consumption
- Reduce, reuse, recycle
- Avoid the use of plastic and paper material
- Reduce water consumption
- Separate waste
- Use public transport or share the same vehicle among several people
- Plant trees, turn off unnecessary lights
- Promote and protect green spaces in our cities.

116. We encourage everyone to cultivate an ecumenical spirit in this effort. May all religions unite in bearing witness to God's loving care for his creation! The ecumenical initiatives, convergences, interreligious tables, coalitions and alliances are encouraging examples of the capacity for joint work that we believers can deploy for the purpose of caring for the environment.

117. We can learn a lot from young people, who are often sensitive to caring for our planet and have the necessary knowledge to put new technologies and social networks to work for this task. The Synod on Youth in 2018, World Youth Day in 2019—as well as any ecclesial event in which the protagonism of young people is being reclaimed—should be an experiential laboratory for the counsels put forth in *Laudato Si'*, a permanent environmental classroom in which a lifestyle that enables sustainability can be put into practice and, in general, can serve as an interdisciplinary meeting point for faith and science in striving to reduce the carbon footprint and deepen ecological spirituality from an integral perspective.

118. Each and every one of the Christian communities, acting from their own reality and particular characteristics, are agents of change and promotion of sensitivity for the care of life. It's not just the major benchmarks and advances in this line that are important, even the very small individual and community options are valuable, contributing to the strengthening of forces. All these gestures, large or small, *benefit society, often unbeknown to us, for they call forth a goodness which, albeit unseen, inevitably tends to spread* (LS 212).

119. In several places in Latin America and the Caribbean, Christian communities are already committed to practicing fair trade. We want to encourage this practice in our dioceses so that it becomes increasingly widespread. Let us assume our *social responsibility of consumers* (LS 206), keeping in mind that *purchasing is always a moral — and not simply economic — act* (LS 206).

120. We will continue to use democratic means in our efforts to put necessary pressure on governments in the Global North to enact laws requiring transnational companies to be transparent in informing their countries of origin about the sources of natural goods and in what ecological and social conditions they have been extracted or generated. In that way, when it is found that natural goods have been generated on the basis of socio-environmental conflict, with great injustices committed against local populations and workers, their import and use can be avoided. Within that framework, we recognize the importance of a binding treaty on transnational corporations and human rights, just as is currently being debated in the UN, with the support of the Vatican itself.

121. We reaffirm our commitment to accompany and support communities affected by conflicts caused by extractive activities, with the willingness to contribute from the spirit of the Gospel so that those conflicts may be resolved peacefully and with justice and respect for the rights of peoples and cultures. For that reason, we remain committed to fostering training processes that will enable the communities, their organizations and their leaders to be aware of their rights and to acquire comprehensive information, in understandable language, about the possible benefits, impacts and risks of extractivist projects in order to acquire a genuine discernment.

122. We strongly support communities in their demands for their right to participate in decisions being made about extractivist projects on their lands because of the huge impact these projects have on the life and culture of the communities and the surrounding environment. These local communities affected by mining activities must be guaranteed the right of consultation, consent and veto. Communities can say “no” to mining proposals if, in their assessment, the ventures would generate more damages than benefits.

The State is responsible for carrying out the respective consultations and must enforce its jurisdiction, in compliance with international standards. We urge States to fully comply with their duty to carry out prior and informed consultations in conditions of transparency and sincere dialogue between the different parties.

123. We demand that an environmental impact study be carried out before *the drawing up of a business proposition or the proposal of a particular policy, plan or program* (LS 183). At the same time, we insist that it must *be carried out in a way which is interdisciplinary, transparent and free of all economic or political pressure* (LS 183), and public access to this information must be facilitated. The information must be available to local inhabitants affected by extractive projects.

124. Relying on the Social Doctrine of the Church, we remind the States that it is their duty not to succumb to the pressures of strong and immediate economic interests; rather, it is the States' duty to defend the rights of local inhabitants, mostly members of very vulnerable populations who are in a position of asymmetric power before large national and transnational companies and the State itself.

125. In tandem with Pope Francis, we emphasize that *we need to stop thinking in terms of 'interventions' to save the environment in favour of policies developed and debated by all interested parties* (LS 183). We have in mind that in the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church, the active participation of citizens in matters that affect their lives and their future, is *one of the pillars of all democratic orders and one of the major guarantees of the permanence of the democratic system* (CSDC 190) and of social peace.

126. We urge local, regional and national governments, the States and corresponding international organizations, to devise policies that encourage the development of *less polluting forms of energy production* (LS 172) and of other resources, and thereby diversify the branches of economic production.

127. States and appropriate mechanisms of popular consultation must define the mining extraction rate, as well as the limit of the amount of mineral to be mined each year in each mine.

128. Adopting specific health and safety legislation for mining work is an urgent matter. The intense rhythms of mining activities generate impacts on the health and safety of workers: accidents and injuries, occupational diseases, moral harassment in the workplace, etc.

129. It is necessary to envisage establishing in the legal systems of our countries, as is the case in mining countries such as Australia and Canada, i.e., "Mining-free areas" that include protected areas, water catchment areas for urban centres, places of historical importance, primary forests, etc.

130. Mines are abandoned on various grounds — most notably the supposed bankruptcy of the mining companies — when the mine nears its depletion. It is necessary to demand that

mine closure plans be prepared in advance, guaranteeing the availability of special resources earmarked for that purpose from the very beginning of the mine's operations.

131. We are deeply concerned that many social leaders and pastoral agents suffer continual threats, persecution and assassinations during socio-environmental conflicts: *their physical or psychological integrity and their freedom is in danger while they are defending human rights and the rights of local populations*¹⁰¹ and for protecting the environment and the conservation of creation's assets.

132. We denounce human rights abuses and the acts of violence to which social leaders and pastoral agents have been subjected. At the same time, we urge States to fulfill their duty to guarantee that human rights and the rights of local populations are protected. We reiterate our commitment to work through international ecclesial networks of solidarity to raise awareness of rights abuses in the transnational corporations' countries of origin.

133. We must build alternatives to an economic model that impoverishes, excludes majorities and degrades the Common Home. An extractivist model that in pursuit of a supposed development eradicates nature, biodiversity, the culture of our peoples and, not infrequently, the life of human beings. We must work towards *a circular model of production capable of preserving resources for present and future generations, while limiting as much as possible the use of non-renewable resources, moderating their consumption, maximizing their efficient use, reusing and recycling them* (LS 22).

FOR AN INTEGRAL ECOLOGICAL CONVERSION

134. The papal Encyclical *Laudato Si'* calls us to an Ecological Conversion. All of we baptized men and women must change our lifestyles, modes of production and consumption, to be more consistent with the values of the Gospel. A Church going out to do missionary work, poor for the poor, is also a Church that loves and protects creation. It is a Church that is located and incarnated in the territory, which is recognized as "home and school of communion" and for that very reason, it defends the life of Creation, promotes relations of brotherhood among all creatures and teaches living and coexisting together, breaking down self-centredness and promoting a sincere concern for the other.

135. The approach to Integral Ecology that underlies the heart of this Encyclical of Pope Francis must be assumed by the whole Church, as a constituent dimension of our evangelizing work. We urge every Episcopal Conference of Latin America and all dioceses to consider establishing an Integral Ecology Commission or Ecology Ministry that will help the ecclesial community to take care of creation in an active way, collaborating actively with the pastoral social dimensions in the social dimension of Evangelization.

¹⁰¹ Public hearing before the InterAmerican Commission on Human Rights (2015), p. 11.

136. We need parishes, schools and universities whose practices bear witness to an ecological culture that respects, loves and defends Life, all human life and all Creation. The Eco-Parishes Guide,¹⁰² the “Green Seminars”,¹⁰³ eco-neighbourhoods, sustainable schools, sustainable universities are eco-pedagogical references to generate an ecological citizenship consistent with environmental responsibility, with the hope *that our seminaries and houses of formation will provide an education in responsible simplicity of life, in grateful contemplation of God’s world, and in concern for the needs of the poor and the protection of the environment* (LS 214).

137. Catechists, facilitators of Basic Ecclesial Communities, members of secular apostolate groups, youth movements must take Integral Ecology as a pastoral challenge in their daily practices. No one in the Church can be indifferent to the cry of the poor and the cry of our sister Mother Earth. The whole evangelizing process must be thought of as a key to living and coexisting lovingly in this common home. All catechetical, liturgical and pastoral activity can highlight this vital connection between our faith and the care of Creation.

138. The family as a “domestic Church” has a huge responsibility. Care of the Common Home begins with “home”. *In the family we first learn how to show love and respect for life; we are taught the proper use of things, order and cleanliness, respect for the local ecosystem and care for all creatures* (LS 213).

139. Integral Ecology implies a prayerful and contemplative spirituality in action. Like Saint Francis of Assisi, we praise the Creator and thank him for each and every one of his creatures. The Global Catholic Climate Movement translates well that commitment to pray for and with Creation, assuming an austere and simple lifestyle, and publicly advocating for the defense of life.¹⁰⁴

140. “Time for Creation” is an increasingly popular celebration worldwide, with the participation of many Christian churches and various episcopal conferences. It is a concrete opportunity for the Church to deepen its process of ecological conversion. This ecumenical celebration takes place annually between September 1, World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, instituted by Pope Francis, and October 4, Feast of St. Francis of Assisi. This is a good first step in creatively permeating liturgical times, sacramental rites, expressions of popular piety and, in general, the celebrative dimension of the faith, so that everyday behaviour expresses the ecological spirituality of the communities.

¹⁰² A preliminary version of Eco-Parish guide can be downloaded from <http://catholicclimatemovement.global/eco-parroquia/>

¹⁰³ There is a good example of inter-religious work for organizing “green” convents and seminaries. <http://www.greenfaith.org/programs>

¹⁰⁴ The Global Catholic Climate Movement (GCCM), through a campaign backed by the Vatican, promotes that we pray for creation, assume an austere lifestyle and defend creation. It is a good example of the commitments that can be promoted between Catholic communities. (www.vivelaudatosi.org)

141. From the encounter with Jesus Christ, Word of God made flesh, we commit ourselves to the construction of his Kingdom. This encounter leads us to let the Holy Spirit act in each and every one of us, so that it might fill our hearts with the love of God and renew the face of the earth. The World Day of the Poor reminds us that to give glory to Christ the King, we must embrace him in the skin of the impoverished and marginalized. Caring for Mother Earth with the same consideration in the treatment of the poorest is an ethical horizon of Integral Ecology. Ecological Education is fulfilled in Ecological Spirituality, by moving from environmental information to a leap of communion with the Mystery (LS 210).

142. It is also necessary to take care of the caretakers of the common home, because they are often threatened, mistreated, repressed and imprisoned for announcing the Good News of the Kingdom and denouncing the “gods of power and money”. There are already many martyrs who have given their lives in Latin America in the struggle for the defense of Life. Their blood is the seed of freedom and hope.

143. Our territories enjoy the wonderful blessing of biodiversity but they are also exposed to tragedies caused by earthquakes, hurricanes, and landslides, among others. Many of these risks have been increasing due to wrong human activity. It is an essential task of each ecclesial community to prepare for emergencies, using their in-depth knowledge of their own region; growing in solidarity and communication; training in risk management, adaptation to climate change and strengthening the ability to face adversity with a focus on the message of Jesus, who offers us life in abundance (Jn 10:10).

144. *Mary, the Mother who cared for Jesus, now cares with maternal affection and pain for this wounded world* (LS 241). May Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mother of Latin America, accompany us and encourage us to be Missionary Disciples Custodians of the Common Home, so that in Jesus our peoples may have full Life and we can sing together with joy “praise be to you.”

In Bogotá, Colombia, on the twenty-fifth day of the month of January 2018