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Archbishop Kurtz Welcomes Pope Francis' Encyclical *Laudato Si'*

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WASHINGTON—Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz of Louisville, Kentucky, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), welcomed the release of Pope Francis' encyclical on ecology, *Laudato Si'*, June 18.

Full text of Archbishop Kurtz's statement follows:

Statement on the Occasion of the Promulgation of *Laudato Si'*
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President, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

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With an open heart and gratitude I, along with my brother bishops in the United States, welcome *Laudato Si'*. In this beautiful and extensive treatment on care for our common home, the Holy Father calls all people to consider our deep and intertwined relationships with God, our brothers and sisters, and the gifts that our Creator has provided for our stewardship.

Drawing extensively from the teaching of his predecessors, the Pope teaches that care for the things of the earth is necessarily bound together with our care of one another, especially the poor. This interdependency extends from the deep respect due every human person to all living beings and to the earth where we make our home. "Each creature has its own purpose... and the entire material universe speaks of God's love."⁸⁴ The Pope uses the term "integral ecology" to draw our attention to a rich treasury of thought that people of faith bring with them to conversations about the human person and our environment. He states, "We must regain the conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for others and the world, and that being good and decent are worth it."²²⁹

In *Laudato Si'*, the Holy Father invites us to reflect deeply on all points of human activity, whether we consider care for creation at the level of our individual choices or in the public square. The need for urgent action is clear and he appeals to us to become "painfully aware" of what is happening to the world and "to grow in solidarity, responsibility and compassionate care."²¹⁰ The Holy Father makes it clear that we were given the earth as a gift from our Creator. It is our responsibility to avoid contributing to a culture of acquisitiveness, individualism, or exploitation.

Pope Francis repeatedly urges us to renewed and urgent action and honest dialogue about our environment – both social and ecological. "The human environment and the natural environment deteriorate together"⁴⁸, both of which disproportionately affect our poorest brothers and sisters. Reflecting on inner city slums, lack of clean drinking water, and a consumerism mentality, Pope Francis asks "what kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us?"¹⁶⁰ This question is at the heart of this encyclical and rightfully calls us all to work harder against the challenges the human family faces today.

Genuine efforts to true dialogue will require sacrifice and the confronting of good faith disagreements, but let us be encouraged that at "the heart of this world, the Lord of life, who loves us so much, is always present. He does not abandon us...he has united himself definitively to our earth, and his love constantly impels us to find new ways forward."²⁴⁵ May we help answer Pope Francis' call in this encyclical, receiving his message and growing in responsibility towards the common home that God has entrusted to us all.

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Numbers are reflective of the paragraph numbers in *Laudato Si'*.

Keywords: Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, encyclical, ecology, environment, Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz, USCCB, U.S. bishops, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops