

Laudato Si'

DISCERNMENT QUESTIONS FOR POLITICAL LEADERS

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis calls all faithful people to hear and respond to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor – a call which he reiterated as increasingly urgent and imperative in his follow-up encyclical, *Laudate Deum*. Pope Francis tells us that “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.”

Protecting God’s creation is not optional – but how we each live out this universal vocation depends on our unique circumstances and our individual God-given gifts. We must get to know the communities that surround us and the struggles they face, encounter with honesty the present reality of our day, and thoughtfully discern how we can use our gifts and circumstances to transform this reality to look more like the Kingdom of God which Jesus came to announce.

Policymakers, public servants, and elected officials are in unique positions of power to help transform our reality and respond, on a macro-level, to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor. This is not an easy responsibility to bear. To protect God’s creation well requires careful discernment and attentive listening, both to those directly impacted by policies – particularly the most vulnerable – and to the Holy Spirit present within each of us.

The following discernment questions, guided by the teachings of Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'*, are offered to help political leaders discern how the Holy Spirit may be asking them to approach or move on a particular policy decision. These questions can be thought of as a prayer in themselves, for they are a way of inviting God into a process which we may often forget is sacred.

1. Does the policy promote and serve the common good?
2. Does the policy help create a society that is more equitable, just, and peaceful?
3. If the policy is passed, what impacts will it have on the Earth that God entrusted to our care?
4. Does the policy reflect civic and social love? Are my decisions being made from a place of love, compassion, and care? Or fear, greed, gluttony, and pride?
5. Is the policy more concerned with short-term economic gains, easy solutions, and/or attempts to grasp at power or long-term, integral development and the cultivation of a better world for future generations?
6. Whose voices are being prioritized? Is this a plan “drawn up by the few for the few,” or has it been crafted for and with the most vulnerable and directly impacted?
7. What impact will the policy have on indigenous communities and their cultural traditions? Have their voices been included and truly heard?
8. Are we being honest about the economic, social, and environmental costs of the policy and who will bear them?
 - *What land and ecosystems will be altered? Who lives there? What plants, animals, and humans depend on these ecosystems to survive? Does it have any cultural or religious significance to peoples that I am ignoring?*
 - *How will the policy impact the quality of air that people breathe? The cleanliness of water? The quality and accessibility of healthy foods?*
 - *How will the policy impact people outside of our country? Are we forcing others to bear the burdens of our irresponsibility and desire for more?*
9. What impact will the policy have on jobs and the labor market? Am I upholding the dignity of work and the rights of all workers?
10. Am I promoting and protecting life at all stages and in all forms?

“True statecraft is manifest when, in difficult times, we uphold high principles and think of the long-term common good.”

–Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'* 178