



Bishop's Statement on Climate Change

Climate Justice Vigil St. Joseph, Michigan
September 23, 2015

Thank you for being here this evening. Showing up makes a difference. Praying together makes a difference. Standing up in solidarity for a common cause makes a difference. Offering humble thanksgiving for the vast, rich abundance of the earth makes a difference. Taking seriously our responsibility for this fragile island home we share makes a difference. Honoring all creation, respecting all creation, caring for all creation makes a difference. Turning off the lights, hanging clothes on the line, bicycling to work, planting trees and being here, showing up makes a difference. And, all of these added together and repeated daily might eventually make the difference between a dying world and a thriving world. People who are grateful for God's abundant gifts, people of faith, like you, who are not afraid to be held accountable for creation will save it. So, thank you for being here. Thank you for showing up. Thank you to the organizers of this event for pulling us together and in so doing giving voice

to all creation. Don't stop. Keep meeting, keep gathering, keep praying, it makes a difference.

This Climate Justice Vigil is being held in conjunction with Pope Francis' visit to the U.S. He is scheduled to address Congress tomorrow – God

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– *The Rt. Rev. Whyne M. Houglund, Jr., DD*

be with him! Welcome to the Your Holiness. Hope you have a good visit. Thank you for boldly speaking to the issue of climate justice in your recent encyclical letter: “Laudato Si,” “Praise be to You,” On Care for our Common Home. In this letter, Pope Francis critiques consumerism and irresponsible development, laments environmental degradation and global warming. Further, he calls all people of the world to take, “swift and unified global action.” The organizers of this

vigil and I want to say to the Pope, “Amen, brother! We've got your back on this.”

Some might say, “But, Bishop, you are not Roman Catholic.” No, I am not. The care for our common home is not just a Roman Catholic issue. It is not just a Christian issue. It is not just an issue for religious people. It is not just an issue for humankind. The care for our common home concerns us all, all humanity, all creation. The Christian doctrine of creation asserts that the world exists because God choose to call it, and everyone on it, into being. God

created all things and all of it is good and necessary: trees and flowers and fields, birds of the air and fish of the seas, spiders and snakes and all that creeps upon the earth, dogs and cats, horses and cows, frost and snow and ice, rivers, lakes and streams and all the billions of other magnificent things were created by God and I imagine they praise the creator in their owns way as do we. God created all the world – not just humanity – and called it good. We are all in this together re-

ardless of creed or color; whether two-legged or four or eight legged, winged or finned, plant or animal. "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it." Psalm 24:1.

Pope Francis is inviting the world to embrace this vital and ultimate truth. He is inviting us to recognize we are all connected, one to another and each one to the earth and that dwells upon it. Do we recognize this truth? Do we accept it?

The question with which we must struggle is: "What is our relationship with the world? Do we have dominion over it? Or do we have stewardship over it. Are we owners or stewards? Do we respect creation or not? To disrespect it is to disrespect God and each other. Are God's blessings for humanity only or for all living creatures? How we understand our relationship with the world will dictate how we act within in, act with it.

Most evidence suggests we disrespect and ignore our responsibility

actively neglecting the inherent relationship we have with the earth forgetting we are made of the earth and shall eventually return to it. To abuse the world is to abuse ourselves. To neglect the earth is to neglect ourselves. To disrespect creation is to disrespect the creator.

Perhaps we have an environmental crisis because we have a spiritual crisis. We've lost our need for God, lost our reliance on God, because we have so very much. We've sold our soul to the God's of capitalism and consumerism making us shallow and unreflective. We worship profits and comfort. We value wants over needs. We strive for ourselves only. We neglect the poor. We chastise the least, the last, the losers. We have an environmental crisis because we have a spiritual crisis. We have made ourselves God and the world is suffering as a result.

Today, our Jewish sisters and brothers, celebrate their holiest

day of the year, Yom Kippur, the day of Atonement. Yom Kippur is a day of repentance, a day of seeking God's forgiveness for sins committed. We began this vigil acknowledging the ways we have failed to respect the earth and all of creation. This is atonement. This is an act of repentance and it is a good start. To repent means to change direction, to turn around, to go in another direction. Change direction, my friends. Make this Climate Justice Vigil a rallying cry of repentance, a call to change how we relate to God's creation. See yourselves as caretakers not owners recognizing all the world's inhabitants are affected by our actions and remember we are of the earth, formed of it, filled with it, intimately connected to it.

We are walking on holy ground – everywhere we go. The world is holy and good filled with exquisite beauty, a priceless blue diamond unique and precious and oh so very fragile. Walk gently.

– *The Rt. Rev. Wayne M. Hougland, Jr., DD
IX Bishop, Episcopal Diocese of Western Michigan*