6-17-2015

10 Things to Know about Pope's Environmental Encyclical

University of Dayton

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.udayton.edu/news_rls

Recommended Citation

This News Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Marketing and Communications at eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in News Releases by an authorized administrator of eCommons. For more information, please contact frice1@udayton.edu, mschlagen1@udayton.edu.
10 Things to Know About the Pope’s Encyclical on the Environment

From a student's perspective, here is everything you need to know about Pope Francis’ encyclical — what it is, what it means and why you should care.

"God always forgives, but the earth does not." - Pope Francis
Pope Francis is about to release a new blog about the environment and it's kind of a big deal. Well, his “blog” is actually called an encyclical, but when you're part of an institution that’s approximately 1,982 years old, you can use fancy names like that. Did that just raise a few questions? Well, don't worry.

We know that it can be pretty difficult to find the time to answer all those questions yourself, so I — Sarah Spech, a senior English major — sat down with Vince Miller, professor of religious studies and Gudorf Chair in Catholic Theology and Culture at the University of Dayton, for you. Here are answers to the most commonly asked questions to keep you up-to-date with the conversations.

1. What is an encyclical, anyway?

Historically, an encyclical is an authoritative letter written by the pope to all bishops in a single country or around the world. However, in more recent years popes have addressed encyclicals to “all people of good will.”

2. Why should Catholics care?

Catholics are called to be Catholic all the time, not just within the walls of a church on Sunday. Our choices in our everyday lives should align with the will of God, which includes the choices that affect our Earth.

3. I’m not Catholic, so why should I care?

Even if you don't follow the pope, a lot of other people do. 1.2 billion people, actually. But even outside of the Church, Francis’ popularity is sky high and growing. So whether you're Catholic or not, it’s worthwhile to pay attention.

Beyond that, the timing of this is significant since huge international environmental conferences are scheduled for July in Addis Ababa, September in New York and December in Paris.

4. Does the encyclical have a name?

It is titled *Laudato Si*, meaning “Praised Be” with the subtitle “On the care of our common home.”

5. What can we expect the encyclical to say?

While we may not know exactly what the encyclical will say, Pope Francis is not the first pope to speak on the environment. Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops have all discussed the issue of climate change and the moral necessity for Catholics to act responsibly
as stewards of Creation. There has been speculation for months though, and many believe that it will focus on the relationship between God, humans and Creation.

6. Why is the pope speaking about the environment?

Professor Vince Miller says, “Pope Francis is calling the entire world to a spiritual revolution that has economic and political consequences.” So even though people are talking politics around the encyclical, Francis’ argument will be theological, and I think we can agree he is allowed to discuss that.

7. Why is it important?

Popes have been issuing social encyclicals for over a century. Since 1891 and *Rerum Novarum*, popes have been reading the “signs of the times” and issuing Catholic teachings in response to current events. Past encyclicals have affected the world through their relevance to the current problems of the times and their call to action to Catholics and non-Catholics alike.

8. As a Catholic, do I have to agree with what the pope says in an encyclical?

The short answer is “you should try.” It won’t be infallible, but it is still an authoritative letter from the Head of the Catholic Church to teach and guide its members. Catholics are expected to make a sincere effort to embrace its teaching and act on its moral guidance. And, like Francis, start a conversation with the rest of the world on this issue which affects us all.

9. Will I be able to read it?

Yes! Though its name may sound foreign, it will be translated into numerous languages to be distributed and read around the world. It will be released at noon in Rome (so 6 a.m. EST) on June 18 and will be available online for everyone to read.

10. So now what?

When it’s released, read it! (Or at least most of it.) Don’t rely on summaries or news reports to tell you about it, because they will probably leave something out. And don’t be afraid to talk about it, tweet about it, share it on your wall, write your own blog! Join the conversation and help make changes. Find parts that speak to you and make them a part of your life. Because if a debate gets so big that the pope gets involved, maybe you should, too.

*Sarah Spech is a student writer for University of Dayton Magazine. She has attended Catholic school*