

WORLD

# Vatican: Pandemic makes environment's care ever more urgent

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VATICAN CITY — Pope Francis' impassioned appeal to protect nature is increasingly urgent as the global pandemic alters lifestyles and makes painfully plain the fragility of life, the Vatican said Thursday.

The worldwide COVID-19 outbreak struck as various Vatican departments were well into drafting a document calling on the faithful to carry out concrete local actions to mark the fifth anniversary of Francis' encyclical that denounced the environment's exploitation and strongly recommended caring for the Earth.

The coronavirus crisis, the Vatican said in Thursday's anniversary appeal, "renders ever more evident, five years from its publication, the value" of the pope's encyclical.

The 227-page anniversary document says that while the poor "are the least responsible for global warming, they are the most vulnerable in respect to its effects." Decrying widening gaps between rich and poor, the Vatican said that the COVID-19 pandemic laid bare the need to rethink political policies that have been aimed at reducing welfare programs. It didn't identify specific countries.

The document says that, provoked by the pandemic, "the health emergency, the solitude, the isolation to combat contagion, have put us suddenly face-to-face with our fragility as finite creatures." The pandemic "reminds us to discover or rediscover that which is essential in our lives," the Vatican said.

Essentially, the document takes stock of how Catholics worldwide have responded to the pope's encyclical. It is thick with examples of concrete projects and grass-roots initiatives taken in recent years by local churches, charities or parishes to prevent environmental damage or save natural resources.

Tiny Vatican City State's own measures are held up by way of encouragement, including recycling water flowing through monumental fountains and having Holy See employees bring their own mugs or cups to use in the Vatican cafeteria instead of throwaway plastic drink containers.

Vatican officials pointed out on Thursday that solar panels have been installed at the Holy See's astronomical observatory in Arizona, in the United States.

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