



Diocese of Ogdensburg

Most Reverend Terry R. LaValley

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May 2020

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

We live in God's country. As we celebrate the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Pope Francis' Encyclical Letter, *Laudato Si'* (**On the Care for Our Common Home**), we are reminded that we are not mere stewards of this beautiful creation. We are an integral part of God's creation and must learn to live responsibly in the environment in which God has placed us. Careless action (or inaction) can easily destroy our common home and create a domino effect of destruction which will impact us all, especially our children and grandchildren and generations to come.

*Laudato Si'* provides us with the lens of Gospel justice through which to view our current global and local environments. The Holy Father teaches that the cries of the poor and the cries of the earth are not separate concerns but are intricately connected. He refers to St. Francis of Assisi as an example of one who "shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace" (*LS, 10*).

In these recent weeks of isolation, we have seen pictures of cities normally suffocating in smog where now the streets are clearly visible through smokeless air. These images, in dramatic fashion, show us the negative effect we can have on the places where we live and move and have our being. Our health and wellbeing are at risk. How many of the children of our world live in areas where they cannot catch their breath because they lack clean breathable air? Every day literally millions of people search for fresh water to survive, a resource we, too often, take for granted.

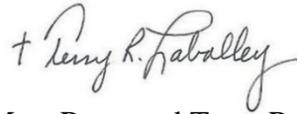
These days of isolation provide us with an opportunity to reflect on our priorities and relationships, especially the importance of family and friends. Let us work together to create a new normal. As good neighbors, we care for each other by tending carefully to our common home, the earth. We can begin by deciding to consume less and recycle more. We are keenly aware of how poorer countries are becoming the dumping grounds for our throw-away culture. Clearly, this is Gospel injustice.

Perhaps, as we reflect on life these days, we have come to realize, more and more, to appreciate what a real gift it is for us to be able to call the North Country our common home. Can we make an extra effort to support our local producers by purchasing items made locally? Local manufacturers, farmers and other businesses are suffering serious economic loss. We can extend a helping hand and caring heart to them by purchasing local products and services, continuing after the current health crisis ends.

*Laudato Si'* is a gift that begs to be unwrapped further. One way to do this is to be sure to read the informative articles on Environmental Stewardship that you will find in the *North Country Catholic*. This Papal document is an evangelization tool for the entire faith community but especially for our youth who will live with the results of what we accomplish, or fail to accomplish, today. We illustrate our love for them, by showing proper concern for the land that both feeds our bodies through the produce and labor of farmers and fishermen, and facilitates the re-creation of our souls by inviting us to walk with our God through mountains and valleys, along streams and lakes and then to simply praise our God for the beauty that He has spread before us.

This is indeed God's country! Let us take good care of it. May God be praised!

Faithfully yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Terry R. LaValley". The signature is written in black ink and includes a small cross symbol at the beginning.

Most Reverend Terry R. LaValley  
Bishop of Ogdensburg