



Ecumenical/Interfaith Committee Walking Together

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This edition of the TAU-USA is dedicated to Pope Francis' Encyclical Letter, *Laudato Si*, and relates to caring for our common home — our sister, Mother Earth. This theme presents a rather daunting challenge for the chair of the Ecumenical-Interfaith Committee. There is no obvious **direct link** between care for creation and ecumenical-interfaith dialogue. So I prayed, and, as always, God hears the cry of the poor, whether they be the materially poor or, in my case, the inspirationally poor. My answer came at Mass in the form of the offertory hymn entitled, *This Is My Song* — sometimes called *A Song of Peace*. With tears of gratitude in my eyes, I joined the congregation and sang out!

The hymn is sung to the melody of *Finlandia*, and the lyrics of the first two stanzas were written by Lloyd Stone at a time between World War I and World War II. If you have a hymnal or access to the internet, I suggest you read the actual lyrics of this hymn since I do not have permission to reprint them here. I will paraphrase the hymn's message and then offer a simple reflection on the connection between Pope Francis' *Laudato Si* and the hopes and dreams of the Ecumenical-Interfaith Committee as we, too, commit to caring for creation. You can listen to this beautiful hymn at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6OxSYe8_e4Y.

Basically, this hymn is a prayer to the one Creator God of all the nations—the Christian nations, the Jewish nations, the Islamic nations — calling us to live as one. It is a plea to the Almighty for unity among us to work for the common good. To do this we need to build bridges of respect and dialogue, and break down barriers of

mistrust and competition. If we can come to a stance of mutual respect and understanding, then we can work cooperatively toward positive global environmental goals. In Paragraph 3, Pope Francis lays the foundation for the connection between care for creation and dialogue among the various faith dimensions when he says, “...**I would like to enter into dialogue with all people about our common home.**”

The lyrics continue with a prayer for **truth, freedom and unity** for all the people of every nation and asks that **peace** may come where “... strife has raged so long. ...” Similarly, in Paragraph 10, Pope Francis draws the connection between these values and environmental concerns. He writes, “[Francis] **was a mystic and a pilgrim who lived in simplicity and in wonderful harmony with God, with others, with nature and with himself. He shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace.**”



As the hymn continues, we sing of our hopes and our dreams for our beloved country. But wait! The next stanza informs us there are other hearts in other countries beating "... with hope and dreams as true and high as mine." The lyrics soar with rejoicing and praising God for our natural wonders, while reminding us again that we are not the only ones to whom God has given natural wonders. The beauty of creation comes from God and is given to us to enjoy, and to serve and preserve. In paragraph 23, Pope Francis states, **"The climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all. At the global level, it is a complex system linked to many of the essential conditions for human life."**

As we continue singing and praising God for the beauty of our surroundings—our blue skies, our oceans, our pines—the next line tells us that "... other lands have skies as blue as mine." God showers us with beauty not because we are good, but because God is good. Because we share the earth with all manner of creatures and creation, we have a responsibility to preserve and protect it. In his Prayer for the Earth at the end of the Encyclical Letter, Pope Francis prays that God will **"Enlighten those who possess power and money that they may avoid the sin of indifference, that they may love the common good, advance the weak, and care for this world in which we live."** This is a strong call to conversion for all of us.

The hymn's culmination is a resounding plea to Almighty God that **all** hearts be united and learn to live as one. To be of one ecological mind in a world that is divided by national boundaries,

national interests, and diverse belief systems will take good listening skills, patience, sensitivity, respect, love and lots of prayer. It is a cooperative effort and we must work with others who may not have the same value system or faith dimension that we have. But the fact remains, we share the one earth and we travel around the same sun—the sun shines on all and the rain falls on all. Nature doesn't seem to be aware of our differences.



I will end with a quote attributed to Adlai Stevenson in which he says: "We travel together, passengers on a little spaceship, dependent on its vulnerable reserves of air and soil; all committed for our safety to its security and peace; preserved from annihilation only by the care, the work and the love we give our fragile craft."

May God protect our fragile craft and bring us safely into that heavenly harbor where we will hear our Father say, "Well done, good and faithful servants!" [Mt 25:23].

