**Statement on Pope Francis’ Laudate Deum**

In *Laudate Deum*, his highly anticipated apostolic exhortation, Pope Francis recently issued an emphatic call to action regarding climate change, reminding people of “the motivations born of their faith.”

“We know,” he writes, “that authentic faith not only gives strength to the human heart, but…sheds light on our relationship to others and with creation as a whole. In the light of faith,” he adds, “responsibility for God’s earth means that human beings, endowed with intelligence, must respect the laws of nature.”

This responsibility isn’t limited to climate.

In Florida, when it comes to **water—which is mentioned 722 times in the Bible, more often than faith, hope, prayer, and worship**—we aren’t respecting the laws of nature. We are failing to be the good stewards our faith requires us be. Florida ranks first in the nation for the highest total acres of polluted lake water. Eighty percent of our 1,000 artesian springs are impaired with excess nitrogen. Approximately 9,000 miles of streams and rivers are contaminated with fecal bacteria. Red tides and blue-green algae blooms pose constant threats to our health and economy. This is but a partial list of Florida’s water quality issues.

Because, as the pope keeps repeating, “everything is connected,” “care for one another and our care for the earth are intimately bound together.” When our stewardship falters, people suffer. Consequently, Pope Francis also calls for a “sure defense of fundamental human rights,” to protect people against environmental injustice and hardship, and emphasizes that “unless citizens control political power…it will not be possible to control damage to the environment.”

**Our fundamental “Right to Clean and Healthy Waters” provides for these three things: respecting the laws of nature, establishing, and defending a fundamental environmental right of the people, and controlling political power by rising above it to the constitutional level when environmentally needed.**

In the spirit of *Laudate Deum*, which is addressed to “All people of good will,” FloridaRightToCleanWater.org calls upon faith communities to act. **We urge individual congregants to sign the “Right to Clean and Healthy Waters” petition and get five other registered Florida voters to sign. We urge church leaders to call upon congregants to do so.**

We still need hundreds of thousands of signed and verified petitions by the end of the year to qualify for the 2024 ballot. **Florida’s faith communities, compelled by the convictions of their faith, can make this minor miracle happen.**