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Pope Francis meets with migrants at the John XXIII Peace Lab's Center for Migrants in Hal Far,

Pope Francis meets with migrants at the John XXIII Peace Lab's Center for Migrants in Hal Far, Malta, April 3, 2022. The backdrop was built with plastic bottles and life vests pulled from the sea. (CNS/Paul Haring)

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Oceans are a gift from God and they must be used fairly and sustainably, Pope Francis said in a written message for the Our Ocean Conference.

"All of us depend on oceans," which all of humanity has "received as a gift from the creator," the papal message said.

Because they belong to all of humanity, "we must use oceans in a just and sustainable way" so they will be "in good shape" when passed on to future generations, the message said.

The message was written by Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, on behalf of Pope Francis. It was addressed and sent to the eighth Our Ocean

Conference that was held March 2–3 in Panama. The Our Ocean conferences aim to build partnerships between government, industry, science and civil society, and to encourage commitments to better protect and revitalize the world's oceans.

Some "alarming" problems affecting oceans, the message said, include pollution, acidification, illegal fishing and overfishing. It also expressed concern over deep-sea mining. Other tragedies include the plight of immigrants who travel by sea, human trafficking that takes place at sea and the very difficult conditions or illegal work people may be subjected to.

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Parolin wrote in the message that the pope has asked people to adopt an approach of "integral ecology" as detailed in his encyclical *Laudato Si*'.

This means no longer looking at the world from a merely pragmatic, utilitarian or self-interested point of view, it said, but to begin including local communities and facts on the ground when making decisions and to recognize the connection between social injustice and environmental degradation.

The pope proposes three ways humanity could improve its relationship with the oceans, the cardinal wrote:

- Review, "with seriousness and urgency, strategies for growth that are based on waste and consumerism, unjust and unsustainable models of production, transportation, distribution and consumption."
- Unite "to protect and restore marine, coastal and river ecosystems," and promote greater awareness and people's sense of responsibility through education and cultural initiatives. This will help protect biodiversity in areas that do not come under the jurisdiction of individual countries.
- Form more effective ways to manage, regulate and coordinate activity on oceans with "systems of governance" that demand more inclusive participation and support by everyone.

This way, the message said, "there will always be hope."

Related: Pope Francis: Throwing plastic in the sea is 'criminal' and 'kills the Earth'