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Pope Francis greets members of the Italian Catholic Movement of Adult Scouts during a meet

Pope Francis greets members of the Italian Catholic Movement of Adult Scouts during a meeting at the Vatican April 13, 2023. (CNS/Vatican Media)



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Humanity must have more direct contact with nature to counter the modern lifestyles that are destroying the planet, Pope Francis said.

Respecting and loving the earth as well as seeking direct contact with nature "are values that we need so much today as we discover ourselves increasingly powerless before the consequences of irresponsible and short-sighted exploitation of the planet," he told members of the Italian Catholic Movement of Adult Scouts.

Meeting with the members, dressed in their scouting uniforms, at the Vatican April 13, the pope said people in modern society are "prisoners of lifestyles and behaviors that are as selfishly deaf to every appeal of common sense as they are tragically self-destructive; insensitive to the cry of a wounded earth, as well as to the voice of so many brothers and sisters unjustly marginalized and excluded from an equitable distribution of goods."

"In the face of this, the Scouts' sober, respectful and frugal style sets a great example for all," he said.

Francis highlighted the group's recent charitable efforts, such as donating an incubator for infants to an emergency care center in Lampedusa, Italy, a landing point for migrants coming into the country.

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The incubator, he said, " symbolizes the joy of a child coming into the world, the commitment to ensure that he or she can grow well, the expectation and hope for what he or she may become."

"We live in a time of a dramatically falling birthrate," the pope said, noting that the median age in Italy is 46 while the median age in nearby Albania is 23. The falling birthrate shows that humanity "seems to have lost its taste for creating and caring for others, and perhaps even its taste for living," he said.

Sending the incubator to the Lampedusa reception center "further underlines that love for life is always open and universal, desirous of the good of all, regardless of origin or any other condition.

The scouts also helped build a nautical carpentry workshop in Zambia which he said is aligned with the human vocation of transforming God's gifts "into instruments of good," particularly in a world "where there is so much talk, perhaps too much, about producing weapons to make war."

Citing his 2015 encyclical "*Laudato Si*', On Care for Our Common Home," the pope encouraged the scouts to "take charge" of the current climate crisis and from there, to deeply consider "the specific place that human beings occupy in this world and their relations with the reality that surrounds them."