

Perspectives

Report from a Recent Conway Graduate

Laudato Si' and Ecological Design

BY MOLLY BURHANS '15



Molly Burhans

Pope Francis's recent encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, makes addressing climate change a moral imperative for the 1.2 billion Catholics in this world. It is sobering and hopeful. Some Catholics are taking the Pope's message more seriously than previous calls to climate action; and when that is "some" of 1.2 billion people, the potential impact is global. The Catholic Church is one of the largest landholders in the world and is affiliated with the world's largest international education and health care systems. If only a small fraction of that land were ecologically managed, it could have a profound impact.

In his public address, Pope Francis acknowledges the "cry of the poor" and vulnerable in the face of human-driven climate change. It is a cry that I heard in the Sahel region of Mali while working on a Conway project (see p. 21). A cry of a people who brace for yet another devastating typhoon. A cry from victims of violence caused by climate-escalated conflicts relating to resource distribution. A cry that says, "if there is no rain, we die." These are the struggles of our age, and the potential impact of the Catholic Church—with its massive landholdings, large population, and organized structures—all uniting to address climate change inspires hope. For me, that hope means considering the lives of the most vulnerable at the forefront of discussions about planning and design.



Molly's experiences in Mali applying both ecological and social approaches to design—including engaging with community members and using GIS—continue to inform her current work with the GoodLand Project. *Left to right:* Chief Segou Tounkar, Molly Burhans '15, Chris Hendershot '15, Jonathon Ellison '94, and Modibo Fofana. PHOTO: CHRIS HENDERSHOT '15

We have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.

—Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'* paragraph 49

Shortly before the release of the pope's encyclical I found myself inspired to deepen the relationship between my faith and my education at Conway. The encyclical helped me grasp how good design becomes a form of charity through its long-term benefits to communities and ecosystems. As a Catholic, I am one of many taking the message of *Laudato Si'* seriously. After graduating in June 2015, I founded the

GoodLand Project.



Read about the GoodLand Project at www.goodlandproject.org

The project's goals include mapping the Church's international landholdings, and helping the Church and its affiliates imple-

ment Catholic social justice teachings through ecological land management that is sensitive to human ecology, economic realities, and the environment. I am working with Church leaders, biologists, business people, and design professionals from around the world who work to care for our common home with the hope that we can create a better future for all by thoughtfully managing the land we use and love.