

‘Laudato Si’

Study & Action Guide for Individuals & Small Groups

Making ‘Laudato Si’ a part of your life

“What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?” (#160)

Pope Francis asks this in his 2015 encyclical addressed to “every person living on this planet” and invites us to enter into a dialogue about our common home.

The letter takes its name from the opening of the *Canticle of the Creatures* by St. Francis of Assisi, ‘*Laudato Si*’ or *Praise be*, to remind us that the Earth, our common home, “is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us.”

“Sister earth, along with all the abandoned of our world, is crying out, pleading that we take another course.” (#53)

Using this guide

This guide is for people of faith and people of conscience who are interested in studying the words of Pope Francis and taking action. It may be used individually or in a group, one chapter at a time or as a whole.

Each chapter of ‘*Laudato Si*’ is addressed in two ways: **study** and **action**. We offer a summary and questions for reflection, as well as ways you and your community can take action in order to care for our common home. “All it takes is one good person to restore hope!” (#71)

It would be helpful to have a Bible and a copy of the encyclical, available at <http://bit.ly/Laudato-Si>

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Ways to respond

- Water conservation
- Renewable energy
- Funds for poor nations adjusting to climate change
- Just Economic Policies
- Ecological Education
- Political / Commercial Action

For more information

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With thanks to the Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach, Washington D.C

Chapter One - What is Happening to our Common Home

The environment is a common good that belongs to all of us. All of humanity share a common home. But studies indicate that “most global warming in recent decades is due to the great concentration of green-house gases ... released mainly as a result of human activity.” (#23)

Pope Francis writes that climate change is “one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day.” Five times Pope Francis names a **“throwaway culture”** as a root cause of the ecological crisis. We face pollution and waste, scarcity of water, loss of biodiversity, decline in the quality of life and breakdown of society, extreme consumerism and global inequality, and weak international responses.

A true **“ecological debt”** (#51) exists, particularly between the global north and south, connected to “the disproportionate use of natural re-sources.” Great attention must be given to “the needs of the poor, the weak and the vulnerable” (#52).

Like his predecessor, Saint John Paul II, Francis calls us to a **“global ecological conversion”**: “We need only take a frank look at the facts to see that our common home is falling into serious disrepair. Hope would have us recognise that there is always a way out, that we can always redirect our steps, that we can always do something to solve our problems.” (#61)

Questions:

- What images come to mind when I read “throwaway cul-ture”?
- How have I participated in or reacted to a throwaway culture?
- How can I contribute to a sustainable future for the Earth in my per-sonal life, in my community, and as a global citizen?

“Today, however, we have to realise 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.” (#49)

Take action

- Evaluate your water footprint. You could use www.watercalculator.org
- See ways to live gently on the Earth. Have a look at cafod.org.uk/livesimply or www.greenchristian.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/leaflet/nine-ways.pdf
- Invite your MP to read ‘*Laudato Si*’. You will find a guide to writing to your MP at www.careforourcommonhome.net and then go to Resources

Columban Response to this Lived Experience

“Columbans missionaries are called to heal, reconcile, build bridges and create mutual understanding through dialogue which is expressed through our solidarity with marginalised people and the exploited Earth. We are called, as in the words of Pope John Paul II, to an ecological conversion. Our response to the crisis of climate change must be prophetic, that is good news for the poor and the planet.” - Columban Society Statement on Climate Change, 2014.

“Climate change should be a top priority for the Catholic Church if the Church really believes that its mission is for the flourishing of the life of the world.”

- Fr. Sean McDonagh, SSC, eco-theologian, author, advisor to the Vatican for *Laudato Si*’, recipient of the Partnership for Global Justice Award in 2011.

Chapter Two - The Gospel of Creation

Science and religion can enter into an "intense dialogue fruitful for both," on the environment. Indeed, the word "creation" has a broader meaning than "nature." It is God's loving plan in which "every creature has its own value and significance," and humans are "linked by unseen bonds and together form a kind of **universal family**."

The light of our faith, the wisdom of the Biblical narratives, and the mystery of the universe invite us into a loving "**communion**" with God, with our neighbour and with the Earth itself, yet these relationships, once harmonious, have been broken by sin. We need to join our concern for the environment with a "sincere love for our fellow human beings and an unwavering commitment to resolving the problems of society." (#91)

Every ecological approach needs to take into account the fundamental rights of **poor and underprivileged people**. The natural environment is "a collective good" and "the responsibility of everyone." We break the commandment "Thou shall not kill" when "twenty percent of the world's population consumes resources at a rate that robs the poor nations and future generations of what they need to survive." (#95)

Questions

- How am I in relationship with God, my neighbour, and the Earth?
- Are my relationships healthy or broken? Read Matthew 6:26.
- What am I doing to share the gift of creation with others, especially those who are poor, and with future generations?

"Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river, and mother Earth." (#92)

Take Action

- Adopt some of Pope Francis' practical lifestyle changes: pray before and after meals, show care for other living beings, re-cycle, reduce use of heating/air-conditioning, limit food waste.
- Construct a plan to progressively replace your daily consumption of fossil fuels with renewable energy.
- Find out about the campaign for disinvestment from fossil fuels. Have a look at '*The Catholic Argument For Fossil Fuel Divestment*' and the Fossil Fuel Non Proliferation Treaty Introduction document at www.laudatosimovement.org/resources
- Find out about the Live Simply Parish Award at <http://livesimplyaward.org.uk/>

Columban Response to this Lived Experience

"With our mission experience of living with communities and the natural world that have been marginalised and exploited, Scripture, Catholic Social Teaching, and science compel us to seek ways to restore right relationships with Creation. The reality of climate change invites us to ongoing personal and communal ecological conversion which leads to both personal lifestyle and structural change. As a result of insights from creation-centered theology, we realise that ethical behaviour must no longer be confined solely to our relationship with God and other human beings. It must also extend and include our relationship with all Creation." - Columban Society Statement on Climate Change, 2014.

"Our aim is awareness in the Church and society of the connections between peace, ecology and justice through dialogue and advocacy." - St. Columbans Centre for Peace Ecology and Justice, Australia

Chapter Three - The Human Roots of the Ecological Crisis

What are the human roots of the ecological crisis? “A certain way of understanding human life and activity has gone awry, to the serious detriment of the world around us.” (#101) We need a “culture and spirituality genuinely capable of setting limits and teaching clear-minded self-restraint,” especially in regards to **technology** and the **place of human beings** in God’s plan for creation.

Technology has brought wonderful achievements to the world, but when used unwisely it has created deadly arsenals of war and contributed to climate change. “Never has humanity had such power over itself, yet nothing ensures that it will be used wisely, particularly when we consider how it is currently being used.” (#104) We need to “slow down and look at reality in a different way,” so that we can “appropriate the positive and sustainable progress which has been made” and “recover the values and the great goals swept away by our unrestrained **delusions of grandeur**.” (#114)

In a similar way, modern belief in the significance of humans over all other species devalues creation to a raw material and promotes technology over all else. “When we fail to acknowledge as part of reality the worth of a poor person, a human embryo, a person with disabilities – to offer just a few examples – it becomes difficult to hear the cry of nature itself; everything is connected.” (#117)

Questions

- What is my understanding of care for creation and care for the poor?
- Are there restraints that wealthy nations need to make to ensure that all can benefit?
- What restraints do I need to make in my own life?
- What restraints do we need to make as a global community?

“The fact is that ‘contemporary man has not been trained to use power well,’ because our immense technological development has not been accompanied by a development in human responsibility, values and conscience.” (#105)

Take Action

- Identify your connections with the poor and vulnerable people in your community. How can barriers be broken down and inequalities reduced?
- Find out about the peace education work of Pax Christi (paxchristi.org.uk).
- Have an uncomfortable look at the work of London Mining Network (londonminingnetwork.org).

Columban Response to this Lived Experience

“All of Creation is under threat as a result of human-induced climate change created largely by an over-consumption of and dependence on fossil fuels which is driven by an economic model that places profits over the common good. Of particular concern to Columbans is the centrality of extractive industries to the exacerbation of climate change as well as the impacts climate change have on access to safe water and healthy food.” - Columban Society Statement on Climate Change, 2014.

“We see what is happening to the rivers, to animal life, to bird life, and particularly to the people who are the age-old first inhabitants of the Amazon region. Their lives are being destroyed, their lands are being taken, their cultures are being trodden down. They are filled with the evil effects of disorganised mining operations.” - Fr. Peter Hughes, SSC. Vatican Radio, 3 May, 2015

Chapter Four - Integral Ecology

Ecology is the **relationship** of living organisms and the environment: “Everything is closely interrelated.” All of creation is a web of life that includes “human and social dimensions.” By “environment,” we mean the relationship existing between nature and society. We ourselves are a part of nature. The social and environmental crises are intertwined: “Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combatting poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature.” (#139) This is **integral ecology**.

Analysis of environmental problems cannot be separated from the “analysis of human, family, work-related and urban contexts, nor from how individuals relate to themselves, which leads in turn to how they relate to others and to the environment.” This suggests the need for a “**social**” and “**economic ecology**” which includes protecting the environment. Together with our natural heritage, we also should value our cultural heritage, with “special care for indigenous communities and their cultural traditions,” (#146) and provide for common areas, housing and transportation in a way that promotes “the common good.”

The global nature of the crisis requires “**solidarity** and a **preferential option for the poorest** of our brothers and sisters,” (#158) as well as solidarity with **future generations**, “since the world we have received also belongs to those who will follow us.” (#159)

Questions

- What is my understanding of “integral ecology”?
- What responsibilities do I have to creation?
- What responsibilities do I have to those who are poor and to future generations?
- How is poverty linked to environment?

“What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?” ... “We need to see that what is at stake is our own dignity. Leaving an in-habitable planet to future generations is, first and foremost, up to us. The issue is one which dramatically affects us, for it has to do with the ultimate meaning of our earthly sojourn.” (#160)

Take Action

- Learn more about poverty and Laudato Si themes at cafod.org.uk and laudatosi.org
- Identify ways you can combat poverty, restore dignity to the excluded, and protect creation in your community. See website justice-and-peace.org.uk

Columban Response to this Lived Experience

“The threatening reality of climate change - which is advancing and will bring pain, suffering, and death to millions of humans and other creatures that are facing huge levels of extinction, particularly due to habitat loss - has yet to impinge seriously on our church communities worldwide. Political and economic decision makers and Church leaders hardly appreciate the ex-tent to which the insatiable demands of our global economy are thoroughly tearing apart the web of life, with disastrous consequences for future generations.” - Columban Society Statement on Climate Change, 2014.

“The system that denies the poor a livelihood is also the system that is destroying the Earth, and therefore denies them the possibility of ever having a livelihood.” - Centre for Ecozoic Living and Learning, (CELL) Philippines, founded 1998

Chapter Five - Lines of Approach and Action

There are five major paths of dialogue to counter the ecological crisis. These are:

(1) Interdependence means “one world with a common plan.” (#164) A global economy based on fossil fuels must be replaced without delay by renewable energy. We urgently need a “true world political authority” to protect the environment.

(2) National and local policies need to promote best practices, “modify consumption,” develop “an economy of waste disposal and recycling,” promote “renewable energy,” “small producers” and preserve “local ecosystems.” (#180)

(3) Affected communities need “a special place at the table.” (#183) Decision-making needs transparency and dialogue to assess the environmental impact of ventures and projects during the planning process. (#190)

(4) Politics and economy need to join together, rather than blaming each other, to serve human life. We need to reject the notion that “problems can be solved simply by an increase in the profits of companies or individuals.”

(5) Religion and science need to help each other. Religion offers ethical and spiritual resources that science lacks when explaining reality. “The gravity of the ecological crisis demands that we all look to the common good.” (#201)

Questions

- In which of these five paths can I make a difference?
- How have I already participated in dialogue to counter the ecological crisis?
- What are ways I can contribute to this dialogue?

“Interdependence obliges us to think of one world with a common plan. Yet the same ingenuity which has brought about enormous technological progress has so far proved incapable of finding effective ways of dealing with grave environmental and social problems worldwide. A global consensus is essential for confronting the deeper problems, which cannot be resolved by unilateral actions on the part of individual countries.” (#164)

Take Action

- Identify ways you can include solidarity with poor and vulnerable people and the environment in the decisions you make with your family and your community.
- Find out about the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) trade deal. Fears are that it will undermine workers’ rights and remove environmental safeguards. www.globaljustice.org.uk
- Learn about and support environmental refugees

Columban Response To This Lived Experience

“While all people are impacted by climate change, our global sisters and brothers living in poverty and at the margins of society are the most vulnerable and least able to adapt, yet they have contributed the least to the greenhouse gas emissions causing global warming. We believe countries and industries which have contributed most to climate change have a responsibility to reduce carbon emissions through policy change which prioritises clean, non-fossil fuel technologies, and make it available to the Global South.” - Columban Society Statement on Climate Change, 2014.

“The environmental and economic challenges we face often appear insurmountable. We can choose to give up in frustration, blame others, or wait for the Church or government to start something. Or, like Jesus and the disciples, we can go off in twos and threes and proclaim the Kingdom has come by living simply, creatively, and in solidarity with those in most need.” - Fr. Bill Morton, SSC, The Renovation of the Columban Mission Center

Chapter Six – Ecological Education and Spirituality

Many things have to change, but it is “**we human beings above all who need to change.**” and to remember “our common origin,” “our mutual belonging,” and “a future to be shared with everyone.” (#202) People tend to feel free only because they are free to consume. This breeds selfishness and greed, a disregard for the common good, and increasing inequality that leads to social unrest and mutual destruction. But there is hope! **Ecological education calls us to “a new ecological sensitivity” and “ecological conversion,”** characterised by a “generous spirit.” (#209) Like St. Francis, our “encounter with Jesus Christ” becomes evident on our “relationship with the world.” “Our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue.” (#217) The Christian life calls us to “**a prophetic and contemplative life-style.**” (#222) Love, “overflowing with small gestures of mutual care,” sets before us the ideal of “**a civilisation of love.**” “We need one another,” and “we have a shared responsibility for others and for the world.” (#229) God offers light and strength “beyond the sun.” With God, we can care for our common home.

Questions

- In what ways am I free? In what ways am I bound?
- What ways can I change my lifestyle to reflect my relationship with God?
- What are steps that I can take to live out the call for ecological conversion?

“In calling to mind the figure of St. Francis of Assisi, we come to realise that a healthy relation-ship with creation is one dimension of overall personal conversion, which entails the recognition of our errors, sins, faults and failures, and leads to heartfelt repentance and desire to change.” (#218)

Take Action

Create a personal creation covenant about guidelines for Water use - Food consumption/waste - Living space - Use of technology – Travel - Personal time and prayer - Ethical investing - Consumer purchases

Educate yourself - www.operationnoah.org - www.ctbi.org.uk/creation-time-2016 - www.ecen.org

Look up the books of Columban eco-theologian Fr. Sean McDonagh

Columban Response to this Lived Experience

“We believe that our missionary vocation contains within it an ecological vocation to be in solidarity with the poor and with Creation... Columbans strive to help society and particularly the Catholic Church understand the magnitude of the climate change issue and its consequences...”

Columbans support sustainable economic models that value the dignity of all life... We believe that the natural world by its relational and regenerative nature can teach us how to live sustainably... We join with people of other faith traditions in a spirit of respectful dialogue and prophetic witness, knowing that climate change has universal impacts... As a Society we are called upon to use the resources entrusted to us for the life of the world... Our option for the poor and Creation invites us to live intentionally in relationship with communities and the natural world that are most vulnerable.”

- Columban Creation Covenant, 2014.

“It’s a really good ecological document. It’s a good social document, he’s really good on the impact on the poor of the destruction of the earth. But it really is an evangelical document. If someone asked me, ‘Look, could you give me a book on how to be a Christian in the 21st century?’ I’d say, take this book (On Care For Our Common Home by Fr. Sean McDonagh), and you can have the Bible as well

- Sean McDonagh, SSC (2016, March 9 NCR Article)

Columban Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation

We are the national JPIC office for the British region of the Missionary Society of St. Columban. The office serves as the line of communication between Columban missionaries in 15 countries around the world and the Catholic Church in Britain and partners.

Our four social justice priorities are:

- Environmental Justice
- Migration
- Economic Justice
- Peace & Conflict Transformation

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Prayer for our earth

Concluding prayer of 'Laudato Si' to be shared "with all who believe in a God who is the all-powerful Creator."

All powerful God, you are present in the whole universe
and in the smallest of your creatures.
You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.
Pour out upon us the power of your love,
that we may protect life and beauty.
Fill us with peace, that we may live
as brothers and sisters, harming no one.
O God of the poor,
help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this Earth,
so precious in your eyes.
Bring healing to our lives,
that we may protect the world and not prey on it,
that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction.
Touch the hearts
of those who look only for gain
at the expense of the poor and the Earth.
Teach us to discover the worth of each thing,
to be filled with awe and contemplation,
to recognise that we are profoundly united
with every creature
as we journey towards your infinite light.
We thank you for being with us each day.
Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle
for justice, love and peace.

A Christian prayer in union with creation

Concluding prayer of Laudato Si' for Christians to "take up the commitment to creation set before us by the Gospel of Jesus."

Father, we praise you with all your creatures.
They came forth from your all-powerful hand;
they are yours, filled with your presence and your tender love.
Praise be to you!

Son of God, Jesus,
through you all things were made.
You were formed in the womb of Mary our Mother,
you became part of this Earth,
and you gazed upon this world with human eyes.
Today you are alive in every creature in your risen glory.
Praise be to you!

Holy Spirit, by your light
you guide this world towards the Father's love
and accompany creation as it groans in travail.
You also dwell in our hearts
and you inspire us to do what is good.
Praise be to you!

Triune Lord, wondrous community of infinite love,
teach us to contemplate you
in the beauty of the universe,
for all things speak of you.

Awaken our praise and thankfulness
for every being that you have made.
Give us the grace to feel profoundly joined
to everything that is.
God of love, show us our place in this world
as channels of your love
for all the creatures of this Earth,
for not one of them is forgotten in your sight.
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.
The poor and the Earth are crying out.
O Lord, seize us with your power and light,
help us to protect all life,
to prepare for a better future,
for the coming of your Kingdom
of justice, peace, love and beauty.
Praise be to you! Amen.