



Laudato Si'

Study & Action Guide

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 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)

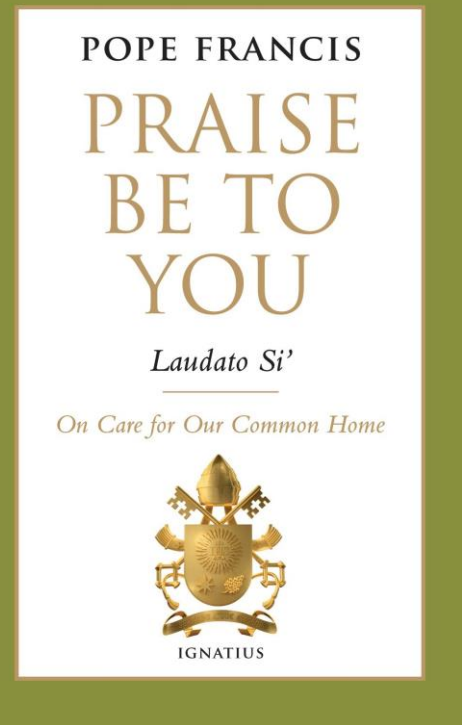
The encyclical centers around the concept of *integral ecology* to describe the relationships of the person: with God, with one's self, with other human beings, and with creation. In six chapters, Pope Francis teaches that science is the best tool by which we can listen to the cry of the earth. Our faith and Church teaching call us to right relationships and dialogue, particularly between politics and economy, and between religion and science, as they pertain to the care of our common home.

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)

You may need a Bible and copy of the encyclical, available [here](http://bit.ly/Laudato-Si) or <http://bit.ly/Laudato-Si>



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Ways to Respond

- Create a personal creation covenant
- Engage in ecological education
- Become an advocate for environmental and economic justice

For more information

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Chapter One

What is Happening to our Common Home

The environment is a common good that belongs to all of us. All of humanity shares a common home. But studies indicate that “most global warming in recent decades is due to the great concentration of greenhouse 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 resources.” Great attention must be given to “the needs of the poor, the weak and the vulnerable” (#52).

Like his predecessor, Saint John Paul II, Pope 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 recognize 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)

Reflection: What images come to mind when I read “throwaway culture”? How have I participated in a throwaway culture? What environmental challenges do I see in my own community? How do my actions and those of my community impact the greater world?

“Today, however, 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.” (#49)

Take Action

Evaluate your water footprint
www.watercalculator.org

Evaluate your carbon footprint
www3.epa.gov/carbon-footprint-calculator

Join local organizations in your community that are committed to environmental justice. For example, find your local Interfaith Power and Light chapter here:
<http://bit.ly/1XpBqIQ>

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 marginalized 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, quoted in [Tasmanian Catholic](#), Vol 3.2, 2007.

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 meaning broader than simply "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 neighbor 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 **the poor and the underprivileged**. 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)

Reflection: How does my faith call me to act on climate issues? How am I in relationship with God and the earth? What am I doing to appreciate the gift of creation?



"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)

Columban Response to this Lived Experience

"Our mission experience of living with communities and the natural world that have been marginalized 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 realize that ethical behavior 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

Take Action

Form a [Creation Care Team](#) in your local parish to explore ways your community can live its faith through caring for creation.

Construct a plan to progressively replace your daily consumption of fossil fuels with renewable energy. For example, the [Columban Mission Center in El Paso, Texas](#), installed solar panels, reduced water use and cultivated a community garden.

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)

Reflection: What are some examples of ‘unrestrained delusions of grandeur? 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 conscience.” (#105)

Take Action

Learn more about socially responsible investing with resources from the Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility:
<http://bit.ly/1XFq83it>

Adopt some of Pope Francis’ practical lifestyle changes: pray before meals, show care for other living beings, recycle, limit food waste.

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 disorganized mining operations.”

- Fr. Peter Hughes, SSC. [Vatican Radio](#), 03 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)

Reflection: What is my understanding of “integral ecology”? How are poverty and climate change linked? Where do I see those connections in my community?



“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 inhabitable 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)

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 extent 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.”

- [Center for Ecozoic Living and Learning](#), (CELL) Philippines, founded 1998.

Take Action

Learn more about poverty
www.povertyusa.org

Identify ways you can combat poverty, restore dignity to the excluded, and protect creation in your community.
www.catholiccharitiesusa.org

Ask Congress to support the Green Climate Fund to fund low-emission, climate-resilient development in poor countries.
<http://bit.ly/1UBeYWb>

Chapter Five

Lines of Approach and Action

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

(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 access 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)

Reflection: In which of these five paths can I make a difference? How can I become involved in the dialogue to counter the ecological crisis? How can politics and economy better serve communities, especially those most affected by the ecological crisis?

“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 the poor and vulnerable & the environment in the decisions you make with your community.

Urge Congress to promote trade agreements that protect the environment, and promote justice and peace.
<http://bit.ly/1RYePu0>

Sign up for [CCAO's Action Alerts](#).

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 prioritizes 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,”** characterized 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 civilization 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.

Reflection: 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 Saint Francis of Assisi, we come to realize that a healthy relationship 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)

Columban Response to this Lived Experience

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

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

Take Action

Create a [personal creation covenant](#) with guidelines for:

- Water use
- Food consumption and waste
- Living space
- Use of technology
- Travel
- Personal time
- Financial investing
- Consumer purchases

Educate yourself:

- Read [On Care for Our Common Home](#) by Fr. Sean McDonagh
- Sign up for CCAO’s [Monthly E-Newsletter](#)



Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach

We are the national advocacy office for the U.S. 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 policy makers in Washington, D.C.

Our four social justice priorities are:

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

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Prayer for our earth

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 recognize 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.

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

A Christian prayer in union with creation

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.

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