

# LIVING OUT *LAUDATO Si'*

A COMMENTARY AND PRACTICAL RESOURCE  
FOR CANADIAN CATHOLICS

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CANADIAN CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS  
EPISCOPAL COMMISSION FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE

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## PREFACE

*Laudato Si'* is a profound and disquieting encyclical that occupies an important place in the long history of Catholic social teaching. It challenges both Christians and non-Christians to be engaged on the national and world stages to protect our common home and to take action in response to the many ways that the human family is besieged in our times. Pope Francis stresses the vulnerability of those living in poverty. He emphasizes that life in all of its stages, from the embryo to old age, is sacred.

How can we genuinely teach the importance of concern for other vulnerable beings, however troublesome or inconvenient they may be, if we fail to protect a human embryo, even when its presence is uncomfortable and creates difficulties? “If personal and social sensitivity towards the acceptance of the new life is lost, then other forms of acceptance that are valuable for society also wither away”.  
(*Laudato Si'*, no. 120)

This is a powerful message for our world today—one that too often has been forgotten or ignored.

The teachings contained in *Laudato Si'* are reminders of the teachings of Indigenous elders. Oren Lyons is an Elder of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy (Iroquois or Six Nations) who has been involved in the global struggle for recognition of Indigenous rights at the United Nations. In a 1984 article, he states:

We native people understand that all living things are one large extended family and that we therefore should be working together in all four corners of the world . . . We say there exists a common interest that should determine the future of the world. The common interest should be, as stated by my people, the welfare of the seventh generation to come. Every decision should be made in reference to how that decision will affect the seventh generation in the future. . . The destructive effects of short-term thinking can already be seen in the damage inflicted on our environment . . . water is the source of life.<sup>1</sup>

These Indigenous teachings parallel the encyclical of Pope Francis. Indigenous people are taught that all life comes from the Creator, and that there is only one right in this world: the right to life. The rest of our life is a path of responsibility.

<sup>1</sup> Oren Lyons, “Spirituality, Equality and Natural Law,” in *Pathways to Self-determination*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984.

Pope Francis praises the attitude and way of life of Saint Francis of Assisi (see *Laudato Si'*, nos. 10–12). In his *Canticle of the Sun*, Saint Francis uses descriptive family concepts such as Brother Sun, Sister Moon, Brothers Wind and Air, Sister Water, Brother Fire, Sister Mother Earth and Sister Death. Similarly, Indigenous people speak of Mother Earth, Grandmother Moon, Father Sky and Grandfather Sun.

It is appropriate that this Canadian resource on *Laudato Si'* raises the issue of the 94 Calls to Action released by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and their importance for Canadians today. It also deals with the question of clean drinking water, which many Indigenous communities, like Shoal Lake First Nation in Manitoba, still cannot access.

Catholic Social Teaching has an important role to play in calling Catholics to understand better who we are. That teaching is well represented in this resource. The resource also raises many of the environmental difficulties facing Canadians today and challenges us to discuss them frankly. This will not be an easy task. However, we need to believe that seven generations ago, our leaders and communities thought of us. We, too, must think that far ahead. Our future generations deserve a better world than what we have today. I strongly encourage people to use this resource as a tool towards making a radical transformation, at the service of a better future. This is 2017 and we are not alone in this world. We have to fulfill our path of responsibility.

**The Honourable Graydon Nicholas, CM ONB**

Former Lieutenant Governor of New Brunswick

Chair in Native Studies, St. Thomas University, New Brunswick

Tobique First Nation

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## INTRODUCTION

Written into creation and the created order is the challenge to live respectfully together on this planet, and to care for our common home; God has given us this challenge. Scripture tells us that when God created the natural world, he saw that it was good (Genesis 1.25). It has long been a fundamental teaching of Christianity that the physical universe has an important role to play in God's plan, and our faith in spiritual things does not mean a rejection or devaluation of material realities. Christ came to raise up humanity, and all of creation with it, to the Father. As human beings created in God's image, we have a unique responsibility to safeguard the created world and to treat it with respect. This fact lies at the centre of our obligation to creation and to each other. Unique among the creatures of our planet, we are created to be, and to love, like God. We manifest this love towards our fellow human beings and towards every creature God has made.

Pope Francis, in his encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, has presented us with a significant contribution to Catholic Social Teaching. It addresses ecological and environmental concerns in a robust way, but within the context of a larger concern with the needs of the whole human family. It presents a vision of integral human development, where human dignity is upheld, the world's poorest are attended to, and environmental, moral, social and political challenges are addressed in an integrated way.

*Laudato Si'* sounds an alarm that we have lost our way in addressing this basic human and Christian calling. Our world is falling into serious disrepair, and our way of living is threatening future life on the planet. The economic inequalities within and between our nations have led to tremendous suffering. The challenge before us is urgent, and Pope Francis asks in the strongest terms that we honestly and directly name our current crises, and take significant steps towards a new and universal solidarity, grounded in the conviction that humanity is one people living in a common homeland. We have a shared responsibility for others and for our world, and this includes a responsibility towards future generations, and towards those of our own day who are deprived of basic human needs.

As Canadian Bishops, we want to offer a resource to help Catholics, whether individually or in groups, to engage more deeply with the challenge of *Laudato Si'* in their Canadian context. This resource is organized into six chapters, each based on one of the six chapters of *Laudato Si'*. However, this resource does not need to be followed in sequence; the chapters can be read and studied individually or in any order. Each chapter concludes with a series of reflection questions and resources for action, organized under the headings *See, Learn, Pray, Act*. In most cases, more questions and discussion items are provided than would normally be used in a group discussion, so readers and/or group leaders should not feel obligated to use them all.

It is our hope that this resource may allow both individuals and groups to take up Pope Francis' invitation to engage in an open and honest conversation about our current crises concerning the environment, our economies and our societies. As people blessed with the privilege of living in

Canada, we have a special responsibility to have conversations about how we can live in a way that is sustainable and life-giving for all, and to put those plans into action. May using this simple resource be a small part of your journey to a deeper faith and a life of greater solidarity with those who share our common home.

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## CHAPTER 1: WHAT IS HAPPENING TO OUR COMMON HOME?

*We need only take a frank look at the facts to see that our common home is falling into serious disrepair (LS, no. 61).*

*Laudato Si'* exposes the suffering of the Earth – our common home – by speaking about pollution and climate change, the state of our water supplies and the loss of biodiversity. In the first chapter, Pope Francis explains that ecological degradation cannot be addressed without simultaneously working for social justice and human equality on a global scale. There is a connection between morality and ecology: when our human relationships suffer, our environment suffers; where the environment is wounded, human life is diminished, especially for the poor and marginalized. The encyclical challenges us to “become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it” (LS, no. 19).

The problems of waste and pollution are intimately linked to what *Laudato Si'* calls “a throwaway culture.” Today, our world is marked by a system that readily discards people and food. It is not troubled by the increasing amounts of atmospheric pollutants that expose the poorest persons to serious health hazards. Pope Francis affirms that we have a responsibility to ensure a stable climate because it is a good intended for all. Right now a “solid scientific consensus” (LS, no. 23) indicates that human behaviour is leading to accelerated global climate change.

Canada also faces other environmental catastrophes. Examples include the recent flooding in Quebec and Ontario (Spring 2017), massive forest fires in Western Canada (Spring 2016; Summer 2015), the deep freeze in the southern parts of Québec and Ontario that same year, the floods in Toronto and Calgary (2013), the record-breaking drought in Eastern Canada (2012), the high tides that hit the Gaspé Peninsula (2010), and Hurricane Juan that battered Halifax (2003). Canadians are victims of extreme weather events but are relatively better equipped than most nations to deal with their effects. We have sophisticated early warning systems and emergency procedures that allow us to quickly respond when a region of our country is struck by an extreme weather event.

While access to technology such as early warning systems is welcome, Pope Francis asks us to rethink our ideas of progress. *Laudato Si'* asserts that lasting ecological solutions cannot come about without considering fundamental social and ethical questions (LS, no. 60). Too often we have assumed that technology will solve all of our problems and have focused on symptoms rather than root causes, which ultimately lie in human sinfulness. The encyclical invites us to question our current models of production and consumption, while ensuring that all people have access to clean and renewable energy (LS, no. 26).

Pope Francis' call to protect our common home “includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development” (LS, no. 13). Acting as a barrier to the integral human development of other peoples, our lifestyles here in Canada directly impact the

people of the Global South. *Laudato Si'* teaches that wealthy Northern countries, like ours, owe an ecological debt to the South because we continue to use a disproportionate amount of the world's resources. We are in large part responsible for toxins and pollutants that are negatively affecting life in the South (LS, no. 51). Pope Francis also denounces the privatization of common goods which are essential for life, including green spaces and fresh water.

**Integral Human Development** refers to a development of human persons, cultures and societies that goes beyond the merely economic to encompass every aspect of human life: social, economic, political, cultural, personal and spiritual.

We ought to be concerned by the suffering that results from the environmental impact of certain Canadian industries in the Global South. For example, Bishops of Latin America, the Philippines, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo have denounced the actions of some Canadian extractive companies for their impact on people and the local environment.

We often see the terrible destruction caused by extreme weather events. It is, however, harder to see the lasting suffering that results from climate change. For instance, it is important to remember our brothers and sisters from the Philippines who, in 2013, were struck by Typhoon Haiyan. The media focused on the 6,000 people who were killed immediately, but not on the lingering effects experienced by the millions more who were displaced. Stories of ongoing suffering disappear from the headlines. This makes it easier for us to close our eyes, for example, to the millions of people who regularly face famine in the Horn of Africa and in the large region of the Sahel. The solidarity and generosity of Canadian people is a welcome response to this suffering, but the encyclical invites us to go further. We are called to examine our habits and lifestyles to reduce our impact on the environment and use less of the earth's precious resources.

Despite the state of our common home, *Laudato Si'* summons us to hope. This is not a superficial optimism in our technological prowess, but rather the virtue of hope in God who gives us the human capacity to become aware of and work towards healing our wounded relationships with each other and with "our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us" (LS, no. 1). The encyclical reminds us that human beings are constituted by relationships with nature, with each other and with God.

We often see ourselves as separate from creation and imagine that issues of poverty and injustice are unrelated to the problems of the environment. Pope Francis reminds us that "human beings, too, are creatures of the world" (LS, no. 43). As a result, "the human environment and the natural environment deteriorate together; we cannot adequately combat environmental degradation unless we attend to causes related to human and social degradation" (LS, no. 48). In other words, we need to "*hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor*" (LS, no. 49, emphasis in original). In this sense, the encyclical's reference to "our common home" provides a rich image, because a home or a refuge is not only a physical reality but also a social and spiritual place. Our homes are not made of bricks or wood but, first and foremost, of the social relationships that exist between us and all beings with whom we share space and our lives.



## CHAPTER 1: REFLECTION QUESTIONS AND RESOURCES FOR ACTION

1. Pope Francis highlights the fact that fresh drinking water is “indispensable for human life and for supporting terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems.” (LS, no. 28) But more parts of the world are experiencing water poverty and a lack of access to safe water today.

**SEE:** Notice the state of the water around your community. Is it safe?

**LEARN:** Where is your local drinking water sourced?

**PRAY:** Pray for those who do not have access to clean drinking water.

**ACT:** Avoid bottled water. Find ways to recycle water in your home: e.g, use “grey water” (waste water from sinks, showers, washing machines, etc.) for gardening. Work to ensure all communities in Canada have access to safe drinking water.

2. Pope Francis invites us to face the costs that come with the loss of biodiversity. He reminds us that “[b]ecause all creatures are connected, each must be cherished with love and respect, for all of us as living creatures are dependent on one another.” (LS, no. 42)

**SEE:** Take time to see the plants and animals around you. Appreciate their beauty.

**LEARN:** Learn about the conditions necessary for healthy and diverse ecosystems. Start by reading *Laudato Si'* 32–42.

**PRAY:** Meditate on St. Francis’ *Canticle of the Creatures* (LS, no. 87).

**ACT:** Pick up garbage while taking a walk. Recycle what you can. Find a local group that works for environmental conservation.

3. Pope Francis indicates that, since human beings are also creatures of the world, “we cannot fail to consider the effects on people’s lives of environmental deterioration, current models of development and the throwaway culture.” (LS, no. 43)

**SEE:** Where are there signs of pollution and overconsumption in your community?

**LEARN:** Find out where your water comes from and where your waste goes.

**PRAY:** Pray for those in other parts of the world who are affected by our overconsumption and wasteful lifestyles in Canada.

**ACT:** Encourage groups at your parish to use real dishes at parish functions. Volunteer to do the dishes! Get your faith community to organize a neighbourhood cleanup.

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## CHAPTER 2: THE GOSPEL OF CREATION

As Christians, grounded in the Good News, the current ecological crisis should not cause us to despair. *Laudato Si'* highlights God's relationship with all creation and traces the scriptural basis for our belief in God's sustaining presence in nature. Drawing on both scripture and tradition, Pope Francis expresses confidence that religious people can make fruitful contributions to the dialogue about how to take care of our common home.

Pope Francis states that we have at times misinterpreted Genesis 1.28 and the dominion human beings are given over other creatures. He asserts that this cannot legitimately be used to support a human mastery over nature that allows for the "unbridled exploitation" (LS, no. 67) of creation; humanity's uniqueness does not sanction "a tyrannical anthropocentrism unconcerned for other creatures" (LS, no. 68).

When the biblical texts are read in context, the proper interpretation "implies a relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature. Each community can take from the bounty of the earth whatever it needs for subsistence, but it also has the duty to protect the earth and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations" (LS, no. 67). This involves respecting the laws of the earth and the "delicate equilibria" (LS, no. 68) among creatures.

The encyclical's treatment of scripture leads to a number of particular insights:

### (1) *Everything is linked*

Interdependence is the basis of the ecological functioning of the created world. "God wills the interdependence of creatures ... [They] exist only in dependence on each other, to complete each other, in the service of each other" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 340, quoted in LS, no. 86). In Canada alone, 265 animal species are endangered at the moment. For example, woodland caribou are threatened across the North, the beluga whale may cease to swim in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and the polar bear may no longer grace the Arctic. Already, the passenger pigeon, once remarkably plentiful in North America, has been exploited and hunted to extinction. This is an ecological loss, certainly, but also a spiritual one. Pope Francis calls on us to lament the "extinction of a species as a painful disfigurement" (LS, no. 89). The encyclical also stresses the interconnectedness between the dignity of human life and care for the environment. The interconnectedness of things calls for an integrated response to the many serious challenges facing the human family.

### (2) *Respect for all living beings*

We learn from St. Francis of Assisi that we need to relate to all creatures as our brothers and sisters. The Pope writes, "The ultimate purpose of other creatures is not to be found in us" (LS, no. 83). They are not created solely for us. We cohabit the same territories and are called to take care of all forms of life.

The biblical accounts affirm that “each creature has its own purpose. None is superfluous. The entire material universe speaks of God’s love... Soil, water, mountains: everything is, as it were, a caress of God” (LS, no. 84). Quoting St. Thomas Aquinas, Pope Francis reminds us that the entire universe, in its wholeness, manifests the inexhaustible richness of God. Each creature has importance and meaning within the entirety of God’s plan (LS, no. 86).

### (3) *Deep universal communion*

Pope Francis is convinced that “all of us are linked by unseen bonds and together form a kind of universal family, a sublime communion which fills us with a sacred, affectionate and humble respect” (LS, no. 89). However, Pope Francis is convinced that we do not have a real communion with the rest of nature “if our hearts lack tenderness, compassion and concern for our fellow human beings” (LS, no. 91). Deep communion means that we join our concern and love for the earth to our concern and love for human beings. Nothing and no one is excluded.

### (4) *Universal destination of goods*

Canadian society can be very individualistic. We can act as if we have no responsibilities to the land and other people. In contrast, Pope Francis affirms that “the earth is essentially a shared inheritance, whose fruits are meant to benefit everyone” (LS, no. 93). From this perspective, private property is not an absolute right. The principle of the universal destination of goods, found in Catholic Social Teaching, reminds us that the gifts of the earth are to serve the needs of all and not just the few. Pope Francis recalls the words of Pope Saint John Paul II: “God gave the earth to the whole human race for the sustenance of all its members, *without excluding or favouring anyone*” (LS, no. 93, emphasis in original). We have a solemn duty to ensure that the earth’s goods are equitably shared by all.

### (5) *Overconsumption*

Pope Francis offers a warning to those of us who use more than our share of the earth’s gifts: “We fail to see that some are mired in desperate and degrading poverty, with no way out, while others have not the faintest idea of what to do with their possessions, vainly showing off their supposed superiority and leaving behind them so much waste that, if it were the case everywhere, would destroy the planet” (LS, no. 90). In short, this overconsumption endangers our common home.

### (6) *Wonder*

Canada’s diverse landscape—its tundra, forests, oceans, ice, mountains, rivers, lakes, plains and sky—evokes wonder. The Pope borrows a phrase from the 2003 pastoral letter of the Canadian Bishops: “From panoramic vistas to the tiniest living form, nature is a constant source of wonder and awe. It is also a continuing revelation of the divine” (LS, no. 85). By taking time to experience and contemplate the created world’s wonders on a daily basis, we are moved to take care of our common home.

## CHAPTER 2: REFLECTION QUESTIONS AND RESOURCES FOR ACTION

1. Pope Francis appeals to the scriptures in calling for a renewal that “entails recovering and respecting the rhythms inscribed in nature by the hand of the Creator.” (LS, no. 71)

**SEE:** Notice the barriers that keep you from finding Sabbath rest.

**LEARN:** Learn about the Hebrew tradition of Sabbath and the Christian observance of the Lord’s Day (Sunday). Some good resources include *The Sabbath* by the Jewish writer Abraham Heschel and the Apostolic Letter *Dies Domini* by Pope Saint John Paul II.

**PRAY:** Renew your commitment to the Lord’s Day by dedicating time for prayer, reflection and introspection, and for resting with friends and family.

**ACT:** Connect with our common home: look at the stars, search out wildlife, contemplate the beauty of a body of water, watch a sunset, pause to examine the intricate qualities of plants or trees.

2. Pope Francis reminds us that the ancient stories of the Christian tradition testify to the conviction that everything is connected, that each particular created thing as well as the universe as a whole manifests God, and that all created beings live in a deep universal communion.

**SEE:** Go for walks and spend time in the natural world, fostering an attentiveness to the created beings with whom we share our local home. What is their purpose? What do they contribute to your local community? This wonder will lead you to give praise to the Creator.

**LEARN:** Read the work of contemporary Canadian nature writers such as Trevor Herriot or read the report from the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC), 2016: *Canadian Wildlife Species at Risk*. [www.cosepac.gc.ca](http://www.cosepac.gc.ca)

**PRAY:** Pray Psalm 148.

**ACT:** Support the work of the Canadian Wildlife Federation. [www.cwf-fcf.org](http://www.cwf-fcf.org).

3. Pope Francis points out that “every ecological approach needs to incorporate a social perspective which takes into account the fundamental rights of the poor and the underprivileged.” (LS, no. 93)

**SEE:** See how environmental degradation hurts those living in poverty the most.

**LEARN:** Discover ways to ensure that all people, and especially the most vulnerable, in your community have access to land, education, social services and the opportunity to participate in all aspects of community living.

**PRAY:** Pray A Christian Prayer in Union with Creation (found at the end of *Laudato Si'*).

**ACT:** Cultivate a healthy simplicity in your life.

Involve your Christian community in the Green Churches Network.

[www.greenchurches.ca](http://www.greenchurches.ca)

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## CHAPTER 3: THE HUMAN ROOTS OF THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

It is within the reach of most Canadians to enjoy the stunning beauty of mountains, forests, prairie grasslands, wetlands, lakes or rivers, and the sheltering sky. However, we have too often reduced the natural world to a set of objects to be used in the service of profit-making.

How could we forget that all life, the whole created world, is interconnected and reveals God's presence and authorship? Pope Francis suggests that the roots of the ecological crisis are found in this forgetfulness of the origin and relationship of all things. As human beings, we have been blessed by God with the ability to reflect on the natural world and perceive his fingerprints within it.

We have witnessed in this country how technology has served humanity. It has opened possibilities that our ancestors could never have imagined. Modern technological innovation has allowed access to goods and services in transportation, communication, health care, industry and the digital revolution. Pope Francis acknowledges the contributions that scientists and engineers have made, but reminds us that technology in itself cannot fully meet the contemporary social and ecological challenges that we face.

One challenge particularly experienced by Canada concerns the extractive industry, which has been transformed by developments in technology. Mining allows for vast accumulation of wealth by some in our country, though it also carries ecological and social costs. Extractive technologies, such as offshore oil drilling and open pit mining, have been lauded for their ability to transform “have-not” provinces to “have” provinces. However, these “booms” often bring with them environmental costs, a widening gap between rich and poor, a consumerist mentality, and an increase in crime and violence due to the demographic changes often created by mining settlements. Pope Francis challenges us to see that focusing on the growth of the economy for financial gain without due consideration for the environment and the poor creates complex problems (LS, nos. 109, 110).

In addition to having a resource-based economy, Canada has a long history in the development of modern biotechnology—from the discovery of insulin in 1922 to recent contributions to the development of an Ebola vaccine. Biotechnology is upheld as an area of economic strength and a source of quality employment.

Pope Francis reminds us that technology must not advance independently of ethical considerations (LS, no. 136). The dizzying achievements of human technology tempt us to feel we are the absolute masters of the world, and thereby to devalue all other forms of life, even human life at its earliest stages. At the same time, the other extreme is present in our society: the tendency to see no special value in human beings and therefore to pretend that there can be a renewal of the environment without a renewal of humanity (LS, nos. 117, 118).

When Canadians forget the common good in their interactions with each other and the natural world, problems ensue. For example, we have witnessed amendments made to environmental legislation such as the *Fisheries Act* that permit the conversion of healthy lakes into tailings ponds. A similar amendment to the *Agricultural Growth Act* gave corporations exclusive rights over the patenting of seeds. This Act has served to prevent small farmers from saving their seeds for future planting. These amendments harm the common good by putting water, fish, original seeds, biodiversity and the viability of the small Canadian farmer at risk.

Yet positive and more hopeful initiatives are springing up across the country. Canadian religious groups and organizations, Indigenous peoples, environmentalists, scientists, academics and corporations are actively promoting alternate ways to develop an inclusive and integrated approach to caring for our common home. One example of this was the International Conference on Degrowth for Ecological Sustainability and Social Equity that took place in Montreal in 2012. This was organized by five Canadian universities and attended by representatives from many of the groups mentioned above, as well as from outside the country. “Degrowth,” a bottom-up, grassroots model for change, challenges economic growth by taking both social well-being and the natural world into consideration. It is premised on the idea that overconsumption and consumerism are at the root of our economic and environmental problems, and that reducing consumption and learning to be happy with fewer material goods is the solution. In this sense, “degrowth” finds strong resonance with Catholic Social Teaching and can be seen as a useful corrective to the “throwaway culture” Pope Francis speaks of so often.

Another example of a cooperative and integrated way of thinking about development has occurred on Fogo Island, Newfoundland and Labrador. After the collapse of the local fishery, this small community developed an alternative tourism economy that celebrates their culture and unique geography. In other small communities along the coast of Newfoundland, schoolchildren are learning to use the traditional handline method of fishing, with some of the catch being served in school lunch programs. Across the country, children are growing food in classrooms and in small plots on school grounds, and holding classes in green spaces next to schools. Other programs connect local farms with schools, providing fresh salad for school lunches.

These local initiatives suggest that Canadians are hearing the call issued by *Laudato Si'* to rediscover who we are called to be and to remember once again that we share one fragile and interrelated planetary community.



## CHAPTER 3: REFLECTION QUESTIONS AND RESOURCES FOR ACTION

1. Pope Francis states clearly that “[m]odernity has been marked by an excessive anthropocentrism which...continues to stand in the way of shared understanding and of any effort to strengthen social bonds.” (LS, no. 116)

**SEE:** Which laws or regulations are not adequately protecting our environment?

**LEARN:** Learn about the creatures that are part of your local ecosystem. Consider that each one has its own intrinsic value.

**PRAY:** Ponder the complexity of God’s creation and both the smallness and greatness of our place in it.

**ACT:** Read the materials from Development and Peace – Caritas Canada’s *Create a Climate of Change* campaign. [www.devp.org/en/education/fall2015/materials](http://www.devp.org/en/education/fall2015/materials)  
Decide on one or two changes you can make in your life this week.

2. Persistent advertising drives consumerism by offering powerful images of prestige and importance designed to convince us that happiness and contentment will be found in the purchasing of particular items.

**SEE:** Make a list of the advertising that you are exposed to in the course of a day. What are the primary messages being sold to us?

**LEARN:** Learn about the Slow Movement, which is based on the idea that a faster-paced life is not always better and that the best speed for many things may be slower than you expect. Consider which traditional faith beliefs can help us to curtail or resist the temptation to seek our fulfillment in the acquisition of more.

**PRAY:** Choose a day and take a block of time to attend daily Mass, pray the Rosary or spend time in unhurried, silent prayer.

**ACT:** Identify something in your life that you don’t need. Eliminate it.

3. The extractive industry is sometimes referred to as supporting a “terminal” economy: one that is near death and unsustainable. But it is also a very powerful engine for economic growth.

**SEE:** Inform yourself about one of the Canadian extractive industries and its practices here in Canada and in the Global South.

**LEARN:** Explore opportunities for you or your community to invest in renewable energy initiatives.

**PRAY:** Ask God to guide leaders in both government and industry to steer our economy in a more sustainable direction.

**ACT:** Walk, cycle or take public transit to an event you would normally drive to. Communicate with your politicians about the need for an ombudsperson based in Canada that people from the Global South could contact to address their concerns with transnational activities of Canadian-based mining companies.

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## CHAPTER 4: INTEGRAL ECOLOGY

At the heart of *Laudato Si'* is the notion of “integral ecology”: a new paradigm for justice “which respects our unique place as human beings in this world and our relationship to our surroundings” (LS, no. 15). As the Canadian Bishops’ Social Affairs Commission stated: “To enter into ever-deeper relationship with God—this ‘Lover of Life’—entails striving to develop right relations with nature and with other human beings” (*You Love All that Exists*, 2, emphasis added).

The encyclical confronts us with the question “What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?” (LS, no. 160). From Pope Francis’ perspective, this question is not simply about the natural world alone. It requires us to look at a number of dimensions of life: our social institutions, including the family; our cultures, especially those of Indigenous peoples; our living spaces and places; and future generations. We must therefore keep in mind not only future generations, but also the poor of today who need our help now (LS, no. 162).

Why? Because “[i]t cannot be emphasized enough how everything is interconnected” (LS, no. 138). “Since everything is closely interrelated . . . today’s problems call for a vision capable of taking into account every aspect of the global crisis” (LS, no. 137). “Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature” (LS, no. 139). An “integral ecology” is Pope Francis’ name for such a broad and comprehensive vision because it integrates what other Popes have called “human ecology” with environmental ecology; it looks at the whole web of human relationships: with themselves, with others, with creation and with God.

This integrated approach depends in part on ongoing research that helps us to understand how creatures relate to each other in diverse ecosystems. Such systems “have an intrinsic value independent of their usefulness,” a goodness in and of themselves (LS, no. 140). *Laudato Si'* calls us to learn how ecosystems function and how much we depend on them to clean our water and air. As we become more conscious of this interdependence, we will give proper consideration “to each ecosystem’s regenerative ability” (LS, no. 140).

In addition, human institutions need to contribute to this vision of integral ecology. Pope Francis highlights the intertwined relationship between environmental concerns and human economies, societies and cultures: “If everything is related, then the health of a society’s institutions has consequences for the environment and the quality of human life” (LS, no. 142). It is critical, then, that we develop strong social institutions, locally and internationally, that will ensure respect for the law, solidarity and civic friendship.

An integral ecology further demands that we attend to the ways in which our cultural heritage is threatened. In the same way that we are facing the loss of species diversity, the consumerist paradigm “has a levelling effect on cultures, diminishing the immense variety which is the heritage

of all humanity” (LS, no. 144). “The disappearance of a culture can be just as serious as, or even more serious than, the disappearance of a species of plant or animal” (LS, no. 145). As Pope Francis puts it, “Ecology, then, also involves protecting the cultural treasures of humanity in the broadest sense. More specifically, it calls for greater attention to local cultures when studying environmental problems” (LS, no. 143).

Throughout the encyclical, Pope Francis shines a light on the significance of Indigenous peoples and the value of their cultures, worldview and practices.

It is essential to show special care for indigenous communities and their cultural traditions. They are not merely one minority among others, but should be the principal dialogue partners, especially when large projects affecting their land are proposed. For them, land is not a commodity but rather a gift from God and from their ancestors who rest there, a sacred space with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identity and values (LS, no. 146).

In practice, this means that resource development projects in Canada’s north, such as dams, mines, or pipelines, need to secure the free, prior and informed consent of those Indigenous Peoples whose land will be affected.

The call to give special attention to Indigenous communities also applies to Canadian society as a whole. The calls to action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission—whether talking about children, education, health or justice—all point to the need to develop processes of reconciliation that understand and respect the language, culture and values of First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities. We must endeavour to understand the rich diversity of Indigenous communities. This remains a crucial task for Canadians.

When we face deeper issues of meaning and value, Pope Francis is convinced that we will find ourselves asking: “What is the purpose of our life in this world? Why are we here? What is the goal of our work and all our efforts? What need does the earth have of us?” (LS, no. 160). Only an honest struggle with these questions will produce significant social and ecological results. What is at stake in this serious endeavour is proper relationships with each other, nature and God, our Creator.

Deeply acknowledging the value of the natural world and living in intimate relationship with it will have an impact on how we live our individual and social lives. This need not be a revolution. The way we order and structure our society can be transformed by “simple daily gestures which can help to create a culture in which life is shared and all beings are respected” (LS, no. 230).

An integral ecology is also “inseparable from the notion of the common good, a central and unifying principle of social ethics” (LS, no. 156). This principle is concerned with the well-being of

society, calls us to work for social peace, and summons us to solidarity and a preferential option for those living in poverty (LS, no. 157). It extends, without question, to future generations. It requires us to act decisively, here and now.

## CHAPTER 4: REFLECTION QUESTIONS AND RESOURCES FOR ACTION

1. Pope Francis reminds us that we need to show special care for Indigenous communities and their cultural traditions because we can learn much from these communities about living with the land and regarding it as a sacred gift.

**SEE:** Watch the CBC series *8th Fire: Aboriginal Peoples, Canada and the Way Forward*.  
[www.cbc.ca/8thfire/](http://www.cbc.ca/8thfire/)

Use the 8th Fire Guide for Educators in your community. [media.curio.ca/filer\\_public/e5/c9/e5c95239-396c-4772-ae5-cf84389c7e00/8thfireguide.pdf](http://media.curio.ca/filer_public/e5/c9/e5c95239-396c-4772-ae5-cf84389c7e00/8thfireguide.pdf)

**LEARN:** Discover Canadians for a New Partnership and consider signing the Declaration in support of building new partnerships between Indigenous Peoples and others in Canada. [www.cfnp.ca](http://www.cfnp.ca)

**PRAY:** Attend Mass on December 12, the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, and pray for the Indigenous Peoples of Canada.  
Ask for the intercession of St. Kateri Tekakwitha (prayers can be found at [kateritekakwitha.net/prayer](http://kateritekakwitha.net/prayer))

**ACT:** Discuss how your community might respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action.  
[www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls\\_to\\_Action\\_English2.pdf](http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf)

2. Pope Francis insists that the transformation towards an integral ecology requires us to learn that everything is interconnected, that the natural world is our sister and brother.

**SEE:** Get to know your own ecoregion, its watershed, its various species of plants and animals. What are the particular environmental concerns in your ecoregion? What are the positive steps being taken?

**LEARN:** Start with a visit to the Canadian Biodiversity website:  
[canadianbiodiversity.mcgill.ca/english/index.htm](http://canadianbiodiversity.mcgill.ca/english/index.htm)

Visit the Living Oceans website: [www.livingoceans.org/about](http://www.livingoceans.org/about)  
Learn how you can get involved in making sure that we are raising ocean-friendly seafood in Canada.

**PRAY:** Prayerfully recite the Canticle found in Daniel 3.29-65 (3.52-87 in some Bibles).

**ACT:** Go for a nature walk near your home. See how many species of plants and animals you can identify.

3. Pope Francis invites us to ensure that an integral ecology governs all aspects of our daily lives.

**SEE:** Read about the Ignatius Old Growth Forest project that establishes a sanctuary just north of the city of Guelph, Ontario. [www.oldgrowthforest.ca](http://www.oldgrowthforest.ca)

**LEARN:** Find out what plans there are in your city or region for the building of healthy, vibrant communities. For example, read the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority 10-year Strategic Plan, “Building the Living City”.  
[www.trca.on.ca/dotAsset/164987.pdf](http://www.trca.on.ca/dotAsset/164987.pdf)

Is your community part of the TreeCanada programs? [treecanada.ca/en/about-us](http://treecanada.ca/en/about-us)

**PRAY:** Meditate on the Parable of the Mustard Seed (Matthew 13.31-32).

**ACT:** Investigate initiatives in your community to protect common areas, and create spaces that help us to feel that we belong, that we are rooted, that we are at home with the earth.

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## CHAPTER 5: LINES OF APPROACH AND ACTION

*Laudato Si'* shows us that we have to work harder to care for people and the planet. The encyclical suggests that dialogue is the preferred method to “help us escape the spiral of self-destruction which currently engulfs us” (LS, no. 163). Healthy dialogue fosters concrete action. This principle applies to Canadians, our communities and our impact in the world.

However, Pope Francis’ constant reminder that we live in an “interdependent world” pushes us to search for solutions that reflect a global perspective, to “think of *one world with a common plan*” (LS, no. 164, emphasis in original). This is precisely why dialogue with diverse partners is so important.

For instance, Pope Francis affirms that water is a basic human right but, in Canada, this right is not enjoyed by everyone. It is deplorable that a large number of Indigenous communities do not have direct access to clean drinking water. This has a profound impact on people’s daily lives. For example, the community of Shoal Lake, Manitoba, has had a boil-water advisory in place for over 17 years. Ironically, Shoal Lake is the intake for the aqueduct that provides drinking water for the City of Winnipeg.

Many Canadians gain their livelihoods from extractive industries. However, these industries also pose challenges in terms of water use and quality both at home and abroad. Processes for extracting oil, minerals and natural gas use large volumes of water, often mixed with potentially carcinogenic chemicals. Both Bishop Luc Bouchard and international justice advocates, including Climate Action Network Canada, have expressed concern over water, land and wildlife contamination near the oil sands in Alberta. Although some companies have shown promising initiative in their efforts to operate more sustainably and with greater care for the environment, considerable work remains to be done by the industry as a whole.

Some Canadian mining operations in the Global South have also been associated with socially and ecologically harmful results. These realities have motivated both the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace to call for an ombudsperson, who could be contacted by foreign nationals, with power to ensure Canadian mining companies behave ethically abroad.

To counter such negative outcomes, *Laudato Si'* turns to the political realm. Its prescription for “healthy politics” (LS, no. 181) includes paths for action and dialogue on local, national and international levels (LS, no. 163). Pope Francis praises several local actions, including reducing waste, recycling, protecting threatened species, diversifying agriculture, improving public transport and encouraging the construction and retrofit of green buildings. While much still needs to be done in these areas, several Canadian communities have embraced such actions. For instance, cities in many regions of the country have expanded their rapid transportation systems.

The encyclical calls for a renewed approach to politics, so that it will be in dialogue about the common good and the long-term health of the earth. It advocates addressing climate change in a manner that simultaneously and effectively works towards eliminating poverty (LS, no. 175). It specifically advocates for “truly meaningful and effective global agreements” (LS, no. 166) that ensure just outcomes that support the well-being of all life. Here, Pope Francis cites the positive example of the Montreal Protocol, which helped to restore the thinning ozone layer (LS, no. 168).

Pope Francis further calls on economically developed countries like Canada to fulfill their responsibilities to the global community by supporting such agreements, as well as by providing funding and green technology to developing countries. *Laudato Si'* criticizes the lack of political will to enact the commitments made at international summits. In calling for an effective and just agreement, Pope Francis particularly had in mind the COP21 meeting in Paris. We must recall that, despite jubilation that an agreement was reached in Paris, its content does not fully satisfy the criteria found in the encyclical's vision of integral ecology set out six months before COP21. For example, as Canada moves forward from the Paris climate change conference, it should heed Pope Francis' warning that the buying and selling of “carbon credits” does not help to reduce worldwide polluting emissions (LS, no. 171).

*Laudato Si'* speaks of the need for transformation on all levels: local, national and international; in terms of policy and decision-making; in politics, economics and science. It is crucial to recognize that this call is not related to partisan politics, with its “left” or “right.” Every Canadian can do something by taking up Pope Francis' call for creative leadership and action to care for our common home. This responsibility grows from a requirement “that we all look to the common good, embarking on a path of dialogue which demands patience, self-discipline and generosity” (LS, no. 201).



## CHAPTER 5: REFLECTION QUESTIONS AND RESOURCES FOR ACTION

1. Pope Francis proclaims: “Today, in view of the common good, there is urgent need for politics and economics to enter into a frank dialogue in the service of life, especially human life.” (LS, no. 189)

**SEE:** Look at ways that politicians and businesses in your area are cooperating to promote the good of human persons and of our environment.

**LEARN:** Sometimes, important decisions are made based on narrow interests. In public discussions about oil and gas pipelines, which factors and dialogue partners should be involved?

**PRAY:** Pray for your local politicians and business leaders.

**ACT:** Vote with your dollars by purchasing products and services that are socially and ecologically sustainable.

Encourage the Canadian government to provide adequate aid to people already negatively affected by climate change in these and other vulnerable areas.

2. Faith communities in Canada have a role to play in advocating for the type of transformation and dialogue discussed in this chapter. As Pope Francis asserts: “The mindset which leaves no room for sincere concern for the environment is the same mindset which lacks concern for the inclusion of the most vulnerable members of society.” (LS, no. 196)

**SEE:** Find out what religious groups in your community are doing to contribute to the development of an integral ecology.

**LEARN:** Explore municipal, provincial, territorial and national dialogues taking place to develop policies. How can your community participate in these dialogues?

**PRAY:** Examine your conscience: what impact have your actions or inactions had on the natural environment or the most vulnerable in our society?

**ACT:** Determine what dialogues and actions are needed in your community to foster social justice and ecological health on local, national and international levels. Consider, for example, the urgent need to respond to challenges like water contamination, soil fatigue, shrinking forest cover, air pollution or species at risk.

3. Pope Francis says we need to reconsider the way we think about ‘progress’: “Put simply . . . a technological and economic development which does not leave in its wake a better world and an integrally higher quality of life cannot be considered progress.” (194)

**SEE:** Is life in Canada better or worse than it was 30 years ago? How?

**LEARN:** Consider the implication of redefining progress in this manner for Canadians.

**PRAY:** Prayerfully recite the *Magnificat* (Mary’s prayer in Luke 1.47-55).

**ACT:** Write to the Prime Minister and visit your local Member of Parliament to express your support for Pope Francis’ call that international leaders craft truly effective, binding and enforceable agreements that promote social justice and ecological health.

Walk, bike, run, skate, ski, paddle or take public transport whenever possible. Encourage the further development of quality, active and public transport options with all levels of government.

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## CHAPTER 6: ECOLOGICAL EDUCATION AND SPIRITUALITY

*An awareness of the gravity of today's cultural and ecological crisis must be translated into new habits (LS, no. 209).*

According to Ouranos, the Consortium on Regional Climatology and Adaptation to Climate Change, Canada is warming at twice the rate of other countries. Our tundra and icecaps are being transformed by a warming climate, and Northern peoples are facing increasing hardships due to the effects of thawing permafrost and loss of ice. Meanwhile, Canadians are among the world leaders in per capita greenhouse gas emissions. In the face of this, Pope Francis clearly states:

*Many things have to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change. We lack an awareness of our common origin, of our mutual belonging, and of a future to be shared with everyone. This basic awareness would enable the development of new convictions, attitudes and forms of life. A great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set out on the long path of renewal (LS, no. 202).*

Such renewal and change requires “ecological conversion” (LS, no. 217). This conversion moves us beyond a culture of extreme consumerism towards developing “new convictions, attitudes and forms of life” that reflect a culture of care and an integral ecology (LS, no. 202). It means a change of heart, mind and actions. It means love for *all* of creation.

We need to integrate this conversion into our whole lives. Prayer and worship remind us that creation is “God’s loving gift.” To be faithful to this gift is to “stop and admire something beautiful” (LS, no. 215). Appreciating Canada’s natural beauty, forest and prairie, mountain and tundra helps us to understand ourselves as part of God’s gift of creation. Ecological conversion means that our prayers will begin to include concern for the earth and vulnerable peoples, as well as justice for future generations.

Our deepening faith is nourished through the sacraments, which act through earthly symbols. Oil and water, fire and colours, and the hand that blesses all become part of our act of praise and connect us to Christ (LS, no. 235). Through the Eucharist, we find our Lord in this world, embracing all creation: “Thus, the Eucharist is also a source of light and motivation for our concerns for the environment, directing us to be stewards of all creation” (LS, no. 236). This is because in the Eucharist we encounter the Real Presence of Christ and learn the significance of the Incarnation: “For Christians, all the creatures of the material universe find their true meaning in the incarnate Word, for the Son of God has incorporated in his person part of the material world, planting in it a seed of definitive transformation” (LS, no. 235).

Living simply means actively caring for the environment in our homes, schools and parishes through energy conservation, the protection of water resources, a reduction in consumption patterns, lower carbon footprints, decreased waste and the proper handling of toxins. *Laudato Si'* reminds us that deep joy is found in lifestyles that include serene harmony, simplicity, time with others, contact with nature, service, and the development of our gifts (LS, no. 223).

Living contemplatively means committing to a life of prayer that is rooted in the convictions of our faith and that cares for God's creation. This means living simply, with prayers and spiritual practices that deepen our respect for creation and prepare our hearts to seek ecological and social justice. In this effort, we will develop habits of gratitude, loving awareness and a deeper awareness of our individual capacities (LS, no. 220).

Living as a Christian means doing: "Love, overflowing with small gestures of mutual care, is also civic and political, and it makes itself felt in every action that seeks to build a better world" (LS, no. 231). Christian living means working actively to change the world and to share God's love of creation with those we encounter and by advocating with governments, institutions and corporations. It means we engage in community initiatives that reflect our shared responsibility for all peoples and our common home.

With our individual and collective lifestyles, we are called to develop a new social fabric, a new shared identity based on love (LS, no. 232). Together, Canadians must "regain the conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for others and the world, and that being good and decent are worth it" (LS, no. 229). Pope Francis has invited us to ecological and societal conversion and to follow a new path. In our commitment to accept this invitation we can find deep joy and hope for the future.

## CHAPTER 6: REFLECTION QUESTIONS AND RESOURCES FOR ACTION

1. Canada has an economy heavily based on mining, oil and gas. In fact, nearly 75 per cent of the world's mining and exploration companies are listed on Canadian stock exchanges. Yet Pope Francis reminds us that "[a] change in lifestyle could bring healthy pressure to bear on those who wield political, economic and social power." (LS, no. 206)

**SEE:** Read about the challenges posed by mining projects in the developing world.

**LEARN:** Investigate the Development and Peace campaign calling on the Government of Canada to establish an independent ombudsperson for the Canadian extractive sector.  
[www.devp.org/en/pressroom/2013/comm2013-09-23](http://www.devp.org/en/pressroom/2013/comm2013-09-23)

**PRAY:** Pray for those in the Global South who have suffered because of conflicts over mineral resources.

**ACT:** Explore ways your workplace can pressure mining companies to ensure just working conditions.

2. Most Canadians are unaware that airborne chemicals such as PCBs, DDT and mercury emitted by those in southern Canada are drawn northward by wind patterns to Canada's Arctic where they enter the food chain. Consequently, for example, through bioaccumulation, the breast milk of Inuit women contains high levels of toxins that are then passed on to the children they nurse. This example highlights Pope Francis' conviction that "[e]ducation in environmental responsibility can encourage ways of acting which directly and significantly affect the world around us." (LS, no. 211)

**SEE:** Do you have any substances in your home (e.g., chemicals, medications) that would damage the environment if not disposed of properly?

**LEARN:** Learn about the impact of pollution on the Canadian Arctic.  
[www.amap.no/documents/doc/arctic-pollution-2002/69](http://www.amap.no/documents/doc/arctic-pollution-2002/69)

**PRAY:** Pray for those people and communities affected by toxins in their food, water or air.

**ACT:** Explore ways that your community can pressure chemical companies to establish clean emissions.

3. Pope Francis affirms that "[v]arious convictions of our faith...can help us to enrich the meaning of [ecological] conversion," a conversion that is both individual and communal. (LS, no. 221)

**SEE:** Take time with your family to contemplate the presence of God in all creatures.

**LEARN:** Read St. Thomas Aquinas' explanation of how traces of the Trinity are present in all creatures (*Summa Theologiae* I.45.a7).

**PRAY:** Examine prayer resources provided by various religious communities that can help us fully integrate care for our common home into our prayer and worship.

**ACT:** Cultivate attitudes of attentiveness, openness, gratitude, joy and peace towards all.

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World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, September 1, 2017

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