Laudato Si’ Reflection Resource: On Care for Our Common Home

Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth
St. Francis of Assisi
To the Convener

The convener should be familiar with the encyclical *Laudato Si’*. S/he is responsible to prepare (or ask someone to prepare) the video(s) for each meeting. Convener times the meeting, always allowing time for the closing and socializing.

In keeping with the spirit of the document, the convener assists group members to simplify their transportation to meetings; makes copies on sustainable paper; uses both sides; avoids staples; provides water pitcher and glasses (not plastic bottles).

For the first meeting, have a copy of *Laudato Si’* on the center table and the reflection resource at the place of each participant.

**Week One: Introduction**

**Convener:** Welcome to this first of five meetings on Pope Francis’ encyclical *Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home*, first published in June 2015.

Introduce yourselves and share briefly why you chose to participate.

**Convener:** Pope Francis writes: *I would like to enter into dialog with all people about our common home.* (3) We are here to do that, and to prayerfully reflect on, and respond to, this Encyclical. These sessions primarily contain quotes from the document (in italics followed by paragraph numbers), but cannot substitute for the entire text. It is hoped that you will choose to read it all. The Scripture excerpts can be used any time during the year.

Skim the document. It contains an introduction and six chapters. The first session focuses on the introduction because it grounds readers in the cosmological setting without which the rest of the document cannot be adequately understood.

If you cannot attend a meeting, please let someone in the group know so we won’t wait for you. If you would like refreshments after meetings 2 - 5, we can arrange that after this session.


**All:** Loving Creator Spirit, we ask that the spirit of Christ and of St. Francis be present in our hearts and minds as we ponder what Pope Francis has written. **Silent prayer**

**All:** Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with colored flowers and herbs. (1)
Read in turn: Encyclicals are official, public letters from the Pope that have authority in the Church second only to teaching defined as dogma.

Cardinal Peter Turkson, who wrote the initial draft of this encyclical letter with his team, described it as a “prayerful meditation,” not a theological, scientific, or policy paper.

Pope Francis includes statements from past saints and popes who have spoken of the interdependence of creation and for a global ecological conversion [St. John Paul II]. (5)

from Laudato Si’ — Introduction

We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth (cf Genesis 2:70; our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters. (2)

Authentic human development has a moral character. It presumes full respect for the human person, but it must also be concerned for the world around us and “take into account the nature of each being and its mutual connection in an ordered system.” [St. John Paul II] (5)

“… It is our humble conviction that the divine and human meet in the slightest detail in the seamless garment of God’s creation, in the last speck of dust of our planet.” [Patriarch Bartholomew] (9)

[St. Francis] shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace. (10)

If we approach nature and the environment without this openness to awe and wonder, if we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world, our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs. … The poverty and austerity of St. Francis were no mere veneer of asceticism, but something much more radical: a refusal to turn reality into an object simply to be used and controlled. (11)

Rather than a problem to be solved, the world is a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise. (12)

The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change. (13)
Reflect on quotes, then share any quote that surprised you, cheered you, annoyed you, confused you, or drew you to later contemplation and/or learning. Explain.

Read from Scripture (Taken from Eugene H. Peterson’s The Message):
**Genesis 9: 8-10:** God spoke to Noah and his sons, “I’m setting up my covenant with you including your children … along with everything alive around you — birds, farm animals, wild animals….”

**Mark 1: 12-13:** The Spirit pushed Jesus into the wild. For forty wilderness days and nights he was tempted by Satan. Wild animals were his companions….

Share: How might you connect the Scripture readings with the encyclical excerpts?

For next week: Be alert to awe and wonder as you experience life this week. Take at least one special moment to be aware that you are always in the presence of the Holy. Be prepared to share your experience next week. If possible, read the Introduction of Laudato Si’.

Prayer: Response: … may our hearts be open in love.

To treating our common home *like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us* (1) …

To remembering that *our very bodies are made up of [Earth’s] elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters* (2) …

To imitating the example of St. Francis who was *particularly concerned for God’s creation and for the poor and the outcast … a mystic and a pilgrim who lived in simplicity and in wonderful harmony with God, with others, with nature and with himself* (10) …

To feeling *intimately united with all that exists [so that] sobriety and care will well up spontaneously* (11) …

To honoring *the intimate relationship between the poor and the fragility of the planet, the conviction that everything in the world is connected* (16) …

To those who reject or even mock *Laudato Si’* …

Closing: Sing (and dance?) “Canticle of the Sun” (The Heavens Are Telling) uploaded by Michelle Sherliza, OP [3:31 min.] or sing without video

Socialize
Week Two: What Is Happening to Our Common Home

Share one experience or insight each had during the week of awe, wonder, and awareness of the divine in creation.

View “Laudato Si’,” YouTube: www.youtube.com/watch?v=1tYdOlqvpqg [6:18] or sing “How Great Thou Art,” Stuart K. Kline, or similar hymn

All: Loving Creator Spirit, we ask that the spirit of Christ and of St. Francis be present in our hearts and minds as we ponder what Pope Francis has written. Silent prayer
All: Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with colored flowers and herbs. (1)

Read in turn: Pope Francis writes as the science-educated Catholic pontiff he is, who has spent his life studying and contemplating Scripture and who is alive to the unity of all. He is especially concerned about the poorest members of our common home with whom we are all united. To interpret Laudato Si’ as affirming one political and/or economic system is not to have read it or not to understand its depth and scope.

Thanks to the Hubble telescope, scientists estimate that our evolving observable universe contains about 170 - 200 billion galaxies, each with billions of stars.

Sometimes denial of climate change and other problems highlighted in this encyclical results from limited geographical or social experience, and/or a sense of being separate from the rest of creation, and/or inadequate sources of information.

from Laudato Si’ Chapter One
Climate change is a global problem with grave implications: environmental, social, economic, political and for the distribution of goods. It represents one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day. (25)

There has been a tragic rise in the number of migrants seeking to flee from the growing poverty caused by environmental degradation. ... Sadly, there is widespread indifference to such suffering, which is even now taking place throughout our world. (25)

Our world has a grave social debt toward the poor who lack access to drinking water ... there is little awareness of the seriousness of such behavior within a context of great inequality. (30)

A sober look at our world shows that the degree of human intervention, often in the service of business interests and consumerism, is actually making our earth less rich
and beautiful, ever more limited and grey, even as technological advances and consumer goods continue to abound limitlessly. (34)

Because all creatures are united, each must be cherished with love and respect, for all of us as living creatures are dependent on one another. (42)

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. (48)

It needs to be said that, generally speaking, there is little in the way of clear awareness of problems which especially affect the excluded. Yet they are the majority of the planet’s population, billions of people. (49)

People may well have a growing ecological sensitivity but it has not succeeded in changing their harmful habits of consumption. (55)

Economic powers continue to justify the current global system where priority tends to be given to speculation and the pursuit of financial gain, which fail to take the context into account, let alone the effects on human dignity and the natural environment … environmental deterioration and human and ethical degradation are closely linked. (56)

This is the way human beings contrive to feed their self-destructive vices: trying not to see them, trying not to acknowledge them, delaying the important decisions and pretending that nothing will happen. (59)

Reflect on quotes, then share any quote that surprised you, cheered you, annoyed you, confused you, or drew you to later contemplation and/or learning. Explain.

Read from Scripture (Taken from Eugene H. Peterson’s The Message):
Gen. 22: 17-18: Oh, how I’ll bless you! I’ll make sure that your children flourish — like stars in the sky, like sand on the beaches! … All nations on Earth will find themselves blessed through your descendants because you obeyed me.
Ps. 116: I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living.

Share: How might you connect the Scripture readings with the Encyclical excerpts?

For next week: Prepare to share one fact concerning global pollution, climate change, water conditions, biodiversity, or global inequality that already does or might in the future negatively affect your descendants.
If possible, read Chapter One of Laudato Si’.

Prayer: Response: … may we, indeed.

That we may judge decisions, systems, and laws by how they affect the common good [and] integral and sustainable human development (18), …
That we may develop policies so that, in the next few years, the emission of carbon dioxide and other highly polluting gases can be drastically reduced, for example, substituting for fossil fuels and developing sources of renewable energy (26), …

That we may support lifestyles and policies that protect fresh drinking water, an issue of primary importance, since it is indispensable for human life and for supporting terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems (28), …

That we may stop plundering earth’s resources because of short-sighted approaches to the economy, commerce and production (32), …

That we may always consider the effects on people’s lives of environmental deterioration, current models of development and the throwaway culture (43), …

Closing
Sing (and dance?) “Canticle of the Sun” (The Heavens Are Telling) uploaded by Michelle Sherliza, OP [3:31 min.] or sing without video

Socialize

Week Three: The Gospel of Creation and the Human Roots of the Ecological Crisis

Share one ecological danger that already, or might in the future, negatively affect your descendants.

View YouTube: Bishop Robert Barron on Laudato Si’ [3:39]

All: Loving Creator Spirit, we ask that the spirit of Christ and of St. Francis be present in our hearts and minds as we ponder what Pope Francis has written. Silent prayer

All: Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with colored flowers and herbs. (1)

Read in turn: The “dust” that we are results from hydrogen and helium that date to about 13.8 billion years ago. “Star-stuff” became planet Earth about 4.5 billion years
ago, after many stars exploded providing the atoms needed to create fish, birds, monkeys, thought, music, and laughter.

Anthropocentrism is the “ism” that places humans as separate from, and above, the rest of creation, regarding humans as the central and most important element in creation.

**from Laudato Si’ — Chapters Two and Three**

… we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God’s image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures. (67)

These ancient [Bible] stories, full of symbolism, bear witness to a conviction which we today share, that everything is interconnected, and that genuine care for our own lives and our relationships with nature is inseparable from fraternity, justice, and faithfulness to others. (70)

We can say that “alongside revelation properly so-called, contained in sacred Scripture, there is a divine manifestation in the blaze of the sun and in the fall of the night.” [Catechesis] (85)

The Christian tradition has never recognized the right to private property as absolute or inviolable, and has stressed the social purpose of all forms of private property. (93)

Never has humanity had such power over itself, yet nothing ensures that it will be used wisely, particularly when we consider … nuclear bombs dropped in the middle of the twentieth century, or the array of technology which Nazism, Communism and other totalitarian regimes have employed to kill millions of people, to say nothing of the increasingly deadly arsenal of weapons available for modern warfare. (104)

To seek only a technical remedy to each environmental problem … is to separate what is in reality interconnected and to mask the true and deepest problems of the global system. (111)

An authentic humanity, calling for a new synthesis, seems to dwell in the midst of our technological culture, almost unnoticed, like a mist seeping gently beneath a closed door. (112)

We should not think that political efforts or the force of law will be sufficient to prevent actions which affect the environment because, when the culture itself is corrupt and objective truth and universally valid principles are no longer upheld, then laws can only be seen as arbitrary impositions or obstacles to be avoided. (123)

The expansion of [Genetically Modified] crops has the effect of destroying the complex network of ecosystems, diminishing the diversity of production and affecting regional economies, now and in the future. In various countries, we see an expansion of
oligopolies … This dependency would be aggravated were the production of infertile seeds to be considered …. (134)

Reflect on quotes, then share any quote that surprised you, cheered you, annoyed you, confused you, or drew you to later contemplation and/or learning. Explain.

Read from Scripture (Taken from Eugene H. Peterson’s The Message):
Exodus 20: 3-7: No other gods, only me. No carved gods of any size, shape, or form of anything whatever, whether of things that fly or walk or swim. Don’t bow down to them and don’t serve them....
John 2: 17: “Stop turning my Father’s house into a shopping mall!”

Share: How might you connect the Scripture readings with Laudato Si’ excerpts?

For next week: Prepare to share how you envision the “authentic humanity” Pope Francis mentions in par. 112.
If possible, read Chapters Two and Three of Laudato Si’.

Prayer:
Response: … Christ, help us.

That Christians will realize that their responsibility within creation, and their duty toward nature and the Creator, are an essential part of their faith (64), …

That human beings, endowed with intelligence, [will] respect the laws of nature and the delicate equilibria existing between the creatures of this world (68), …

That we can see God reflected in all that exists [so that] our hearts are moved to praise the Lord for all his [sic] creatures and to worship him [sic] in union with them (87), …

That we will recognize that Everything is connected, and Concern for the environment thus needs to be joined to a sincere love for our fellow human beings and an unwavering commitment to resolving the problems of society (91), …

That we may slow down and look at reality in a different way, to appropriate the positive and sustainable progress which has been made, but also to recover the values and the great goals swept away by our unrestrained delusions of grandeur (114), …

That all those directly or indirectly affected … can make known their problems and concerns, and have access to adequate and reliable information in order to make decisions for the common good, present and future (135), …

Closing
Lauds: [ecospiritualityresources: Lauds: 4:25] celebrates our privilege to consciously praise Creation “till our sphere resounds in space with the fire of Love . . . .”

Socialize
Week Four: Integral Ecology and Lines of Approach and Action

**Share:** How do you envision the “authentic humanity” Pope Francis mentions in par. 112? What values and consciousness will it bring to life?

**View** “Meditation on Laudato Si’, csjthewell.org/meditation-on-pope-francis-environmental…” [4:43] or sing “How Great Thou Art” or similar hymn

**All:** Loving Creator Spirit, we ask that the spirit of Christ and of St. Francis be present in our hearts and minds as we ponder what Pope Francis has written. **Silent prayer**

**All:** Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with colored flowers and herbs. (1)

**Read in turn:** Ecosystems are comprised of interacting and interdependent organisms that developed mutually enhancing relationships over centuries or more. Thich Nhat Hanh [Tik N’yat Hawn] calls it “interbeing.”

Critics who complain that Pope Francis should stick to matters of faith and doctrine display the compartmentalized thinking that Pope Francis is asking us to transcend. Everything is interconnected and cannot be “stuck to” without everything else.

Not to act is as political as acting.

**from Laudato Si’ — Chapters Four and Five**

- *It cannot be emphasized enough how everything is interconnected. Time and space are not independent of one another, and not even atoms or subatomic particles can be considered in isolation.* (138)

- *The imposition of a dominant lifestyle linked to a single form of production can be just as harmful as the altering of ecosystems.* (145)

- *[T]he principle of the common good immediately becomes … a summons to solidarity and a preferential option for the poorest of our brothers and sisters.* (158)

- *Unless we struggle with [the world’s general direction, its meaning, its values], I do not believe that our concern for ecology will produce significant results.* (160)

- *A growing conviction that our planet is a homeland … motivates us to ensure that*
solutions are proposed from a global perspective, and not simply to defend the interests of a few countries. (164)

As the bishops of Bolivia have stated, “the countries which have benefited from a high degree of industrialization, at the cost of enormous emissions of greenhouse gases, have a greater responsibility for providing a solution to the problems they have caused. (170)

Enforceable international agreements are urgently needed …. Relations between states must be respectful of each other’s sovereignty, but must also lay down mutually agreed means of averting regional disasters which would eventually affect everyone. (173)

True statecraft is manifest when, in difficult times, we uphold high principles and think of the long-term common good. (178)

We know that water is a scarce and indispensable resource and a fundamental right ... If objective information suggests that serious and irreversible damage [to integral ecology] may result, a project should be halted or modified…. (par. 185, 186)

[O]nly when “the economic and social costs of using up shared environmental resources are recognized with transparency and fully borne by those who incur them, not by other people or future generations,” [St. Benedict XVI] can those actions be considered ethical. (195)

Reflect on quotes, then share any quote that surprised you, cheered you, annoyed you, confused you, or drew you to later contemplation and/or learning. Explain.

Read from Scripture (Taken from Eugene H. Peterson’s The Message):
Psalm 137: 4: Oh, how could we ever sing God’s song in this wasteland?
John 3: 19: This is the crisis we’re in: God-light streamed into the world, but men and women everywhere ran for the darkness. They went for darkness because they were not really interested in pleasing God.

Share: How might you connect the Scripture readings with Laudato Si’ excerpts?

For next week: Read the Suggested Actions on p. 15. Prepare to share the one you feel most called to incorporate into your life.
If possible, read Chapters Four and Five of Laudato Si’.

Prayer: Response: …may we be blessed with courage.

That we will deepen our understanding that nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live (139), …

That we will show special care for indigenous communities and their cultural traditions (146), …
That we may continue to hope that humanity at the dawn of the twenty-first century will be remembered for having generously shouldered its grave responsibilities (165), …

That we may create a politics which is far-sighted and capable of a new, integral and interdisciplinary approach to handling the different aspects of the crisis (197), …

That we leave room for aesthetic sensibility, poetry, or even reason’s ability to grasp the ultimate meaning and purpose of things [Lumen Fidei] (199), …

Closing
Sing: City of God dan schutte - YouTube (Convener decides in advance whether to see or skip the UNHCR ad at the beginning.)

Socialize

Week Five: Ecological Education and Spirituality

Share (alone or in smaller groups) what you feel called to do.

No video this week. Sing YouTube “The Cry of the Poor” by John Michael Talbot [3:27] or similar hymn

All: Loving Creator Spirit, we ask that the spirit of Christ and of St. Francis be present in our hearts and minds as we ponder what Pope Francis has written. Silent prayer
All: Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with colored flowers and herbs. (1)

Read in turn: There is no “away” to throw things to.

Some studies report that once 10 percent of a population is committed to an idea, it inevitably becomes the prevailing opinion.

from Laudato Si’ — Chapter Six

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 … [which] 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. (202)

Compulsive consumerism is one example of how the techno-economic paradigm affects individuals. (203)
Our concern cannot be limited merely to the threat of extreme weather events, but must also extend to the catastrophic consequences of social unrest. Obsession with a consumerist lifestyle, above all when few people are capable of maintaining it, can only lead to violence and mutual destruction. (204)

“As never before in history, common destiny beckons us to seek a new beginning … Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life.” [Earth Charter] (207)

Living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience. (217)

An integral ecology includes taking time to recover a serene harmony with creation, reflecting on our lifestyles and our ideals, and contemplating the Creator who lives among us and surrounds us, whose presence “must not be contrived but found, uncovered.” [Evangelii Gaudium] (225)

Along with the importance of little everyday gestures, social love moves us to devise larger strategies to halt environmental degradation and to encourage a “culture of care” which permeates all of society. (231)

Joined to the incarnate Son, present in the Eucharist, the whole cosmos gives thanks to God. Indeed the Eucharist is itself an act of cosmic love … the Eucharist is also a source of light and motivation for our concerns for the environment …. (236)

Christian spirituality incorporates the value of relaxation and festivity. …the day of rest, centered on the Eucharist, sheds its light on the whole week, and motivates us to greater concern for nature and the poor. (237)

Reflect on quotes, then share any quote that surprised you, cheered you, annoyed you, confused you, or drew you to later contemplation and/or learning. Explain.

Read from Scripture (Taken from Eugene H. Peterson’s The Message)
Jeremiah 31: 33-34: This is the brand-new covenant I will make with Israel when the time comes. I will put my law within them — write it on their hearts — and be their God.
Psalm 51: 12, 15: Bring me back from gray exile, put a fresh wind in my sails. Unbutton my lips, dear God, I’ll let loose your praise.

Share: How might you connect the Scripture readings with Laudato Si’ excerpts?

Prayer: Response: … Christ, by your holy cross, empower us!
That we will take a life-changing, or life-style changing, action to care for our common home this week, and will continue it during the months and years ahead, …

That human beings … capable of rising above themselves will make a new start, despite their mental and social conditioning (205), …

That education in environmental responsibility [will] encourage ways of acting which directly and significantly affect the world around us, such as avoiding the use of plastic and paper, reducing water consumption, separating refuse, cooking only what can reasonably be consumed, showing care for other living beings, using public transportation or car-pooling, planting trees, turning off unnecessary lights, or any number of other practices (211), …

That we will find a mystical meaning … in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person’s face and discover the face of God in the soul and also in all things (233), …

That Mary, the Mother who cared for Jesus … [will] enable us to look at this world with eyes of wisdom (241), …

That St. Joseph will inspire us to work with generosity and tenderness in protecting this world which God has entrusted to us (242), …

That we will respond with joy and enthusiasm to God, who calls us to generous commitment and … to find new ways forward (245), …

Reflect, then Share: What will remind you of Laudato Si’ and keep you motivated to implement it during the rest of Lent, Holy Week, and beyond?

Closing
Sing (and dance?) Go Make A Difference lyrics - YouTube [3:02] or similar hymn (Decide in advance whether to see or skip the UNHCR ad at the beginning.)

Socialize
Suggested Actions

Read the entire document. Make a long-term commitment to implement it, no matter what the obstacles.

Collaborate with others to further Laudato Si’. Encourage others to read it.

Deepen consciousness and gratitude that you are part of nature — human nature — and it is all sacred. “Feel” your oneness.

Read the Gospels with new appreciation of Jesus’ awareness of creation's beauty and unity.

Learn more about the extent of climate disruption and other threats to our common home, the causes, and possible cures.

Urge local, national and world leaders to work together to finance and implement pledges made to care for Earth and those suffering from its current ills.

Vote for candidates committed to reducing climate change and attending to “the cry of the poor.”

Lobby for city, state/province, national and international laws and agreements that will reduce ecological problems and create better lives for the poorest among us now and in the future.

Invest and divest in accord with the goals of Laudato Si’.

Transition to renewable energy for home, school, church, and business.

Get accurate cosmological and climate facts into school curricula.

Use plastic water bottles and straws only in emergencies. Reduce all one-use-only purchases.

Reduce consumption of factory-farmed animals, especially beef.

Purchase organic, reusable, and recycled (not just recyclable) products.

Increase use of public transportation to replace car and plane use; reduce emissions when driving.

Buy organic and local produce and fair trade, organic coffee, tea, and chocolate.

Plant trees responsibly and/or contribute to groups that do so.
Suggested Resources

*Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home* e.g., www.usccb.org or www.vatican.va.


Story of Change - The Story of Stuff Project: storyofstuff.org [6:28]

Acknowledgments and Thanks

Images

Week 1: Tom Toles
Week 2: Focus Barbados/Protect The Children
Week 3: Mary Southard, C.S.J.
Week 4: Mother Earth Protectors
Week 5: France White, S.H.C.J.

Videos

Week 1: Len Sroka
Weeks 1, 2: Michelle Sherliza, O.P
Week 2: The Vatican
Week 3: ecospiritualityresources.com
Week 4: www.csjthewell.org; DanSchutte
Week 5: John Michael Talbot; Steve Angrisano, Orchard Enterprises

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