

Our Common Home: A Laudato Si' Toolkit 1

Overview This program is created to help either groups or individuals to first understand what an encyclical is, then more specifically, become familiar with the nine themes of Pope Francis' encyclical Laudato Si'. This presentation includes prayers at opening and closing, questions to promote discussion and consideration, suggestions for action, and resources for continued education. Not all information presented in this program need be used, and can be adapted accordingly.

Materials (may not all apply)

Powerpoint
Workbook--Questions for consideration and discussion, action ideas, (included in kit)
Answer Pope Francis' Call to Action sheet
Snacks
Take home paraphernalia
Goody bag (pens, pencils, magnets, bookmarks, business cards for contact information, calendar, posters)

Room Set-Up

Preferably either chairs around tables (preferably round so as to better facilitate conversation) or chairs arranged in one large circle. Arrangement dependent on group size.

Ice breaker and Introductions

Workbook on tables for people to discuss beginning questions while waiting for presentation to start.

Discussion questions:

- What do you think an encyclical is, and do you think it is mandatory to accept it?
- What has been your understanding of Laudato Si'?
- Where have you seen harm inflicted on Sister Earth (Paragraph 2)?

Adapted from National Catholic Reporter (NCR), CatholicMom.com,
and Catholic Climate Covenant (CCC)

Once it's time to start, introductions are to be made, recite opening prayer, then conduct a brief open response to discussion questions.

Opening Prayer

Prayer of Intercession

O Lord, grant us the grace to grow deeper in our respect of and care for your Creation.

Lord, hear our prayer.

O Lord, help us to recognize the sacredness all of your creatures as signs of your wondrous love.

Lord, hear our prayer.

O Lord, help us turn from the selfish consumption of resources meant for all and to see the impacts of our choices on the poor and vulnerable.

Lord, hear our prayer.

Brief open response to initial discussion questions.

Purpose/Outline

We are here to learn about Pope Francis' encyclical, Laudato Si', meaning "Praise Be to You," it's importance, what the themes are, what Pope Francis says about them, and to respond to his call to action.



Point 1--Encyclical

What is it? An encyclical is a formal letter issued by a pope to the universal Catholic Church concerning teachings, moral, and disciplinary matters. It is sometimes also addressed to all people of goodwill, such as in the case of Laudato Si'. It is not necessarily infallible, but as it does come from the pope, it carries an authority that should not be ignored.

Adapted from CCC.

Why is it important? An encyclical helps everyone to better understand how to apply the teachings of Sacred Scripture and Catholic Tradition, especially in the light of a particular issue.

Adapted from Global Catholic Climate Movement (GCCM).

Laudato Si' Key Message: Climate change is a moral issue for Catholics and all people of goodwill. Despite contributing the least to climate change, the poor and vulnerable suffer most from the consequences of improper care of the earth, and it is high time we take responsibility for our consumer-driven culture.

Goals of Laudato Si'

A proposal to initiate an honest dialogue at every level of social economic and political life, to create obvious decision-making progress, and a reminder that nothing will work if we don't have a formed and responsible conscience, and an ecological conversion.

Adapted from VIS.

Discussion questions: The encyclical makes us ask:

- ★ What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?
- ★ What are we called to do in this world?
- ★ What can we do for the earth?

Adapted from VIS.

Point 2--Laudato Si, Overview--If time allows, it is recommended to ask questions/have 1-2 min discussions after each theme.

Each bullet is a theme, followed by quotes from the encyclical and reflection.

❖ **The intimate relationship between the poor and the fragility of the planet.**

Many of the poor live in areas particularly affected by phenomena related to warming, and their means of subsistence are largely dependent on natural reserves and ecosystemic services such as agriculture, fishing and forestry. They have no other financial activities or resources which can enable them to adapt to climate change or to face natural disasters, and their access to social services and protection is very limited. (25)

There has been a tragic rise in the number of migrants seeking to flee from the growing poverty caused by environmental degradation. They are not recognized by international conventions as refugees; they bear the loss of the lives they have left behind, without enjoying any legal protection whatsoever. Sadly, there is widespread indifference to such suffering, which is even now taking place throughout our world. (25)

Reflection: We often develop "compassion fatigue" because there's so much going on around the world, but it doesn't affect us directly. Pope Francis however, is saying that as people of faith and/or goodwill, we cannot be indifferent to this suffering. How might you avoid "compassion fatigue" and what changes can you make in your lifestyle to be in solidarity with the poor and vulnerable who are affected by climate change?



❖ **The conviction that everything in the world is connected.**

The climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all. (23)

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. (89)

Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live. We are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it. (139)

Every violation of solidarity and civic friendship harms the environment. (142)

Reflection: The pope is saying that we are all connected to everyone and all creation. Bishop Blaire (of the Diocese of Stockton) once said: "Individual decisions have social consequences." Meaning our actions affect others. What are some negative examples of this phrase? What are some positive examples?

❖ **The critique of technology's influence on society.**

Technology, which, linked to business interests, is presented as the only way of solving these problems, in fact proves incapable of seeing the mysterious network of relations between things and so sometimes solves one problem only to create others. (20)

There is a tendency to believe that every increase in power means 'an increase of "progress" itself', ... as if reality, goodness and truth automatically flow from technological and economic power as such. The fact is that 'contemporary man has not been trained to use power well', because our immense technological development has not been accompanied by a development in human responsibility, values and conscience. (105)

Nobody is suggesting a return to the Stone Age, but we do need to 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. (113-114)

Reflection:

1. In 2009, discarded TVs, computers, peripherals (including printers, scanners, fax machines) mice, keyboards, and cell phones totaled about 2.37 million short tons. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. "Wastes - Resource Conservation - Common Wastes & Materials - eCycling." Web Accessed April 11, 2015.
2. E-waste represents 2% of America's trash in landfills, but it equals 70% of overall toxic waste. Slade, Giles. "iWaste." Mother Jones, 2007. Web Accessed April 11, 2015.
3. It takes 530 lbs of fossil fuel, 48 lbs of chemicals, and 1.5 tons of water to manufacture one computer and monitor. Electronics TakeBack Coalition, A Project of the Tides Center. "Facts and Figures on E-Waste and Recycling." Web Accessed April 11, 2015.

<https://www.dosomething.org/facts/11-facts-about-e-waste>

In what ways have you seen technology cause more damage than benefit? What can you do to avoid using technology unsustainably?



❖ **The call to seek other ways of understanding the economy and progress.**

Whenever these questions are raised, some react by accusing others of irrationally attempting to stand in the way of progress and human development. But we need to grow in the conviction that a decrease in the pace of production and consumption can at times give rise to another form of progress and development. Efforts to promote a sustainable use of natural resources are not a waste of money, but rather an investment capable of providing other economic benefits in the medium term. (191)

We know how unsustainable is the behaviour of those who constantly consume and destroy, while others are not yet able to live in a way worthy of their human dignity. (193)

Put simply, it is a matter of redefining our notion of progress. 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)

Reflection: Our culture promotes consumerism at every turn. When purchasing, do you think about how the product has been developed or created? Does the process of production respect the dignity of the workers, the intrinsic value of the environment, and of plants and animals?

❖ **The value given to each creature in proper proportion.**

It is not enough, however, to think of different species merely as potential “resources” to be exploited, while overlooking the fact that they have value in themselves. Each year sees the disappearance of thousands of plant and animal species which we will never know, which our children will never see, because they have been lost for ever. The great majority become extinct for reasons related to human activity. Because of us, thousands of species will no longer give glory to God by their very existence, nor convey their message to us. We have no such right. (33)

Our insistence that each human being is an image of God should not make us overlook the fact that each creature has its own purpose. None is superfluous. The entire material universe speaks of God’s love, his boundless affection for us. Soil, water, mountains: everything is, as it were, a caress of God. (84)

Reflection: As of 2015, since 1989, there have been at least 21 extinctions; and since 2010, there has been at least one extinction per year. Why does the pope think biodiversity is important (32-42) and why should we think it’s important? How can the loss of biodiversity impact us?

❖ **The human meaning of ecology.**

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)

We are not faced with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the underprivileged, and at the same time protecting nature. (139)

Learning to accept our body, to care for it and to respect its fullest meaning, is an essential element of any genuine human ecology. Also, valuing one’s own body in its femininity or masculinity is necessary if I am going to be able to recognize myself in an encounter with someone who is different. In this way we can joyfully accept the specific gifts of another man



or woman, the work of God the Creator, and find mutual enrichment. It is not a healthy attitude which would seek "to cancel out sexual difference because it no longer knows how to confront it". (155)

Reflection: Pope Francis states that "an ethical and cultural decline ... has accompanied the deterioration of the environment" (162). How might this be so? And how might respecting and caring for our bodies benefit the environment?

❖ **The need for forthright and honest dialogue.**

I urgently appeal, then, for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet. We need a conversation that includes everyone, since the environment challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all. (14)

On many concrete questions, the Church has no reason to offer a definitive opinion; she knows that honest debate just be encouraged among experts, while respecting divergent views. (61)

Here I would state once more that the Church does not presume to settle scientific questions or to replace politics. But I am concerned to encourage an honest and open debate so that particular interests or ideologies will not prejudice the common good. (188)

Reflection: Deforestation; land-grabbing; water pollution; climate change; fossil fuels. Are these mere headlines for us, or are they vital issues raised by Catholic Social Teaching to which we must find concrete responses? Do you agree with the pope that public pressure is needed to bring about change in these important areas?

❖ **The serious responsibility of international and local policies.**

There is an urgent need to 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 is why, in the absence of pressure from the public and from civic institutions, political authorities will always be reluctant to intervene, all the more when urgent needs must be met. To take up these responsibilities and the costs they entail, politicians will inevitably clash with the mindset of short-term gain and results which dominates present-day economics and politics. But if they are courageous, they will attest to their God-given dignity and leave behind a testimony of selfless responsibility. (181)

Reflection: Why do you find it easy/difficult to enter into politics? Do you think you need to be more involved? If so, what can you do or want to do, and will you commit to doing so? If not, is what you're doing enough? Why/why not? How can you help others be more involved? (By the way, EJP would love to help you learn how to be more involved in advocacy!)

❖ **The throwaway culture and the proposal of a new lifestyle.**

The earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth. (21)



These problems are closely linked to a throwaway culture which affects the excluded just as it quickly reduces things to rubbish. (22)

But our industrial system, at the end of its cycle of production and consumption, has not developed the capacity to absorb and reuse waste and by-products. We have not yet managed to adopt a circular model of production capable of preserving resources for present and future generations, while limiting as much as possible the use of non-renewable resources, moderating their consumption, maximizing their efficient use, reusing and recycling them. (22)

When people become self-centered and self-enclosed, their greed increases. The emptier a person's heart is, the more he or she needs things to buy, own and consume. It becomes almost impossible to accept the limits imposed by reality. In this horizon, a genuine sense of the common good also disappears. (204)

Reflection: How does the "throwaway culture" reduce people, creation, and objects to rubbish? According to Francis, although we must self-improve individually, it will not be enough given the extremely complex situation we are facing. Therefore, what is the role for community networks? Governments?

Adapted from USCCB, Laudato Si, VIS, NCR, and Francis35.org

Point 3--Pope Francis' Call to Action

Briefly give examples, then go on to discussion to facilitate people's own ideas. Afterward, depending on group size, allow for either group leaders or individuals to present their ideas and to place suggestions on a board/poster/chart similar to the example below.

"Our goal is not to amass information or to satisfy curiosity, but rather 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." (19)

Our Turn:

The Call (not all need be used)	Our Response
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> The emptier a person's heart is, the more he or she needs things to buy, own and consume. It becomes almost impossible to accept the limits imposed by reality. (204) <input type="checkbox"/> A change in lifestyle could bring healthy pressure to bear on those who wield political, economic and social power. (206) <input type="checkbox"/> We are faced with an educational challenge. (209) <input type="checkbox"/> There is a nobility in the duty to care for creation through little daily actions (211) <input type="checkbox"/> By learning to see and appreciate beauty, we learn to reject self-interested pragmatism. (215) <input type="checkbox"/> Isolated individuals can lose their ability and freedom to escape the utilitarian mindset, and end up prey to an unethical consumerism bereft of social or ecological awareness. Social problems must be addressed by community networks and not simply by the sum of individual good deeds. (219) <input type="checkbox"/> It is a return to that simplicity which allows us to:... (222) 	<p>To be filled out on worksheet</p>

Brief discussion of answers to Our Turn.



Closing

Remember our goals:

- To get together to talk about the state of our environment and our relationship to it and to each other.
- To open our hearts to the crisis of both the environment and disadvantaged peoples.
- To take action together for the Common Good on all levels of society.

Adapted from VIS.

Have Hope!:

Yet all is not lost. Human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start, despite their mental and social conditioning...No system can completely suppress our openness to what is good, true and beautiful, or our God-given ability to respond to his grace at work deep in our hearts. I appeal to everyone throughout the world not to forget this dignity which is ours. No one has the right to take it from us. (205)

We must not think that these efforts are not going to change the world. They benefit society, often unbeknown to us, for they call forth a goodness which, albeit unseen, inevitably tends to spread. Furthermore, such actions can restore our sense of self-esteem; they can enable us to live more fully and to feel that life on earth is worthwhile. (212)

Offer and Provide: Chosen resources (if any), Time to Act sheet. (Some resources are provided in the workbook).

Prayer

Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace, where there is hatred, let me sow love;

Where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union; where there is doubt, faith;

Where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy.

Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood, as to understand; to be loved as to love.

For it is in the giving we receive; it is in the pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Dismissal or Fellowship:

Thank the participants for sharing their reflections and wish them safe travel home. Or, you may wish to invite participants to share in refreshments and fellowship after the session. Ensure that contact information is available, and if applicable, an invitation to future events, website, blog, etc., as well as any paraphernalia, goody-bags, etc. If possible, stay for awhile to answer any questions and/or receive comments or feedback.

Adapted from USCCB.

