

THE ARCHDIOCESE OF OTTAWA

CARE FOR GOD'S CREATION A GUIDE FOR PARISHES

AN URGENT CALL FOR ACTION



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.

*Laudato Si': On Care for our Common Home, §67
Pope Francis, May 2015*

In his encyclical [*Laudato Si': On Care for our Common Home*](#), Pope Francis voices deep concern about the state of the planet. He raises a number of environmental issues including climate change, air and water pollution, deforestation, the destruction of ecosystems, and the loss of biodiversity.

The Pope's concern for creation is not limited to the natural environment. He is also speaking about "*the intimate relationship between the poor and fragility of the planet*" (§ 16, *Laudato Si'*). He wants us to keep in mind that those who are suffering the most from the impact of environmental degradation are the poorest, most vulnerable in society. He reminds us that we have a responsibility to our children and future generations to do something about it.

Following the precautionary principle, the Holy Father says that this is not simply a matter of what some people think is happening but is based on "solid scientific consensus that indicates that we are presently witnessing a disturbing warming of the climatic system... Humanity is called to recognize the need for changes of lifestyle, production and consumption, in order to combat this warming or at least the human causes which produce or aggravate it" (§23, *Laudato Si'*).



"What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?"

*Laudato Si', §160
Pope Francis
May 2015*

Integral Ecology and Mercy

Pope Francis' call to care for creation is grounded in the interconnectedness of the planet. Through the lens of integral ecology, he urges us to understand that all aspects of life, environmental, social, cultural and economic, are interconnected. "We are a part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it" (§ 139, *Laudato Si'*).

In order to address the challenge of caring for creation, Pope Francis calls on us to change. "Many things have to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change. This change begins by addressing our consumerist lifestyle and combatting the culture of indifference. We must move away from a 'throwaway culture' of consumerism towards one that reflects a 'culture of life' in all its



"We are all responsible for the protection and care of the environment. This responsibility knows no boundaries."

*World Day of Peace
Pope Emeritus Benedict
January 1, 2010*

manifestations. When we begin to understand that we are our brothers' and sisters' keepers, we begin to live in solidarity with them. Pope Francis calls us to "see the misery of the world, the wounds of our brothers and sisters, who are denied their dignity, and let us recognize that we are compelled to heed their cry for help" (§15, *Misericordiae Vultus*). We are called to build a "'culture of care' that permeates all of society" (§ 231, *Laudato Si'*).

In light of *Laudato Si'*, the corporal and spiritual works of mercy have taken on a

sense of urgency and meaning that embody the reality of our world today. A complete list of works of mercy associated with care for creation may be found in Appendix A.

Hope for the Future

Together we can make a difference. Pope Francis is hopeful that we will respond to the urgent challenge of protecting our common home. "*The Creator does not abandon us; he never forsakes his loving plan or repents of having created us. Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home. Here I want to recognize, encourage and thank all those striving in countless ways to guarantee the protection of the home which we share. Particular appreciation is owed to those who tirelessly seek to resolve the tragic effects of environmental degradation on the lives of the world's poorest*" (§13, *Laudato Si'*).

This guide has been prepared to offer practical suggestions as to ways a parish may proceed in showing care for God's creation through education, prayer, and actions.



“An awareness of the gravity of today’s cultural and ecological crisis must be translated into new habits... to profound interior conversion.”

*Laudato Si’, §209+§217
Pope Francis
May 2015*

ECOLOGICAL EDUCATION AND SPIRITUALITY

Many Catholics welcome the opportunity to become familiar with Church teachings on care for creation. It is critical that the faithful develop an understanding of our teachings that support a conversion to environmentally friendly lifestyles. By words and by example we encourage the building of a new culture that reflects care for all of creation, especially the poor, all children, and future generations. We can make a difference! Education on Church teachings and environmentally and socially responsible actions can be enhanced in a number of ways:

1. Incorporating within homilies reference to Catholic teachings on the environment and ways we can move towards building a new culture;
2. Including regular parish bulletin entries that provide information about Catholic teachings on the environment as well as practical suggestions for addressing care for creation (an example - [Holy Cross Parish in Ottawa](#));
3. Bringing forth information about best practices in environmental stewardship to members of the environmental committee for their consideration;
4. Signing up as a member of an organization that provides a wide variety of resources that can help a parish move forward in environmental stewardship. Three examples:
[Green Churches Network](#) www.GreenChurches.ca
[Greening Sacred Spaces](#) www.faithcommongood.org
[Catholic Climate Covenant](#) www.catholicclimatecovenant.org
5. Providing workshops to raise awareness of Catholic teachings concerning the care of creation, and practical ways that demonstrate such care.
6. Fostering small group dialogue in parishes. Discussion guides on [Joy of the Gospel](#), [Living with Limits, Living Well!](#) and [On Care for our Common Home: a Dialogue Guide for Laudato Si’](#) are available to facilitate dialogue.



“The ecological conversion needed to bring about lasting change is also a community conversion.”

*Laudato Si’, §220
Pope Francis
May, 2015*

PRAYER AND LITURGY

Pope Francis calls us to an ecological conversion, in which we experience the interconnectedness of our common home. Through conversion we open our hearts and are transformed by the awe and wonder of God’s creation; we recognize the Divine in all things and strive to preserve and protect creation. We begin to develop the attitudes of gratitude and loving awareness (§220; *Laudato Si’*) and we begin to focus outward and engage with each other. The sacredness of life, present in nature and in all things call us into relationship. This conversion is rooted in prayer and liturgy.

We offer prayers for unity and celebration as we work with all Christian churches and faith groups to care for our common home.

We offer prayers of celebration, thanksgiving, and healing during the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation (September 1), Earth Day (April 22), and the Feast of St. Francis (October 4).

We offer prayers of praise and thanksgiving for the gifts of creation as we celebrate the Eucharist. We may also draw from the following for inclusion in the Prayers of the Faithful:

- ✠ We pray for all people as we learn to respect creation and care for it as a gift from God;
- ✠ We pray for our pastors, who shepherd us along the path of caring for creation;
- ✠ We pray to our Lord for the wisdom and strength needed to overcome environmental degradation;
- ✠ We pray for those most affected by the ravages of environmental degradation and climate change, forced into a way of life that is unacceptable and unworthy of their human condition;
- ✠ We pray for our elected representatives and world leaders charged with the responsibility of making laws, establishing policies, and enforcing international agreements that support stewardship of our sacred Earth;
- ✠ We pray for our children, grandchildren, and future generations, whose lives are subject to the manner in which we live our lives today;
- ✠ We pray for all of us who are called to full stewardship of God’s Creation, for genuine conversion to help us mend the ruptures and to re-establish our relationship with nature, our sisters and brothers, and the Creator of Life;
- ✠ We pray for unity and celebration as we work with all Christian churches and faith groups to care for our common home.

Further Prayers of Intercession associated with Care for Creation are available on the [Citizens for Public Justice](#) and the [Green Churches](#) websites.

Pope Francis offers two prayers for the Care of Creation at the conclusion of *Laudato Si'*. One is entitled *A Prayer for Our Earth* which is for “all who believe in a God who is the all-powerful Creator.” Another is called *A Christian Prayer in Union with Creation* in which Pope Francis states that “we as Christians ask for inspiration to take up the commitment to creation set before us by the Gospel of Jesus.” These prayers may be found at the conclusion of this document.

ACTIONS AND ADVOCACY

“Living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue. It is not an optional or secondary aspect of our Christian experience.”

Laudato Si', §217
Pope Francis

A number of actions are possible, many of which are identified in the Resources on Catholic Teaching and the Environment section. Pope Francis himself has provided specific examples in *Laudato Si'* of what we can do. As he states, “There is a nobility in the duty to care for creation through little daily actions... 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 transport or car-pooling, planting trees, turning off unnecessary lights, or any number of other practices” (§211, *Laudato Si'*).

Advocacy for the care of creation is also an important responsibility. In their document, [A Church Seeking Justice](#)¹, our Canadian Bishops highlight Pope Francis’ concern that time is running out and that “there exists a clear, definitive and unpostponable ethical imperative to act”². Echoing Pope Francis, the our bishops state, “Developed countries, like Canada, have the greatest responsibility for global environmental devastation and climate change, while the poorest and most vulnerable people in the world are the ones who are suffering most from the effects of climate change.” The bishops challenge us to ask ourselves, “As people of faith, how will we lower our greenhouse gas emissions here in Canada? How can we affect change and make a difference, as individuals, in families and communities, and in government policy?”

¹ *A Church Seeking Justice- The Challenge of Pope Francis to the Church in Canada*, CCCB, 2015

² Address to the *Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice* Foundation, May 25, 2013

There are many types of actions and forms of advocacy, both large and small, that we can take individually and collectively which can make a difference.

Taking Action

Many actions demonstrate care for creation.

Education

1. Establish a “Care for Creation” education program at the parish, with information shared through resource materials, guest speakers, workshops, and parish bulletin entries. Encourage intergenerational involvement by engaging children and youth in environmental initiatives.

Energy and Water

1. Reduce energy consumption: change from low efficiency to high efficiency lighting and heating; turn off lights, computers and printers when not in use.
2. Arrange for an Energy Audit or [Green Audit](#) to be carried out in your parish. This helps prioritize actions both environmentally and economically. Before making changes, look into incentive programs through your energy provider that may help cover costs.
3. Consider signing on to a renewable energy provider to reduce the carbon emissions footprint of your parish or investing in solar panels on the roof of the church building. Consultation is available through the [Greening Sacred Spaces Program](#).
4. Encourage carpooling and public transportation.
5. Find ways to reduce water consumption, such as the installation of low flush toilets.

Purchasing

1. Purchase paper products that come from recycled sources; cleaning products that are environmentally friendly; serve Fair Trade products that are organic and ensure fair wages for workers. Avoid products that cause damage to the environment, such as bottled water and Styrofoam cups and dinnerware.
2. Repair items that can be repaired rather than buying more.

Waste management

1. Establish a waste management protocol in the parish. Participate in an eco-friendly waste collection program as offered by the municipality or through a private contractor. Instruct all users of the building of the required waste management protocol.
2. Reduce the amount of waste going to landfill by using re-usable cups, cutlery and dinnerware at parish events. When necessary, purchase items which are recyclable.
3. Promote sharing of gently used items with a local not-for-profit charity, such as the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.

Gardening

1. Plant a sustainable organic garden. Plant flowers and trees if space is available.

Getting Involved

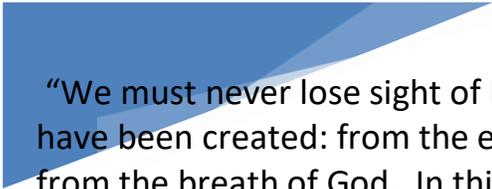
1. Support the campaigns of national organizations such as [Development and Peace](#), [KAIROS](#), and [Citizens for Public Justice](#) who work to address climate change and poverty issues, advocating for a change in Canada's policies from a faith perspective.
2. Research a local environmental or poverty issue in your community and explore how the parish can get involved.
3. Organize a letter-writing campaign or petition to your municipal councillor, or provincial or federal Member of Parliament expressing your desire to see a change in government policy.
4. Host a public meeting to raise awareness and discuss an issue that is affecting your community.
5. Participate in ecumenical and interfaith initiatives that advocate for action on climate change and other important ecological issues.

BEGINNING STEPS

In the Joy of the Gospel (§28; [Evangelii Gaudium](#)), Pope Francis refers to parishes as a “community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, a centre of constant missionary outreach.” The parish is the natural place in which the care for creation should be nurtured and shared in the community.

Here are some suggestions on how parishes can begin to care for creation.

1. A parishioner or a small core group of parishioners recognizes the need for action. This may involve movement from personal denial and complacency to one that recognizes the need for urgent action on climate change and environmental degradation.
2. The individual or group approaches the pastor for support. The pastor is recognized as the spiritual leader associated with care for God's creation. His support of environmental stewardship initiatives is critical in response to the call of our Canadian Bishops to build a new culture consistent with Church teachings on the environment.
3. The parish identifies a lead person and/or a parish Care for Creation committee responsible for overseeing creation care in the parish. Some parishes have formed an environmental committee that includes representation from diverse parish groups and committees given that every person and every ministry has a role to play in environmental stewardship.



“We must never lose sight of how we have been created: from the earth and from the breath of God. In this way we are related to the rest of creation, and we are asked to use creation according to the will of God, to whom we are related too.”

Sollicitudo Rei Socialis/
On Social Concern, §29
Saint John Paul II
June, 1987

4. There are a number of areas for consideration as a parish adopts a new culture supportive of the environment. These include education related to Catholic teachings on the environment, prayer and liturgy, and actions that support care for creation. Priorities should be identified with implementation carried out in sequence one step at a time so that all efforts are manageable.
5. The Care for Creation committee can develop a social media account such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, to engage parishioners by sharing the actions being taken in the parish as well as parishioners sharing their individual and collective actions.

Every action on the part of the Care for Creation Committee has an impact that extends beyond the immediate moment. We learn from one another the kinds of actions that reflect God’s call for us to “cultivate and care for” all of creation (Gen. 2:16). Like a pebble thrown into water, each action has a ripple effect that touches the hearts of others. With faith in action, we build a culture of life that values care for God’s creation and helps ensure justice for all.

RESOURCES ON CATHOLIC TEACHING ON CARE FOR CREATION

Pope Francis’ encyclical on care for creation provides much background information:

- [Laudato Si’ – On Care for Our Common Home \(2015\)](#)

The following are links to pastoral letters and support documents from the Canadian Council of Catholic Bishops related to care for God’s creation:

- [Living Out Laudato Si’ – A Commentary and Practical Resource for Canadian Catholics \(2017\)](#)
- [A Church Seeking Justice: The Challenge of Pope Francis to the Church in Canada \(2015\)](#)
- [2015 Federal Election Guide \(CCCB\)](#)
- [Building a New Culture: Central Themes in Recent Church Teaching on the Environment \(2013\)](#)
- [Building a New Culture: Central Themes in Recent Church Teaching on the Environment – Brief Texts for Parish Bulletins \(2013\)](#)
- [Our Relationship with the Environment: The Need for Conversion \(2008\)](#)
- [“You love all things that exists... all things are yours, God, lover of life.” \(2003\)](#)
- [Appeals on climate change prepare way for Paris World Conference \(2015\)](#)
- [On Care for our Common Home: a Dialogue Guide for Laudato Si’ \(2016\)](#)

The Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario has provided the following document as a resource (2016)

- [Fruit of the Earth Work of Human Hands – 25th Anniversary Reflection Statement \(2014\)](#)
- [Fruit of the Earth, Work of Human Hands – Facilitator’s Guide \(2014\)](#)

Additional On-Line Resources

- [Green Churches / Églises vertes](#)
- [Greening Sacred Spaces Program of Faith and the Common Good](#)
- [Jesuit Forum for Social Faith and Justice: Living with Limits – Living Well](#)
- [Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace](#)
- [KAIROS](#)
- [Global Catholic Climate Movement](#)
- [Catholic Climate Covenant](#)
- [Archdiocese of Ottawa -Environmental Stewardship](#)

Print Resources

This Great and Beautiful World: A Guide to our Commitment to the Integrity of Creation (Bernard Menard, omi; 2008)

Living Ecological Justice: A Biblical Response to the Environmental Crisis (Citizens for Public Justice, 2013)

Greening Your Church: A Practical Guide to Creation Care Ministry for Parishes, Dioceses and Religious Communities (Norman Lévesque, 2014).

A CHRISTIAN PRAYER IN UNION WITH CREATION

From *Laudato Sí, On Care for our Common Home*

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

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

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

Triune Lord, wondrous community of infinite love,
teach us to contemplate you
in the beauty of the universe,
for all things speak of you.
Awaken our praise and thankfulness
for every being that you have made.
Give us the grace to feel profoundly joined
to everything that is.

God of love, show us our place in this world
as channels of your love
for all the creatures of this earth,
for not one of them is forgotten in your sight.
Enlighten those who possess power and money
that they may avoid the sin of indifference,
that they may love the common good, advance the weak,
and care for this world in which we live.
The poor and the earth are crying out.
O Lord, seize us with your power and light,
help us to protect all life,
to prepare for a better future,
for the coming of your Kingdom
of justice, peace, love and beauty.
Praise be to you!
Amen.

A PRAYER FOR OUR EARTH

From *Laudato Si'*, On Care for our Common Home

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

APPENDIX A

ON CARE FOR CREATION AS A WORK OF MERCY

The theme of [Pope Francis' message](#) on the **World Day of Prayer for Creation** on September 1, 2016 was *Show Mercy to our Common Home*. In his message he proposed a complement to the traditional seven corporal and seven spiritual works of mercy, namely “on care for our common home”.

The words of Pope Francis in his World Day of Prayer for Creation Message include the following excerpts:

After a serious examination of conscience and moved by sincere repentance, we can confess our sins against the Creator, against creation, and against our brothers and sister... Let us learn to implore God's mercy for those sins against creation that we have not hitherto acknowledged and confessed. Let us likewise commit ourselves to taking concrete steps towards ecological conversion, which requires a clear recognition of our responsibility to ourselves, our neighbours, creation and the Creator” (Laudato Si, §10, §229)

The Christian life involves the practice of the traditional seven corporal and seven spiritual works of mercy. But if we look at the works of mercy as a whole, we see that the object of mercy is human life itself and everything it embraces.

Obviously “human life itself and everything it embraces” includes care for our common home. So let me propose a complement to the two traditional sets of seven: may the works of mercy also include *care for our common home*.

As a spiritual work of mercy, care for our common home calls for a “grateful contemplation of God's world” (*Laudato Si*, §214) which “allows us to discover in each thing a teaching which God wishes to hand on to us” (*ibid.*, §85). As a corporal work of mercy, care for our common home requires “simple daily gestures which break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness” and “makes itself felt in every action that seeks to build a better world” (*ibid.*, §230-31).

In addition, **Cardinal Peter Turkson**, President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, gave a Lenten talk, [Care of Creation as a Work of Mercy](#), at St. Thomas of Villanova Church, Villanova University on February 26, 2016. In his talk he gave concrete examples of the corporal and spiritual works of mercy associated with creation care, and added “to care for our common home” as a work of mercy:

Corporal Works of Mercy

1. to feed the hungry; especially those who suffer from poverty and drought.
2. to give drink to the thirsty; especially those who lack clean, abundant water.
3. to clothe the naked; especially those exposed to the cold of winter and the sting of indifference.
4. to give shelter to the homeless; especially victims of war, storms, and rising seas.

5. to care for the sick; especially those who have been poisoned by the wastes of our industries.
6. to ransom the captive; especially those oppressed by cruel economic and political systems, or from addictions to the pleasures of the world.
7. to protect the dignity of the human person, especially in reverently burying the dead.
8. to care for our common home (an additional work of mercy).

Care of creation could also be our eighth *corporal* work of mercy, through concrete actions large and small – from the everyday actions of good ecological citizens to pressuring national governments to implement what they have promised.

Spiritual Works of Mercy

1. to teach those who do not see how their lifestyles harm others.
2. to offer hope to those who despair for the future of loved ones or the future of the world.
3. to admonish those who sin against neighbor, the natural order, or the laws of nature.
4. to patiently bear the sufferings inflicted by gluttony and greed.
5. to willingly forgive offences committed against humanity and the goodness of creation.
6. to comfort those afflicted by corruption, by changes to our climate, and by unwholesome desires.
7. to desire always to pray for the living and the dead and future generations.
8. to care for our common home (an additional work of mercy).

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