

# Care for Creation: Seven Year Plan

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A Diocesan and Parish Response to *Laudato Si'*



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## Prayer for Our Earth

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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.

Amen.

## Content Summary

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### **I. Introduction**

### **II. Diocesan Commitment to Ecological Conversion**

### **III. Response to the Cry of the Earth**

- Greater use of clean renewable energy and reducing fossil fuels in order to achieve carbon neutrality, efforts to protect and promote biodiversity, guaranteeing access to clean water for all etc.

### **IV. Response to the Cry of the Poor**

- Defence of human and all forms of life on Earth, with special attention to vulnerable groups such as indigenous communities, migrants, seniors and children etc.

### **V. Simple Lifestyles**

- Our current lifestyles are structured in a way that promotes the destruction of our environment and the resources and habitats that sustain creation.

### **VI. Ecological Education**

- Re-think and re-design educational programs and activities in the spirit of integral ecology to create ecological awareness and action. Promote the ecological vocation of young people, youth ministers, teachers, chaplains and leaders of education.

### **VII. Ecological Economics**

- The ways in which we consume, purchase and discern how our financial capital is used, has lasting impacts on the earth and humanity. We must take responsibility for this and ensure our investments reflect our values as people of God.

### **VIII. Ecological Spirituality**

- Recover a religious vision of God's creation, encourage greater contact with the natural world in a spirit of wonder, praise, joy and gratitude. Promote creation-centred liturgical celebrations, develop ecological catechesis, prayer, retreats and formation.

### **IX. Reconciliation**

- Offer education, training and accompaniment that directly support reconciliation with Indigenous communities.
- Acknowledge and join Indigenous advocacy and stewardship. This is key to healing our relationships with Indigenous communities and the earth.

### **X. Community Engagement and Participatory Action**

- Collective action creates new bonds and strengthens the fabric of our society.

### **XI. Conclusion**

- Tie the goals, actions and commitments made together for a vision of the next seven years in your Diocese or parish community.

## I. Introduction

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“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

Proven science and data point to climate change as a great crisis for the planet, both ecological and humanitarian. Pope Francis calls the faithful and all of humanity to react to the globalization of indifference and respond as stewards of creation. We cannot wait, but must plan for how we will implement change now.

We want to bring the unique gifts and spirit present in every Diocese to our response to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.

- The first step is to identify individuals within your Diocese who are committed to Care for Creation. **Establish** a working group or committee who will be responsible for the creation and delivery of your 7-year plan.
- Secondly, members of the committee must **commit** themselves to understanding and responding to the cry of the earth and poor.
- Lastly, consider the needs of your Diocesan community and then **pursue** social and educational partnerships to address those needs.

## II. Our Commitment

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“Everything is connected. 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.” *Laudato Si’* #91.

**Here would be a good place to offer a summary of your Seven Year Plan.**

- General goals and focus.
- Information such as current emission levels, programs and benchmarks.
- Commitment to growth, change and reconciliation.

What do you hope to achieve in the next seven years?

**Examples:**

- Reduced emissions across the Diocese through “greening” and carbon offsetting.
- Establish an exit strategy from investment in fossil fuels and reinvestment in renewables.
- Establish educational partnerships that help inform on issues of ecological justice for all ages and demographics as well as provide safe engagement opportunities. For example, libraries, environmental organizations, catholic education, institutions of higher learning, etc.
- Promote the concept of human development and seeing life in all things.

For each of the following sections, it can be helpful to first state your general mission for that area followed by three tangible actions or changes that will be completed within the given time frame. It is important to remember that if we want to accomplish real change, we cannot only participate in symbolic gestures but must also offer substance in our commitments.

### III. Respond to the Cry of the Earth

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“Today, 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.” *Laudato Si’* #49

- Establish an understanding of current emissions and create some benchmarks for your community.
  - Surveys, reports, campaigns that encourage submission of greening activities and programs within the Diocese are helpful to accomplish this.
  - Encourage “green audits” or “greening” of sacred spaces
- Where can we make changes to renewable energy sources?
- Support programs that protect and educate on biodiversity, conservation and advocacy
- Set parameters to phase out all single use plastics and disposable water bottles from Diocesan events, buildings, parishes, etc.
  - Are there partners in Catholic Education with whom you could collaborate?
- Establish a webpage devoted to Integral Ecology or *Laudato Si’*. Items you can include on this webpage include links to the encyclical, information on Season of Creation, the Dicastery, your completed plan, events, resources relating to *Laudato Si’* and its programs.
- Advocate for regulations and policy that protect sacred eco-systems, waterways, forests, etc. from development and destruction. This must be considered when reviewing expenditures and initiating new projects.

## IV. Respond to the Cry of the Poor

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“Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combatting poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature.” *Laudato Si'* #139

- Highlight and support the work of frontline organizations serving communities within your Diocese. How will you support them over the next seven years? Volunteer hours, in-kind, financial?
- Avoid campaigns or projects that produce significant amounts of waste or burden small communities with used products.
- Prioritize accompaniment to vulnerable populations by partnering with frontline agencies such as Catholic Social Services, Good Shepherd Ministries and the Society of St. Vincent De Paul. These partners prioritize the dignity of the humans being served, are close to home and establish lasting relationships that lead to structural change.
- Educate on and support *sustainable* development initiatives in the Global South
- As extreme climate events impact the poor most intensely, how will you commit to a response? This could be through parish outreach ministry, support of *out of the cold* programs and ensuring access to clean drinking water for all.

## V. Fostering Simple Life Styles

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“Education in environmental responsibility can 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 transport or car-pooling, planting trees, turning off unnecessary lights, or any number of other practices.” *Laudato Si’* # 211

### **Some ideas for ways to set goals around this topic could include:**

- Offer strategies to parishes, homes and schools to reduce waste, consume less and give back.
  - Offering information on how to separate recycling, compost and waste in your region.
  - Encourage and implement community gardening initiatives that focus on composting, growing food, sustaining pollinator populations and limiting the purchase of items wrapped in plastic.
- Encourage the establishment of parish and school “green teams” to work together to initiate community, parish, family shifts toward integral ecology and ecological living.
- Encourage transportation use that cuts down on emissions such as Sunday car-pooling (when safe), public-transit and city bike programs. Consider installing bike racks on parish property and at event spaces.
- Share best case practices on how to reduce waste and consumption to the *Laudato Si’* and Diocesan webpages.



## VI. Ecological Education

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“Environmental education should facilitate making the leap towards the transcendent, which gives ecological ethics its deepest meaning. It needs educators capable of developing an ethics of ecology, and helping people, through effective pedagogy, to grow in solidarity, responsibility and compassionate care.” *Laudato Si’* #210

- Encourage community members to make time to read and learn about theology, spirituality and information relating to Integral Ecology and Integrity of Creation. This can be done through bible study, group discussions, lectures, workshops, retreats and bulletins.
- Build resources which incorporate the perspectives of other cultures, especially Indigenous teachings, on ecology, creation and spirituality.
- Invite pastoral agents to use, promote and communicate these resources as a priority for the Diocesan or Parish community.
- Share best case practices, initiatives, successes and failures. These shared experiences offer important insight.
- Invite organizations with an ecological focus, such as *Laudato Si’ Movement* and Development and Peace for example, to present.
- Establish educational partnerships with institutions and educators to collaborate on resources, campaigns and programs.
  - Outdoor education programs such as camp, community gardens and conservation authorities can be very valuable.
  - Support high-school, post-secondary and seminary curriculums that teach eco-theology, eco-spirituality and Integral Ecology.
- Provide Youth Ministers with the tools, resources and information to be able to effectively share the teachings of *Laudato Si’* and concepts such as integral ecology.

## VII. Ecological Economy

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“A consumerist vision of human beings, encouraged by the mechanisms of today’s globalized economy, has a levelling effect on cultures, diminishing the immense variety which is the heritage of all humanity. Attempts to resolve all problems through uniform regulations or technical interventions can lead to overlooking the complexities of local problems which demand the active participation of all members of the community.”

*Laudato Si’* #144

- Commit to divestment from the fossil fuel industry and reinvestment in renewable and sustainable industries.
- Review purchasing and consumption practices and modify where and how we spend to simplify lifestyles and support sustainable products and packaging.
- Support sustainable disposal services and recycling programs.
- Partner with and support small and local producers.
- Invest in the preservation of local ecosystems with the same focus as our other financial investments. These are also assets. Are there parts of Diocesan or Parish property that can be utilized as protected habitat for wild-life, vegetable gardens or pollinators?
- Support dignified work in your community? For example
  - Support organizations working with Migrant Workers.
  - Support the Living Wage campaign in whatever ways you can. You can also support local businesses that pay a living wage by making them preferred vendors.
- Set aside or raise funds to make efficiency upgrades and retrofits for older buildings

## VIII. Ecological Spirituality

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“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” *Laudato Si’* #217

Establish annual programming for the Season of Creation September 1 – October 4 that centres Creation.

- Offer spiritual and theological offerings during key moments of the year such as Earth Day – April 22<sup>nd</sup>, Season of Creation – September 1-October 4.
- Offer reflections on personal and communal relationships with Creation through the use of scripture, Catholic Social Teaching, eco-theologians, teachings about Creation, etc. We must see God in all creation and others.
- Offer retreats that focus on care for creation in its many forms.
- Include ecological concern into mass prayer intentions and examination of conscience.
- Incorporate integral ecology into homilies, reflections and educate others how to do so.
- Highlight sacred outdoor spaces to honour and venerate creation within the Diocese. If possible, establish an annual outdoor mass, perhaps during the Season of Creation.

## IX. Reconciliation

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“In calling to mind the figure of Saint Francis of Assisi, we come to realize that a healthy relationship with creation is one dimension of overall personal conversion, which entails the recognition of our errors, sins, faults and failures, and leads to heartfelt repentance and desire to change.” *Laudato Si’* #218

Reconciliation with our Indigenous communities is an on-going commitment that must grow and evolve. Reconciliation is closely tied with ecological justice and builds the foundation of care for creation. We cannot pursue one without the other.

- Are there Indigenous led organizations, producers, programs that you can support financially, in-kind, with volunteer hours or advocacy?
- Create opportunities for learning and accompaniment with resources such as The Blanket Exercise and the Jesuit Forum’s *Listening to Indigenous Voices* Dialogue Guide on Just and Right Relationships. Include an examination of consciousness which names and challenges our biases.
- Educate and train on land acknowledgments and the example of stewardship offered to us by Indigenous communities. Choose a form of land acknowledgment (visual, oral) to raise awareness and respect for Indigenous guardianship of the earth.
- Offer programming and education to youth on reconciliation with the earth and Indigenous Communities. Understand the local issues facing these communities and support their advocacy efforts.
- In what ways will you, your Diocese, your parish *directly* contribute to reconciliation with Indigenous peoples and the earth?
- Include information on Indigenous relations and reconciliation on the Diocesan/parish webpages. Include links to the Circle of Guadeloupe and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls to action for example.

## X. Community Engagement and Participatory Action

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“These actions cultivate a shared identity, with a story which can be remembered and handed on. In this way, the world, and the quality of life of the poorest, are cared for, with a sense of solidarity which is at the same time aware that we live in a common home which God has entrusted to us. These community actions, when they express self-giving love, can also become intense spiritual experiences.” *Laudato Si’* #232

- In their document, *A Church Seeking Justice: the Challenge of Pope Francis to the Church in Canada*, our Canadian 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 can we affect change and make a difference, as individuals, in families and communities, and in government policy?”
- Support the campaigns of national organizations such as *Laudato Si’ Movement Canada*, *Development and Peace-Caritas Canada*, *For the Love of Creation*, *KAIROS*, *Joint Ecological Ministry (JEM)* 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.
- Research a local environmental or poverty issue in your community and explore how parishes and lay groups can get involved.
- Organize a letter-writing campaign or petition to your municipal councilor, or provincial or federal Member of Parliament expressing the desire for change in government policy.
- Host a public meeting to raise awareness and discuss an issue that is affecting your community.
- Participate in ecumenical and interfaith initiatives that advocate for action on climate change and other important ecological issues.

## XI. Conclusion

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“We 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.”  
*Laudato Si’* #229

It is important to acknowledge that the challenges we face are immense and can overwhelm. To conclude this commitment, consider that we are not alone, that others are facing these tests and that as we renew our commitment to creation together, we begin the path forward.

- Communication is important. Consider tangible ways in which this 7 year plan will be communicated to clergy, laity and the community.
- What is next? Where will you direct those reading this plan to go upon completion? For example, visit a Diocesan webpage, contact a regional animator or partner organization.
- Accountability: How will you report the progress you make on your commitments? What will happen upon completion of the 7 years?
- Closing remarks. This should establish a clear vision and promote hope for the future. Something everyone urgently needs at the moment.
  - *“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).*

This document has been reviewed and endorsed by  
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