

For the love of Creation



Archbishop

BLASE Cupich of Chicago has called *Laudato si'* “a watershed moment for the Church, for humanity, and for the planet”. Pope Francis makes a powerful argument that concern for the environment is core to Catholic theology and activity. He presents a challenge to parishes in saying that he would like us to enter into dialogue with all people about caring for our common home.

At one level, the parish model is not well-equipped. Apart from a few parishes that have Livesimply, Justice and Peace or Cafod groups, few at parish level have had any formation in Creation-centred theology or in the mission of Creation care. Support structures at diocesan level are being reduced, with Justice and Peace staff being cut. At national level, Cafod produces resources which link the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth. At present, there is no Catholic environmental agency – at least, nothing comparable to Catholic Earthcare Australia, which has this week organised an Ecological Encyclical Formation Program for Australian Catholics. We need a structure and process for

systematic Creation care by Catholics in Britain if we are seriously to seek “ecological conversion” in our parishes.

However, some excellent initiatives in social and ecological justice formation are available. The annual Conference of the National Justice and Peace Network, which promotes environmental justice, will take place on 17-19 July. This year, “The Things that make for Peace” has inspirational Filipino priest and environmental campaigner, Fr Edu Gariguez, speaking about how the Philippines Church has brought Creation care into its mission. There are workshops specifically on *Laudato si’* and on “Conflict and Climate Change”.

In mid August, the Catholic People’s Weeks will run a study programme on “The cosmic Christ”. In part, it will pick up on the encyclical’s references to the work of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. Pax Christi is involved in peace education training which incorporates reconciliation with the “wounded” earth. In October, Liverpool Archdiocese has a study day on *Laudato si’*.

Parishes might do well to make use of the expertise of young people. Many of them study issues of climate change, desertification and water scarcity in their GCSEs and A levels. The “Celebrating Young People Awards” two weeks ago demonstrated that there are Catholic schools in parishes with expertise in running eco-programmes.

Only a few parishes may have achieved the Livesimply parish award so far; but, in nine dioceses there are one or more model parishes. See <http://livesimplyaward.org.uk> for ideas and even a competition for winning a parish energy audit. Livesimply parishes always report how life-affirming they found the initiative. After creating a Quiet Garden in the grounds of Petts Wood Parish in Southwark Archdiocese, parishioners still speak of the community spirit engendered. For modules for parishes, look to the “Free Resources” section of <http://ew.ecocongregation.org>

An immediate response to *Laudato si’*, first, is prayer. Pope Francis proposes two prayers that could be used in parishes. One includes these words: “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./... 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.”

Cafod has the prayers plus a downloadable PowerPoint reflection at <http://www.cafod>.

org.uk/Pray/Encyclical. Look out for ecumenical Creation Time (1 September to 4 October). Find sermon notes at <http://operationnoah.org/resources/sermon-notes-creation-time-climate-change-purposes-god/> plus the Liturgy section of the European Christian Environmental Network www.ecen.org

Secondly, education work based on *Laudato si'* is vital. Several parish groups are already buying in copies of the encyclical and from September will read through it, one chapter at a time, and discuss implications. Note that the National Catholic Reporter has produced a Readers' Guide and Study suggestions at <http://ncronline.org/blogs/faith-and-justice/readers-guide-laudato-si>.

Cafod is producing an Encyclical Study Guide for September containing four one-hour sessions. A study programme on Climate Change and the Church's Social Teaching, "Between the Flood and the Rainbow", is on <http://www.catholic-ew.org.uk/Catholic-News-Media-Library/Archive-Media-Assets/Files/Environment/ Between-the-Flood-and-the-Rainbow>. My "Paint the Church Green" course is available from Kevin Mayhew Publications. See www.columbans.co.uk for a list of *Laudato si'* introductory videos.

Thirdly, *Laudato si'* calls for reflection and action on how lifestyle choices impact neighbour and nature. Cafod has produced an Encyclical Lifestyle Sheet at the Livesimply award website. The parish could join fasting for action on climate change on the first of each month (<http://www.prayandfastfortheclimate.org.uk>). Westminster Justice and Peace has arranged a year-long programme which has engaged many parishes – the next one on 1 August will be held in Finsbury Park – and has also organised cycling to the Paris Climate talks in two stages (<https://westminsterjp.wordpress.com/2015/05/13/cycle-to-paris-sign-up-now-for-phase-1/>).

At Petts Wood parish the Guides, Brownies and Cubs between them organised a frugal Lenten parish lunch, a presentation at a Mass on work towards a "World Issues" badge and setting up a new recycling system.

Then, there is advocacy work. Pope Francis calls us to examine the root causes of social and environmental injustice. The commodification of nature, concept of unlimited economic growth and practices of multinational companies are questioned. But how does a parish address such complex issues?

I suggest using the internet to engage with current campaigns. Cafod, Columbans UK, Green Christian (www.greenchristian.org.uk) and Operation Noah all share campaigning information. Look into the “Joy in Enough” campaign of Green Christian and “Ecocell” which examines carbon-free discipleship.

Love for all God’s Creation is the motivating force for parishes taking on this mission.

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