

Coresponsible Attitudes for Resources and the Environment (CARE)

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Introduction

Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy,
because on it he rested from all the work he had done in creation.
- Genesis 2:3

The earth is the LORD's and all it holds, the world and those who dwell in it.
For he founded it on the seas, established it over the rivers.
- Psalm 24:1-2

The question addressed in this document by the Bishop's Committee on Integral Ecology – namely, how parishes throughout the Diocese of St. Augustine might flesh out Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si* in response to the ongoing ecological crisis of our time – is decisively answered by the name Jesus Christ.

He is the image of the invisible God,
The first born of all creation.
For in him were created all things in heaven and on earth,
The visible and the invisible,
Whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers;
All things were created through him and for him.
He is before all things,
And in him all things hold together.
He is the head of the body, the church.

He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead,
That in all things he himself might be preeminent.
For in him all the fullness was pleased to dwell,
And through him to reconcile all things for him,
Making peace by the blood of his cross
Whether those on earth or those in heaven.
- Colossians 1:15-20

Jesus Christ - who emptied himself by taking earthy, material form in this world, was obedient unto death on the cross, and so liberated all creation, including us, from the powers of Sin and Death and bondage to decay, reconciling us and all of creation to the Father that all might enjoy in freedom, the glory of God. This Christ is the answer to the present environmental crisis of our time (Philippians 2:5-11; Galatians 6:14; Romans 8:14-27).

The creator God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, loves all of creation as it is “presented to the Father” in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, through the death and Resurrection of Christ. “Through Christ the Church can offer the sacrifice of praise in thanksgiving for all that God has made good, beautiful, and just in creation and in humanity” (CCC no. 1359). Indeed, for St. Francis of Assisi, it was the earthy, mundane elements of the sacrifice of the Mass that “mediated the very presence of him who is the hope of all creation” (Johnson, 2012).

“I implore all my brothers to show all possible reverence and honour to the Most Holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ in Whom that which is in heaven and earth has been brought to peace and reconciled to Almighty God” (Francis of Assisi from Armstrong, 1999).

On June 18, 2015, Pope Francis released the encyclical *Laudato Sí*, in which the Holy Father beautifully describes the integral relationship between human beings and the natural environment inscribed by God in what Pope St. John Paul II would call “the book of creation” (Pope John Paul II, 2001). A call to conversion, *Laudato Sí* exhorts human beings to recognize their vocation as “keepers of the garden” and to respond faithfully to this call by caring for God’s creation in this present time of ecological crisis.

Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the tame animals, all the wild animals, and all the creatures that crawl on the earth.

- Genesis 1:28

The LORD God then took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden, to cultivate and care for it.

- Genesis 2:15

Pope Francis continues faithfully in the tradition of his predecessors. Pope Saint John Paul II warned against people seeing “no other meaning in their natural environment than what serves for immediate use and consumption” (*Redemptor Hominis* 15). Pope Benedict XVI worked

toward making the Vatican carbon neutral through the installation of solar panels on the Pope Paul VI Audience Hall and by planting trees on Vatican-owned property. He also proposed “eliminating the structural causes of the dysfunctions of the world economy and correcting models of growth which have proved incapable of ensuring respect for the environment” (Pope Benedict XVI, 2007).

The complexity of issues surrounding the ecological crisis is reflected in the depth and breadth of *Laudato Si* itself. Pope Francis addresses this complexity by calling for an “integral ecology” in which potential solutions are examined for their multi-faceted impact on our world.

While our understanding of these complex issues will continue to develop over time, it is clear that finding ways to minimize our own impact on the environment is a primary way in which we can fulfill our call. Individually, and collectively, reducing consumption and minimizing waste will lessen our own individual, and collective, impact on this world, and thus, perhaps help preserve it for future generations.

In an effort to respond faithfully to the Holy Father’s call, in the fall of 2019, Bishop Felipe Estevez commissioned the Committee on Integral Ecology. The committee is charged with assaying the ecological situation of the Diocese and crafting a document suggesting ways that individuals, families, and parishes – indeed the entire Diocese – might begin to prophetically imagine (Brueggeman, 2001) how “to be faithful stewards of God’s creation” (The Cathedral Parish of St Augustine, 2020).

The environmental concerns facing NE Florida and the Diocese of St Augustine are multifaceted, interconnected, and complicated. They are not new, nor did they arise suddenly as the result of some single action by an easily identified culprit. Rather these are long-term consequences, which are the direct result of our human behaviors toward the environment. Many of these outcomes are the unintended consequences of policies, practices, and products that are otherwise beneficial and well intentioned. Despite the complexity, we cannot ignore the problem. The solutions will take a long time and require changes in our overall behaviors and mindset. Pope Francis writes “St. Francis is the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically. . . Francis helps us to see that an integral ecology calls for openness to categories which transcend the language of mathematics and biology, and take us to the heart of what it is to be human” (Pope Francis I, 2015, *Laudato Sí* p. 5). The change of mindset is important, but first we need a brief discussion of the problems we face in NE Florida.

Climate change has multiple causes and multiple effects

The scientific community is in general agreement that the current trend of warming climate worldwide is the result of decades of increased greenhouse gasses in the atmosphere. Several gasses are listed as contributing to greenhouse warming. Methane (CH₄) is a byproduct of degradation of garbage in landfills, mining operations, agriculture and oil and natural gas production. Nitrous Oxide (N₂O), also known as laughing gas, enters the atmosphere from nitrogen fertilizers, burning of fossil fuels, and as a byproduct of waste disposal. Hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), Perfluorocarbons (PFCs), Sulfur hexafluoride (SF₆), and Nitrogen trifluoride (NF₃) are used in industrial manufacture of many technology products. All of the

gasses listed above (including Methane and Nitrous Oxide contribute about 18% of the gasses known to contribute to the greenhouse effect (US Environmental Protection Agency, 2019). The primary greenhouse gas that has increased dramatically in concentration over time, starting in the late 1800's, is carbon dioxide. Carbon dioxide levels today (413 ppm, NOAA 2020) are higher than at any point in at least the past 800,000 years (NOAA 2020, Lüthi, D., et al., 2008). The United States is one of the world's leading contributors to carbon dioxide emissions annually. Carbon dioxide is released into the atmosphere through the burning of fossil fuels (oil, coal, natural gas), and the decomposition of organic materials. Transportation is the largest contributor (28.9%) followed by electricity production (27.5%), industry (22.2%), commercial and residential (11.6%), and agriculture (9%) (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2019). The concentration in the atmosphere continues to increase because of increased inputs, but also the destruction of forested areas and/or changes in land use. Vegetation is a major absorber of carbon dioxide. Less vegetation means less of the carbon dioxide that we put into the atmosphere can be reabsorbed from the atmosphere. The resulting buildup creates a blanket of sorts that traps heat near the Earth's surface resulting in increasing temperatures. The consequences of increasing temperature are sea level rise, more frequent and more intense storms and flooding, ocean acidification, excessive heat, and increased insect-borne diseases.

Sea level rise

Sea level rises and falls due to a number of local and global phenomena. Global sea level rise is directly related to warming climate globally. Not only do warmer temperatures melt polar ice caps and glaciers that have stored water for thousands of years, the increases in temperature also cause the liquid water in the oceans to expand a bit. It does not take much expansion of the 321, 003, 271 cubic miles (nearly 352 quintillion gallons) of ocean water to cause coastal flooding (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, 2019). The American Geosciences Institute (2019) publishes an interactive map of coastal flooding impacts from sea level rise that shows the high tide flooding along the Florida coasts, marsh migration inland, and population vulnerability. The tool includes local scenarios that show that most of the NE Florida coastline is likely to experience average high tide flooding of 7.4 inches regularly within the next year. The North Florida Regional Council recommends planning for up to 3 feet of sea level rise by 2060. For extremely low-lying areas, this could result in regular flooding during high tides. During afternoon thunderstorms, or tropical storms with storm surge and increased run off, the flooding will be much worse. Furthermore, geological processes including erosion may enhance sea level rise in some locations.

Frequent storms and flooding

The U.S. Global Change Research Program (2018) reported in their Fourth National Climate Assessment that the United States is already experiencing more frequent and more intense climate-related events. These have resulted in extreme drought, wildfires, storms, and flooding. The repercussions include stress on ecosystems, farming communities, and increasingly on lower-income and other marginalized communities. In 2018 three devastating hurricanes ravaged communities in the U.S.: Harvey, Maria, and Irma. Hurricane Dorian in 2019 did immense damage in the Bahamas. All four of these storms have been classified as among the costliest storms to hit the US and surrounding areas; they occurred in a two-year span (National Hurricane Center, NOAA 2017

updated tables 2019). Globally, since 1990, the number of Category 4 and 5 hurricanes has almost doubled, averaging 18 per year (National Science Foundation (NSF), 2005).

Excessive heat

In general, global and USA atmospheric temperatures have increased approximately 1-1.5 F° from this century compared to the past century (NOAA, 2020). The average annual temperature over the continental United States is projected to rise over the next 30 years. We will likely see continuation of record high temperature days for a generation or more (U.S. Global Change Research Program, 2018). Extreme heat kills over 600 people per year, often those who are least able to escape the effects (elderly, children, economically disadvantaged). Similar to storm activity and intensity, climate change will create heat waves that are more intense and more frequent, and we need to be cognizant of the dangers and health risks that come with this:, such as, heart attacks, respiratory failure, heat stress, dehydration and cardiovascular mortality. Furthermore, it needs to be understood that certain US residents are at greater risk of adverse health effects and death from extreme heat. Low-income residents, the young and the elderly, construction and agricultural workers, individuals with pre-existing medical conditions, and people living in the center of urban areas can be more vulnerable to physical harm from heat.

Increased environmental (atmospheric or water) temperatures can also stress the ecology of living organisms. Organisms that are sensitive to increased temperatures or new higher high temperatures will be negatively impacted. Coral reefs, the tropical rainforest of the ocean and the most beautiful, diverse, and unique of underwater environments, are such animals. Over the past three years, due to increasing summer water temperatures (2°C), have suffered massive bleaching events (loss of color and usually death). The most well-known coral reef on Earth, the Great Barrier Reef, and the world's largest living structure that is visible from space, has lost over 50% of its coral since 2016 and is estimated to be potentially entirely dead by 2050. Coral reefs support between 500,000 to 1 billion people worldwide (Moberg and Folke 1999) and 25% of all oceanic life (NOAA 2019).

Insect borne diseases

Many insect carried diseases (known as vector- borne diseases or VBD) are common in tropical regions of the world. Increased high temperatures expand the habitat for the insects that carry the diseases, and therefore expand the spread of VBD. West Nile virus, Dengue fever, Zika virus, and Lyme disease, to name a few, are increasing (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019). Increased VBD frequency causes disease outbreaks to occur which reduce health conditions as well as negatively impact socioeconomic stability around the world (World Health Organization, 2015).

In addition to the effects of climate change, human activities have resulted in other challenges to our environment.

Water resource scarcity and pollution

In Florida, we depend on underground aquifers for most of our drinking water. This groundwater is also critical to the flow and health of Florida's springs and many of its rivers, such as the St. Johns. Unfortunately, we are pumping more water out of our aquifers than can

be naturally replenished. Over-pumping causes aquifer levels to decline and saltwater intrusion to increase, especially in coastal areas. Sea level rise is contributing to the migration of saline water into our potable groundwater sources. This makes fresh, clean water less available.

A recent study from the Natural Resources Defense Council (2019) indicated that Florida in particular was susceptible to lack of water supply by 2050 based on five criteria: projected water demand as related to precipitation, groundwater use, susceptibility to drought, increase of freshwater withdrawals, and projected increase in summer water deficit (NRDC, 2019). There is now a struggle for drinking water sources between the rapidly growing populations of Central and South Florida and the relatively large water source of the St. Johns, Suwannee, and Ocklawaha Rivers in North Florida. South Florida has nearly reached its limit of water withdrawals from the Floridan Aquifer, and is actively searching for other sources.

Degradation of river, lake, oceanic/beach resources

As the ocean rises, water levels in tidal creeks and rivers, such as the St. Johns, increase, as well. This is allowing saltwater to travel farther upstream, damaging or destroying critical habitat and pollution filters such as freshwater wetlands and submerged grasses. Rising waters and more intense storms increase the likelihood of flooding and the infiltration of storm water into sewer pipes, causing sewer systems to back up and discharge sewage into nearby streets and waterways. Higher groundwater levels and saturated soils cause septic tanks to back up and overflow. Chemicals, fertilizers and contaminants are also flushed from roads, yards, parking lots, and industrial sites into surrounding neighborhoods and our waterways, creating additional health hazards. As the climate warms, so do water temperatures that can fuel toxic algae blooms and red tide events in nutrient-rich waterways.

Increasing numbers of severe tropical storms also result in excess rainwater runoff that carries surface contaminants into the rivers, overwhelms sanitary sewers, and creates standing water in neighborhoods that is both inconvenient and increases the risk of water and insect-borne diseases.

Invasive species

Longer growing seasons and expansion of tropical to temperate climate zones have resulted in migration of plant species further northward. “Many scientists agree that climate change will alter destination habitat and increase vulnerability to invasion because of resource scarcity and increased competition among native fauna and flora” (Szyniszewska, A., 2010. Trade and human introduction worsen the problem of invasive species, those that eventually replace native species in habitats. Florida and Hawaii are the states most affected by invasive species in part because of climates that permit species without cold-tolerance to thrive. This is particularly true of insects, which often die out during the cold months in northern environments but happily thrive year-round in Florida. This could have an effect on the problem of insect-borne diseases mentioned above.

Many non-natives in Florida are the result of intentional or inadvertent release of exotic pets. Burmese Pythons, Iguanas, Lion Fish, Cockatoos, neo-tropical Parrots, and monkeys have all been released into Florida habitats (Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission, 2019). Some of these species cause damage to natural ecosystems as they prey upon or outcompete native species.

Toxins in water, air and soil

One of the most widely reported pollution problems in Florida and worldwide is that of plastics, particularly in the oceans. The issues are obvious, a growing amount of single-use plastic (bottles, straws, bags, cups, etc.) that does not degrade and is not being recycled. The recycling market for plastics has largely collapsed. There is very little demand for the plastics to be recycled; therefore, the current business model of recycling does not work. Plastics do not break down over time, or if they do, they still persist in the environment as tiny particles and are eaten by smaller organisms. Plastics in the ocean often look like food to some marine organisms, or present an entanglement hazard (Greenpeace, 2019). The effects in Florida are seen along the coastline but most especially along the shallow water areas of the Gulf Coast (ESRI, 2019). The effects of plastics are not limited to marine life. Plastics trash in the landfill or as litter also impacts terrestrial animals. The problem of plastics is also a problem of resource use. Plastics are made from petroleum; we are using fossil fuels to create an additional challenge to our environment.

Oil drilling, and the relatively new process of fracking, have also added crude oil pollution to coastlines. The Deep Water Horizon catastrophe in 2010 caused impacts to coastlines and marine life from Pensacola, Florida to Louisiana through 2013. Continued efforts to protect Florida coastlines from problems associated with oil and natural gas exploration have been put into place by Governor DeSantis in Executive Order Number 19-12 (Florida Department of Environmental Protection, 2019).

The Problem Overall

The real problem is not that we do not understand the science, but that human behaviors have resulted in the problems we face. It is time for a change in attitude, perhaps a more spiritual approach. "I used to think the top environmental problems were biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and climate change. I thought that with 30 years of good science we could address those problems. But I was wrong. The top environmental problems are selfishness, greed and apathy and to deal with those we need a spiritual and cultural transformation-and we scientists don't know how to do that" (Speth, 2013).

Social Justice Component

Those living below the poverty level and in rural locales (US Global Change Research Program, 2018) will feel the impacts of environmental degradation most severely. People living in poverty are less likely to have health insurance or independent transportation. These segments of the population are most at risk from the types of environmental issues mentioned above. They do not have the financial means to escape flooding, excessive heat, or the health challenges associated with a compromised environment. "At its core, global climate change is not about economic theory or political platforms, nor about partisan advantage or interest group pressures. It is about the future of God's creation and the one human family. It is about protecting both 'the human environment' and the natural environment" (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2001, p.1).

The Diocese of St Augustine has numerous families that struggle economically. The median household income in the 17 counties in the Diocese of St Augustine for 2013-2017 was \$47,517.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2018), 15% of the population in the diocese is living in poverty, and 12% lack health insurance. In addition almost 5% of the population is under the age of 5, and 16% is over the age of 65. The statistics vary considerably from county to county with higher percentages living in poverty in rural counties.

In addition, environmental pressures regarding land use, availability of water and climate changes are likely to affect agricultural areas. "A half-billion people already live in places turning into desert, and soil is being lost between 10 and 100 times faster than it is forming, according to the report. Climate change will make those threats even worse, as floods, drought, storms and other types of extreme weather threaten to disrupt, and over time shrink, the global food supply. Already, more than 10 percent of the world's population remains undernourished, and some authors of the report warned in interviews that food shortages could lead to an increase in cross-border migration" (Flavelle, C., 2019). Although these problems may seem removed from the Diocese of St Augustine, we will experience these pressures directly on our agricultural areas, and indirectly through migration of individuals in areas most impacted by food shortages and economic downturns.

Why should we act?

It is tempting to think that the actions of individuals can make no real difference, but lack of action just produces more of the same problem. If we have any hope of reversing the trends outlined above, it will take the actions of each of us, all of us, working with a common goal: healing our home.

Our actions do make a difference. In 1973 the first evidence was published of a massive hole in the ozone layer. The cause was chlorofluorocarbon compounds (CFC's) such as Freon that create ozone destroying free-radicals. These compounds persist in the atmosphere for decades and increased use was causing a build-up of free-radicals and ever more extensive destruction of the ozone layer. The ozone layer creates a protective filter for the harmful ultraviolet (UV) rays of the sun. In 1985, the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer was signed. Recent studies have demonstrated that this ban has worked and the Ozone hole is decreasing (NASA, 2018; Strahan & Douglass, 2018).

Corporations can make a difference as well. Amazon has pledged to be carbon-neutral by 2040 and to utilize only renewable energy sources by 2030 (Shieber, 2019). The investment in the environment is sizable, and the investment will undoubtedly create jobs in the clean energy sector as well.

Personal and Practical

Caring for the planet creates immediate benefits for us, our offspring, and near future generations. We should act out of concern for humanity as part of a global ecosystem and geo-economic-political system, and because we have a philosophical and moral imperative to protect and value all life and the natural environment as part of creation.

The environment protects us by providing sources of food, shelter, and other resources. Ecologically a healthy environment with a diverse thriving ecosystem is less likely to collapse. Coastal habitats such as dunes, marshes, and beaches provide a filtration

system that removes toxins from runoff from land and buffers storm surges from damaging inland structures.

Humans are part of every ecosystem. We depend on the resources in that system and, as participants, we affect the physical and biological environment we inhabit. The philosophy of protecting human dignity also encompasses protecting the special place of humans in the ecosystems. The important concept here is not that we are master's of the environment, but as part of the natural world we must be care-takers. This includes prioritizing the good of the human family over commercial interests. Degradation of the natural environment disproportionately affects the poor members of every community. As part of our commitment to social justice, we must exercise care of the environment in order to protect those among us with the greatest needs.

The air we breathe changes with the acts of breathing, driving, and production of power and goods. The soil we use to grow our food, bury our dead, and house our wastes, changes with these activities. The water we drink, bathe in, swim in and use as a repository for waste is contaminated by these very activities. Most of the alterations of our environment that are a direct result of the process of living are part of natural processes. Bacteria, fungi, plants, and animals take in natural wastes we produce and use them as the raw materials for their lives. Industrial activities, however, use the air, land, and water at a different scale, producing larger changes on a larger scale and more rapidly than the individual actions listed above.

Since humans are a highly successful, mobile, numerous, global species, positioned in every inhabitable area of the globe, our activities have a global impact. The complexity of the earth's systems make it very hard to predict the ultimate results and magnitude of our actions. However, we are beginning to see the cumulative effects of fossil fuel burning as global climate change and sea level rise, and of the use and discarding of plastics in the massive amounts of plastic (large and microscopic) making its way into all parts of the ocean.

Theological, Philosophical, and Moral

Environmental Ethics is not a subset of our ethical and moral obligations to other members of our species. All life, every living thing bears its own integrity, its own implicit value beyond any practical value to human beings (Taylor, 1986). This is a central tenet in many spiritual and religious faith traditions, including non-Judeo-Christian religions, including non-Judeo-Christian religions, which the Catholic Church recognizes as fellow pilgrims seeking "answers to the unsolved riddles of the human condition, which today, even as in former times, deeply stir the hearts of men" (Pope Paul VI, 1965, *Nostra Aetate* 1). Moreover, the Church does not reject anything that is "true and holy" or that "reflect[s] a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men (*Nostra Aetate* 2). Indeed, protecting wild communities and natural environments is part-and-parcel of such religious traditions that, like ours, draw out an ideal of human life lived

peaceably with all living things, when there was, may be now, and will be no more harming and destroying of life on God's holy mountain.

God also said: See, I give you every seed-bearing plant on all the earth and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit on it to be your food; and to all the wild animals, all the birds of the air, and all the living creatures that crawl on the earth, I give all the green plants for food. And so it happened.

Genesis 1:29-30

Then the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb,
and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat;
The calf and the young lion shall browse together,
with a little child to guide them.
The cow and the bear shall graze,
together their young shall lie down;
the lion shall eat hay like the ox.
The baby shall play by the viper's den,
and the child lay his hand on the adder's lair.
They shall not harm or destroy on all my holy mountain;
for the earth shall be filled with knowledge of the LORD,
as water covers the sea.

Isaiah 11:6-9

Thus, what is imagined in the biblical tradition goes beyond even the ethical treatment of all living things – flora and fauna, human and non-human – that avoids harm and, where possible, actually improves and benefits their condition. In other words, rather than humanity being apart from the rest of life, humans are a part of the whole of life and creation (Delio, 2013, 2015). This is precisely what the Holy Father implies by his emphasis on realizing an “integral ecology” that is more attuned to both the “protological” (“first word”) portrait of creation in Genesis, and the “eschatological” (“last word”) portrait in Isaiah.

Nevertheless, at the present time, moral conundrums occur when there is a conflict between harming one to benefit another, and most poignantly where the decision is between human benefit and the benefit of the plant, animal, or living ecosystem in

question. A life-centered, or *integral* view need not be in opposition to a practical view where the natural environment is concerned, particularly if the practical view is long-term rather than aiming for immediate, short term benefits. In other words, a view that is life-centered, or *integral* is also *sustainable*.

When we consider the ecosystems of the earth, they are composed of more than plants and animals (including humans). The complex interaction of abiotic (non-living) and biotic (living) components of a system are crucial to the evolution and survival of each. Therefore, we must consider the physical environment and apply our ethical judgements there as much as to the living organisms residing in an area. Careless or wanton activities that disturb the physical nature of the environment can have dramatic and far-reaching effects on local, regional, national and even global scales (climate, pollution, erosion etc.).

Protection of the things we love is natural, and we are called to do as much for all of creation. As goes a popular saying attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, "If you have men who will exclude any of God's creatures from the shelter of compassion and pity, you will have men who will deal likewise with their fellow men." So, we know there is a special need to protect and help the most vulnerable members of our world. People who struggle economically and socially are impacted the most by environmental degradation as they have no means of escape and are often exposed to the elements directly in their working and living situations. The "cry of the earth" is indeed, the "cry of the poor" (*Laudato Sí* 49; Boff 1997). Reflecting on human solidarity in suffering and vulnerability, Pope Francis states "If the simple fact of being human moves people to care for the environment of which they are a part, Christians in their turn realize that their responsibility within creation, and their duty towards nature and the Creator, are an essential part of their faith" (*Laudato Sí* 64).

The Plan

The plan for action concerning the environment in the Diocese of St Augustine has three facets: formation, commitment to reduce consumption and waste, and advocacy. In addition, we propose three scales of action: a) personal/individual, b) family/group, and c) organization. A grid form of the plan is also available with suggested actions in each facet and at each scale.

Formation

Formation is the means by which "people consciously grow in the life of Christ through experience, reflection, prayer, and study."* It is an intentional on-going praxis of walking with people on their faith-journeys consistently over time, questioning and listening to doubts and concerns, and discerning together the "signs of the times" in light of the Gospel (Mt 16:3). The importance of formation and discernment cannot be underestimated. As Pope Benedict XVI put it "[t]he external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast. Therefore the earth's treasures no longer serve to build God's garden for all to live in, but they have been

made to serve the powers of exploitation and destruction."** In light of these "signs of the times," Pope Francis calls for the formation of people toward an "ecological citizenship" grounded in "ecological conversion" so that our encounter with God in Christ Jesus is evident in our relationship with one another and with the world around us (*Laudato Si* 211, 217). Such ecological formation involves careful examination of Sacred Scripture, Church Tradition, Church social and ethical teaching, and the scientific consensus in order to recognize our integral connection to God's creation – to all living things, and so, to one another. Such formation creates opportunities for life-long self-examination of our thoughts about, and actions toward God's creation while learning to love and protect the garden that we are commissioned by God to care for (Gen 2:15).

**Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us: A Pastoral Plan for Adult Faith Formation in the United States* (United States Catholic Conference, Inc., 1999) § 5.

** Pope Benedict XVI, homily at Inaugural Mass, 2005.

Commitment to reduce consumption and waste

Reducing consumption means we will be more frugal, not to a point of deprivation, but to reduce the demands we place on the environment that sustains us. For example, reduce fuel consumption to avoid putting CO₂ into the atmosphere. Just because we can afford the fuel does not mean we should burn it. Carpool, take public transportation, walk or bike, combine errands to use less fuel overall. Extend this to purchasing locally grown products that require less fuel to transport to market. Eating a plant-based diet reduces the CO₂ emitted into the atmosphere and associated energy waste in meat production.

These actions will likely result in less waste as well. The consumer mentality, particularly in America, results in wanton disregard for the value of goods. Combining a commitment to reduce consumption with mindfulness is a powerful mechanism for cleaning up the environmental troubles we find ourselves in today, and preventing the costly damage and cleanup of environmental disasters of the future.

Advocacy

"At its core, global climate change is not about economic theory or political platforms, nor about partisan advantage or interest group pressures. It is about the future of God's creation and the one human family. It is about protecting both 'the human environment' and the natural environment" (*United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2001, p.1*).

If we have any hope of reversing the impacts of climate change, it will take the actions of each of us, all of us, working with a common goal: healing our home.

Advocacy is the extension of mindfulness from person to organization and a commitment to encourage others to make changes to help preserve and heal our environment. The Diocese of St Augustine is adding this component to the plan to affirm

our commitment to advocate for solutions, for protection of our natural environment, and for the protection of our most vulnerable neighbors.

This means community involvement and showing our level of care to a larger audience. Advocacy must always be respectful and cognizant of those who may not be in positions to make mindful decisions about their environment. For example, those eking out an existence at or below the poverty level may not be able to making choices due to their circumstances.

Scales of the plan. “Start by doing what's necessary; then do what's possible; and suddenly you are doing the impossible.” Attributed to Francis of Assisi

The problem seems so massive that it is tempting to believe that individuals cannot make a difference. However, the individual actions of many people over much time caused the degradation. That alone should be proof that individual actions do matter when combined. Millions of footfalls on a marble step over millennia can eventually wear down the stone, and millions of small actions combined can change our world and our cultures.

It is not enough to make only the smallest changes. This plan should produce a life-long commitment to formation, reduction of consumption and waste, and advocacy for the protection of the environment to produce sustainable lifestyles for all.

Personal/Individual Actions

Each individual should strive to learn more about human impacts on environment and the subsequent effects of environment on our cities and towns. Attend lectures, seminars, and webinars. Become knowledgeable about the environment and what you can do to correct the damage.

Reflection and prayer, along with study, are powerful tools on this journey to repair the Earth.

Strive to reduce consumption and waste of fuel, water, food, and products. Finally become an advocate by being a positive role model for the changes you wish to see. Some possible concrete actions are:

- Eliminate single use plastics (water bottles, plastic bags, straws, cups, etc.)
- Reuse or upcycle produces in your home
- Eat a plant-based diet- this requires less energy and produces less CO₂ than a meat-based diet
- Walk or bicycle where possible rather than relying on motorized transportation
- Use public transportation rather than your personal vehicle
- Make your next car a hybrid or electric model
- Participate in cleanups and local environmental activities
- Become involved. At the very least vote in local, state, and national elections. You could become Involved in local environmental groups or support a non-profit organization dedicated to environmental causes

- Attend open forum meetings that discuss environmental issues
- Patronize businesses and organizations with a commitment to social justice and ecologically friendly practices
- Encourage others to join the effort
- Vote in local and national elections keeping the goals of this plan in mind

Family/group Actions

Expand your personal commitment above to include a larger family/social group. Make the personal actions into group or family activities. For example, pray together for healing for the earth, join a study group sponsored by your parish, commit to 1-3 vegetarian meals per week as a family (these have less impact on the environment than producing meat), purchase produce locally and in-season, and participate in activities in your local community that are positive for the environment.

Organization Actions

These actions are at the scale of entire schools or parishes. The larger organization can organize actions to make it easier for individuals to participate. Consider forming a Laudato Sí or Integral Ecology Committee at the parish level. Parish schools can have recycling drives, study reducing environmental impact, compete to reduce energy consumption, or plant a community vegetable garden.

Individuals might be able to encourage their place of business to adopt 'green' or earth-friendly practices:

- Don't use disposable cups, straws, plates or utensils in the workplace
- Consider a company policy that promotes healthy environmental practices and distributes this to its customers
- Encourage local schools to teach more about environmental awareness, ecology and earth sciences

Diocesan Commitment

The Diocese will enable personal, family, and organizational changes by:

- a. Appoint a Steering Committee and sub-committees to expand the specific items in this plan.
- b. Providing education and outreach- in our Catholic schools and parish communities
- c. Developing and distributing environmental care messaging as part of Sunday sermons (homiletics)
- d. Being a role model for the organizational changes suggested above
- e. Advocating for protecting and caring for the environment and our integral ecological community (people, plants, animals, and physical environment)
- f. Reinvesting savings from reduced consumption to help those most impacted by degraded environment

Getting Started

SIGN THE SAINT FRANCIS PLEDGE

I/We Pledge to:

- PRAY and reflect on the duty to care for God’s Creation and protect the poor and vulnerable.
- LEARN about and educate others on the causes and moral dimensions of climate change.
- ASSESS how we-as individuals and in our families, parishes and other affiliations can contribute to climate change by our own energy use, consumption, waste, etc.
- ACT to change our choices and behaviors to reduce the ways we contribute to climate change.
- ADVOCATE for Catholic principles and priorities in climate change discussions and decisions, especially as they impact those who are poor and vulnerable.

<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/environment/upload/ecology-resource-all.pdf>

Committee on Integral Ecology, Diocese of St Augustine, FL

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