



Synod on Synodality National Organization Report

Submitted by Catholic Climate Covenant to USCCB

Introduction: In accordance with Vatican’s vision for the [Synod on Synodality](#), Catholic Climate Covenant (CCC) generated various channels of communication to enable the U.S. Catholic community to a) express how the Holy Spirit is moving within and through them to live *Laudato Si’* and b) join the Catholic Church’s process of discerning and strengthening the Church’s mission to live the Gospel of Jesus Christ and evangelize in the world. CCC conducted or was involved in six consultation efforts related to the Synod on Synodality from January 2022 to June 2022: 1) Living Room Conversations; 2) an online survey; 3) Synodal Listening Sessions; 4) submissions from colleges students; 5) online artistic submissions; and 6) Young Adult Encounter with Pope Francis.

Context, Methods, and Demographics

1) Living Room Conversations (LRCs)

In January 2022, CCC invited its constituents via email and social media to join Living Room Conversations (LRCs) - one-hour small group conversations over Zoom with CCC staff. Eight LRCs were held on the last Thursday of each month from January to April. Approximately 10-15 people attended each session and discussed:

- 1) What is working and what is not – for you, for CCC, the world at large?
- 2) What ideas or solutions do you have for the challenges you see?
- 3) How can we work better together, and with others?

Almost 100 (98) people attended from more than 25 U.S. states, and 69 participants were women while 29 were men.

2) Synodal Listening Sessions

Five Synodal Listening Sessions occurred over Zoom during the week of June 13th, 2022. CCC invited people via email, social media, and on its website. Sessions included an opening prayer, context, demographic survey, small group discussion, report out, and closing prayer. Small group discussions occurred in breakout rooms of 4-7 people for 30 minutes. Each group transcribed responses to the following questions:

1. What are your experiences discussing and implementing creation care and *Laudato Si'* in the Church?
2. What joys did those experiences bring? (i.e., What has made your heart sing?)
3. What difficulties and obstacles have you encountered? (i.e., What has broken your heart?)
4. What steps does the Holy Spirit invite us to take to grow in our journeying together on *Laudato Si'*-centered issues?
5. Whose voices are currently not being heard around creation care issues? And/or what are the areas for change for our Church and what steps can be taken?

The larger group then convened for about 15 minutes (recorded). Small group leaders verbally reported on key takeaways and provided breakout session notes.

Some 171 people participated and 111 filled out the demographics survey. *See demographics of Synodal Listening sessions [here](#).*

3) Online Survey

The Covenant provided an online form with the same questions to people unable to attend the Synodal sessions. 15 individuals responded. *See demographics of Synodal online survey [here](#).*

4) Creighton University Students

CCC collaborated with Dan DiLeo, a theologian at Creighton University, to survey undergraduate students. He included the following questions on a final exam essay prompt to which students could respond:

1. As a young person, how does the issue of climate change make you feel – and why?
2. What is your experience of U.S. Catholic teaching and action on climate change?
How does this make you feel?
3. What are your hopes for how the U.S. Catholic Church addresses climate change moving forward?

15 students responded – 8 Catholics, 6 non-Catholics, 1 non-reporting.

5) Online Artistic Submissions

Small sample, no demographics available.

6) Young Adult Encounter with Pope Francis

On February 24, 2022, CCC social media manager Emily Burke and CCC intern Henry Glynn presented the climate change concerns of young people to Pope Francis. The Loyola University Chicago-coordinated event represented students from the U.S., Canada, and Mexico.

Statements and Findings of the Consultation Efforts

1) Living Room Conversations (LRCs) statements and findings:

A) There is a lack of support from hierarchy, dioceses, parishes on issues of creation care.

LRCs revealed that while many participants had started creation care teams in the parishes or worked on *Laudato Si'* Action plans, they did so without the support of their pastors and bishops.

Many participants contributed this to the politicization of creation care. Participants stated that:

- Politics played a role in how their pastors and bishops approached climate change.
- Some Catholic media dismiss creation care but are supported by U.S. bishops.

- The overarching takeaway was the need for unified support from U.S. dioceses and archdioceses to make *Laudato Si'* and climate change a priority.

B) There is a lack of urgency around climate change.

- One participant said his activism has gone unnoticed. He unsuccessfully wrote twice to his bishop, and while his pastor has spoken about creation care in a homily, the parish has not taken any concrete steps.
- Parishes and dioceses continue to withhold support for creation care by despite interest from and activism by parishioners.

C) There is frustration over the lack of Catholic institutional support for climate change.

- Though participants have implemented *Laudato Si'* Action Plans in select ways, accomplishments are the results of inspired parishioners and clergy members rather than a unified diocesan response.
- Many worry about the role of money and investments, and the lack of mainstream Catholic narratives of climate change, noting the Napa Institute has board members with links to the fossil fuel industry. Participants believed that such financial connections politicize climate change and argued for transparency and support from the U.S. Church.
- There is a general feeling that bishops' and priests' support is necessary for effective lobbying to other Catholic organizations. One person explained that she has been reaching out to Catholic universities to endorse carbon pricing, but without clerical support, her efforts are taken less seriously.
- While talking about universities, participants wondered what was being taught in seminaries and if creation care was being incorporated into the education.

- One person shared her parish’s pushback of her creation care efforts because a large donor has ties to the fossil fuel industry.
- There is broad agreement that climate change remains a stigmatized topic within the Church. One participant’s parish in California went solar, but the pastor did not incorporate climate change into the reasoning because “he knew it would not sell.”
- Participants wished that U.S. Church would be bolder in their support of climate action and hold themselves accountable for stalling climate legislation.

2) Online Survey Statements and Findings

A) *Laudato Si’* Activities are happening in parishes.

The 15 survey responses indicated that the respondents were taking action to implement creation care and *Laudato Si’* in their communities. For example, one Illinois woman has led a parish Earth Care ministry team. This team led book discussions, planting seeds with children, participating in trash cleanup, and collecting recyclables. One respondent shared that his parish has celebrated *Laudato Si’* and shared it with the community.

B) However, they encounter difficulties implementing creation care.

These difficulties stemmed from disinterest and pushback from pastors, bishops, wealthy parishioners, and conservative Catholics. The idea that creation care has gone unnoticed and ignored by parishes and pastors was mentioned by 7 of the 15 respondents. One respondent explained that when she started a social justice group for her parish and attempted to talk about *Laudato Si’*, her priest told her that “‘We shouldn't rock the boat.’ He felt it was too controversial. Honestly, anything justice-related was too controversial unless it was anti-abortion.” Two of the respondents connected this to the politicization of

climate change. In conclusion, all the respondents felt disappointed at the lack of clergy response to and support for *Laudato Si'*.

C) What gives you joy?

Ten of the respondents explained that seeing progress and collaboration among fellow Catholics brought them joy, especially the example of Pope Francis. Two respondents have not had joyful experiences, with one woman stating, “There is no joy in feeling that we are on the path to self-destruction.”

D) Is there hope for the future?

Respondents hoped that Catholics would start or continue embracing *Laudato Si'*. One hoped “to bring creation care into the heart of our liturgy.” Another stated that we must “commit ourselves to *Laudato Si'*-centered issues, and to be evangelists for this powerful and needed message.” For the respondents, continuing this work also necessitated bringing more voices into the conversation. Five respondents wrote that the voices of the poor were not being heard around creation care issues. Four respondents said people who cared about creation care or environmental issues were being ignored and silenced by the Church. They hoped the Church will truly incorporate the feedback from this synodal process.

3) Synodal Listening Sessions Statements and Findings

Participants shared how they have discussed and implemented creation care and *Laudato Si'* in their parishes (e.g., writing monthly articles in bulletins, starting community gardens, hosting educational forums, and leading Creation Care Teams).

A) Participants looked toward religious communities, primarily led by women, as examples of how to implement creation care and *Laudato Si'*. (4 out of 5 listening sessions independently discussed this.)

- **Religious communities have been true leaders in the implementation of creation care and *Laudato Si'*.** Examples: A Benedictine order in Central Illinois has transitioned to solar energy and thermal heating; a Franciscan sister spoke about collaborating with other Franciscans to share their charism and establish an environmental grant program for young adults.

B) Consensus that participants encounter significant difficulties implementing creation care ministries from priests and bishops.

- A resounding theme across all sessions was the lack of support from clergy members, priests, pastors, and bishops. A participant bluntly stated, “If you don’t have the support of bishops and priests, it’s really an uphill battle.”
- Across the five listening sessions, the phrase “uphill battle” came up again and again when speaking about working with priests. For some participants, priests played an active role in suppressing creation care implementation efforts. For instance, one attendee shared that when she created a creation care committee, her pastor refused to let them use “justice” in their title. In another participant’s diocese, the diocese “made it virtually impossible” to implement creation care by running negative articles about *Laudato Si'* in the diocesan newspaper. In other examples, the silence from priests and bishops on issues of creation care and *Laudato Si'* created an environment of apathy and indifference that made it difficult for parishioners to start and continue initiatives. Attendees argued that this silence could be due to the “ever-present issue of politicizing [climate change].”

C) The successful implementation of creation care brought joy to many participants.

- Participants spoke about the joy of seeing children and young adults get involved with her parish’s community garden. Given the older demographics of attendees, many looked toward young people for hope and wished to amplify young people’s voices.
- The attendees agreed that Pope Francis’s example encourages them to keep going. Simply put, an attendee stated that while there are few joys in this difficult work, “*Laudato Si*’ is the joy.”

D) Hope that the Church will take a more unified stance on creation care.

- In two LRCs, participants said creation care efforts “need to be top-down, not just bottom-up.” While the attendees saw the power in what they called a “lay-led movement,” they also recognized that without explicit support from clergy members, they would continue to face difficult obstacles.
- What could this support look like? The participants proposed many concrete steps from little actions like phasing out Styrofoam at parish events to broader actions like fossil fuel divestment. Attendees also hoped that when implementing creation care, the Church center the voices of the most marginalized, the youth, and the poor.

4) Creighton University Students Statements and Findings

- All students expressed frustration, fear, and uncertainty. Many were concerned about the future and wondered how they could bring children into this world.
- Six non-Catholic students said their experiences at Creighton gave them hope because they saw how the university implements Catholic social teaching into tangible climate solutions fossil fuel divestment.
- In contrast, the eight Catholic students felt a disconnect between the teachings at Creighton and their parishes at home; this caused them disappointment and frustration.

- Each of the Catholic students wrote that in their home dioceses, climate change is not talked about nor recognized as an important aspect of Catholicism. One wrote that they feel a sense of “idleness and ignorance” from priests, who fear backlash if they speak about climate change. Witnessing this apathy made this student disappointed. Another Catholic student wrote about feelings of disheartenment toward the Church because they had never heard climate change mentioned in homilies. A different Catholic student experienced the same neglect of the issue, which they found irresponsible. One Catholic expressed their confusion over fellow Catholics who claim to be “pro-life” yet deny that the planet is dying and fail to protect it.
- These testimonies from Catholic students revealed the failures of individual dioceses and parishes to implement the teachings of *Laudato Si'* and the resulting frustration and disappointment at this failure.

Recommendations: All the students hoped that the Catholic Church would offer a unified response to climate change and spread these teachings to every diocese and parish. The students recognized the power and influence that the Catholic Church has on the Church’s constituency and secular society. They argued:

- The Church should use this influence to enact meaningful discussions and solutions for climate change and that the Church has the potential to reduce emissions, divest money from fossil fuel companies, and educate Catholic students to advocate for these issues.
- They want to see the Catholic Church reinforce the messages of *Laudato Si'* through Catholic television, news outlets, and radios.
- The Church should use its “power to move people’s hearts,” emphasizing that climate change is not a political issue but is, as the Church teaches, a moral issue.

5) Online Artistic Submissions

Nine people [submitted art, poetry, and prayers](#) to lift the theme of “Who Will Speak for Creation?” expressing beauty and sorrow:

6) *Young adult synodal listening session with Pope Francis (elaboration [here](#))*

Henry Glynn and Emily Burke, who work for the Covenant, spoke to Pope Francis on February 24, on a position they and 28 other young adults developed and agreed upon. Henry outlined the climate crisis, Church teaching on climate change, and U.S. bishops’ inaction. Emily elaborated upon nonviolent direct action theory and posed the question to Pope Francis: did he support this idea of training Catholics to effectively encounter bishops about acting on climate change. Pope Francis affirmed Emily and Henry’s “construction of nonviolent activities” and challenged them to “strive for sincerity” and “guard against hypocrisy” when dealing with issues of episcopal silence and inaction.

Conclusion of Synodal Efforts

Catholic Climate Covenant heard a resounding cry from people across our various interactions for more institutional Church support and help for care for creation efforts. Most efforts are led and implemented by dedicated lay Catholic leaders and volunteers in parishes, schools and religious orders. People who are witnessing care for creation and Laudato Si’ efforts being implemented feel joy through those accomplishments. We heard more often, expressions of sorrow and disappointment in the lack of dedicated or consistent support from bishops, priests and other Church leaders to live out the call to care for creation. We look forward to working with all who seek to advance this call, for the greater glory of God, our Church, and the common good of all.