

CREATION CARE COMMUNICATIONS



*A Guidebook for
Communicators*

Introduction

You don't need to be an expert to speak publicly about Creation Care, but at a time when misinformation abounds, it's important to have a solid spiritual grounding when sharing our faith's call to care for our common home.

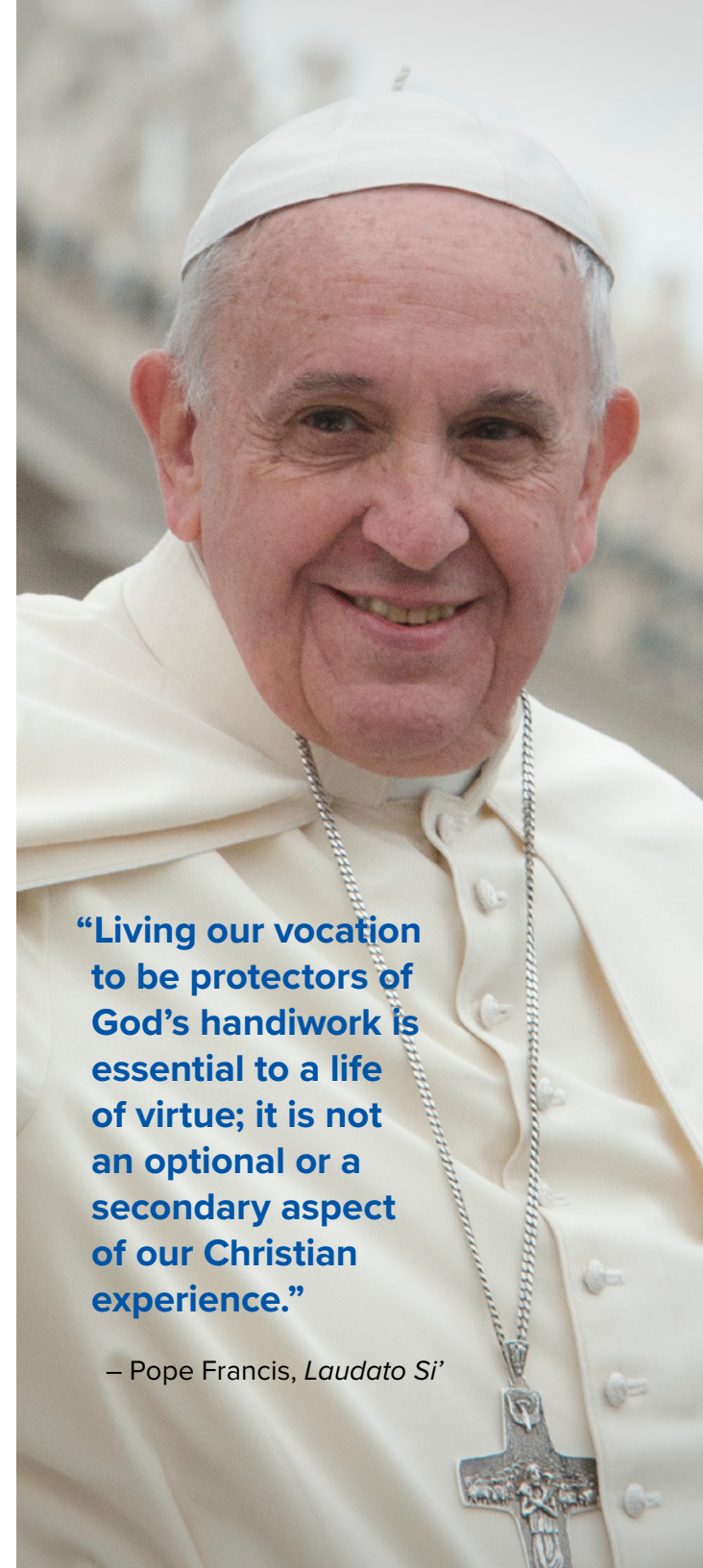
If you are inspired to engage your pastor or bishop, contribute a column to a newspaper, lecture a Confirmation class, address parishioners, or post a thoughtful reflection on social media, this guidebook is for you.

From the earliest days of the church, Christians have seen the truth that Scripture reveals: cherishing creation's beauty and appreciating its life-giving qualities are ways to know, love and serve God. That truth has been reiterated by countless saints, popes, theologians, scientists and a great many others.

The reverse is true as well. Failing to love and protect our planet is ultimately an act of self-destruction. As Blessed Pope Paul VI warned in 1971, through its "ill-considered exploitation of nature, humanity runs the risk of destroying it and becoming in turn a victim of this degradation."

More than 50 years later, climate change poses a threat to our common home and humanity. Now, more than ever, our world needs Catholics to help safeguard our planet.

As Pope Francis has said: "All of us can cooperate as instruments of God for the care of creation, each according to his or her own culture, experience, involvements and talents."



“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.”

– Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*



About this guidebook

In preparation for the second *Laudato Si'* and the U.S. Catholic Church conference sponsored by Creighton University and Catholic Climate Covenant, more than a dozen expert and faithful communicators volunteered to examine, design and offer the communication strategies in this guide. The digital guidebook will be a living document that offers spiritual and practical resources, enabling us all to raise the profile of creation care and effect change within the Catholic Church and beyond.

Do not feel pressure to come up with all the solutions on your own — one of the most important roles of a communicator is to raise the profile of the issue and inspire different audiences to research their own solutions.

The guidebook lists sections by objectives, which are based on the seven goals of the *Laudato Si'* Action Platform:

1. Articulating ecological spirituality
2. Connecting the cries of the earth and the poor
3. Engaging bishops and other church leaders
4. Adopting sustainable lifestyles
5. Helping Catholic schools teach ecological education
6. Encouraging ecological economics
7. Building community resilience and empowerment

If your objective isn't listed, you can use the sections here to help inspire your own communication plan. Thank you for putting this guidebook to good use!

“Preservation of the environment, promotion of sustainable development and particular attention to climate change are matters of grave concern for the entire human family.”

–Pope Benedict XVI, Letter to the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople

GOAL ONE

Articulating ecological spirituality



Know Your Audience

The first key to effective communication is understanding your audience. Different messages will resonate with different people. Learn what concerns your audience before you communicate with them, or ask them directly as part of your communication. After learning what issues concern your audience the most, help connect those concerns with Catholic social teachings. Remember that within every group there's bound to be a diversity of opinions.

Resistance to urgent action addressing climate change is sometimes founded by the thought that there are more important social issues demanding our attention. Here, St. Paul's writings about each of our unique gifts of the Spirit can be helpful in appreciating our brothers and sisters in Christ — and thus helping us to communicate with them more effectively.

When speaking to or writing for a Catholic audience it's helpful to present ecological issues differently than you might to a secular group. Think about which approach will best resonate with your audience.

One approach is to focus on the Pope's environmental encyclical, *Laudato Si'*. Another would be to focus on practical

tips on how to reduce our carbon footprints, recycle, go solar, clean up rivers and other water sources, or buy an electric vehicle. You may want to ask priests to address climate change during Mass when they have a broad audience, not just at ecologically themed events. You can reach new Catholics through RCIA.

The point is: Some folks will be more attracted to user-friendly tips for sustainable living, some more drawn to spiritual study or political activism. You can be most helpful by meeting your audience where it's at, and providing the resources they want and need.

Know Your Message

Speak confidently about the theology of creation care. While these themes have always permeated Catholic teaching, presenting them as religious contributions to ecological conversations is new territory for a lot of people. If you've done research, you will be more knowledgeable than much of your audience about what the church actually teaches.

Familiarize yourself with the ecological concept of integral ecology to illustrate how everyone's concerns can be addressed, often with a holistic solution that focuses on the source issues rather

than pitting one concern against one another.

The more ready-made materials you can provide, the easier you will make it for your audiences to adopt *Laudato Si'* into their work. Provide examples, case studies, and connections to diocesan leaders to help persuade them that creation care is in their interest, part of the work of the church. Provide resources to help them weave this into their current work and persuade colleagues of its significance.

CASE STUDY:

Quoting the Popes

A speaker gave two talks within months of each other, one to a group he sensed was politically liberal, the other to a more conservative group. The speaker knew that both groups would expect him to use quotes from Pope Francis. Instead, the speaker used quotes from Benedict XVI — without saying who they were from at first. The speaker's goal was to help his audiences see the fullness of church teachings and the unity between Benedict XVI and Pope Francis.

“We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature.”

–Pope Francis, Laudato Si’

GOAL TWO

Connecting the cries of the earth & the poor



Use clear and direct language to connect science and faith

In his encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, Benedict XVI connected ecology with other aspects of Catholic social teaching.

“Our duties towards the environment are linked to our duties towards the human person,” Benedict XVI wrote. “It would be wrong to uphold one set of duties while trampling on the other. Herein lies a grave contradiction in our mentality and practice today: one which demeans the person, disrupts the environment, and damages society.”

The Catholic Church brings a distinct perspective to discussions about climate change by highlighting its moral dimensions and calling attention to the needs of the most vulnerable among us.

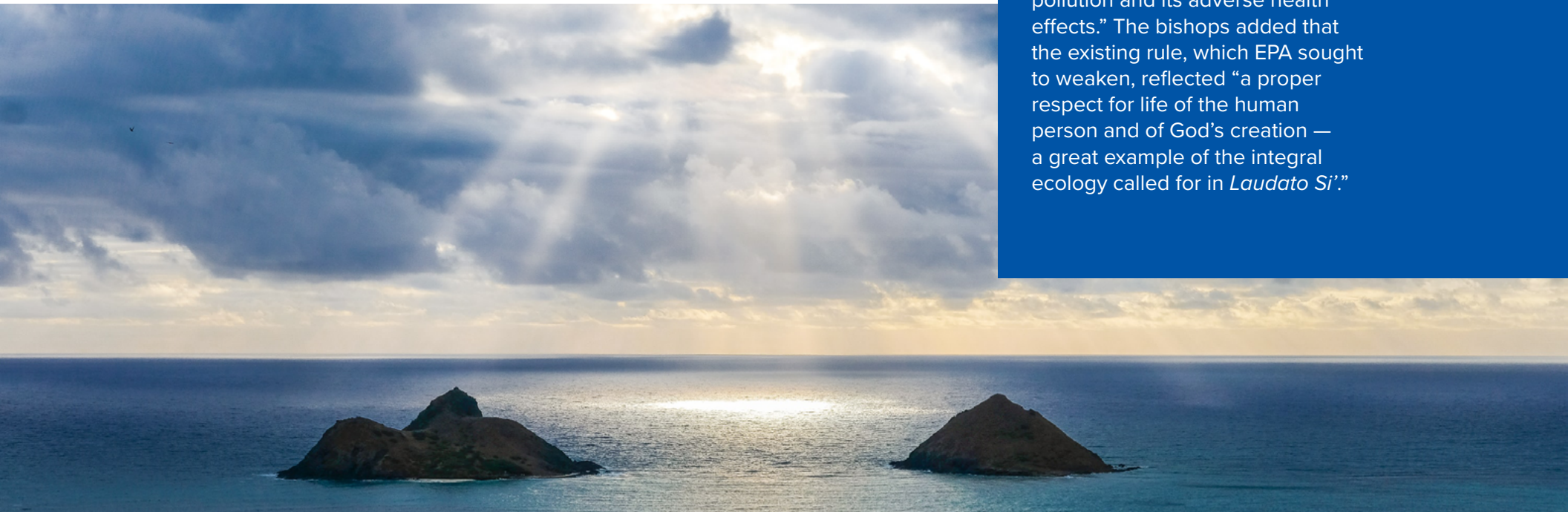
We are all called to create a safe, healthy, and beautiful place for our children and future generations. Here, the concept of the “common good” comes into play. The environment is a common good. Its air, water, and ecosystems belong to all people and must be offered unsullied to those generations not yet born. In order to call attention to these systemic issues and enact change, we must stand in solidarity with those most impacted by environmental issues.

CASE STUDY:

When bishops write to the EPA

When the Environmental Protection Agency proposed a new rule to stop regulating mercury and other hazardous air pollutants emitted by power plants, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops framed their response using both science and spirituality.

The bishops called the proposed rule “troubling since it is well-documented that pregnant mothers and their unborn children are the most sensitive to mercury pollution and its adverse health effects.” The bishops added that the existing rule, which EPA sought to weaken, reflected “a proper respect for life of the human person and of God’s creation — a great example of the integral ecology called for in *Laudato Si’*.”



“Everyone’s talents and involvement are needed to redress the damage caused by human abuse of God’s creation.”

–Southern African Catholic Bishops’ Conference,
Pastoral Statement on the Environmental Crisis (5 September 1999).

GOAL THREE

Engaging bishops & other Catholic leaders



How to engage a bishop

Bishops have staff — clerical and lay — that assist with the large numbers of correspondence that the bishop receives. Before reaching out to your diocese, get to know its structure. Learn the names of the staff, which are often listed on diocesan websites. If you have an idea for an opinion piece for diocesan media, ask for advice from others who have worked with the diocese. Find out who handles submissions and what the guidelines are in terms of word count, etc.

Better yet, call the diocesan offices directly. In *Laudato Si'* and elsewhere Pope Francis champions cultures of encounter and stresses the need for dialogue. Such dialogue can begin with picking up your phone and calling the bishop's office. The administrative staff member who answers will usually

help you in answering questions and providing the names and contact info for diocesan staff.

Your bishop may not yet prioritize ecological issues, but that does not mean that they are not tasked to teach and affirm the importance of Creation Care. Most dioceses should have some program — whether large or small — that addresses environmental issues.

When proposing that the bishop or diocesan staff speak and act more on issues of ecological protection, frame the conversation or letter around issues that they often stress — the issues that are important to them.

If your bishop stresses human life issues such as the rights of the unborn, frame your communications with the human life impacts — especially to the unborn — of ecological issues.

If your bishop stresses catechesis and religious education, frame your communications around the theological underpinnings of creation care. Discuss how engaging ecological issues can help others — particularly young people who see climate change as an existential crisis — learn about and love the Catholic faith and its teachings. Suggest that the diocese can offer moments of catechesis and evangelization if it offers a series on *Laudato Si'* and other papal and episcopal documents on creation.

If at first you don't succeed, keep trying. Attend events that are important to your bishop and enable him to get to know you as someone who is interested in what he's interested in. Keep writing letters, especially if you're not asking for anything.





Starting a creation care program in your diocese

If your diocese does not have a large creation care program — or one at all — and you wish to change that, then the following tips might help:

In getting to know the diocesan structure, learn about the people working on ecological issues. Learn from them why ecological issues are not prioritized. You may discover that staff and even the bishop may wish to do more to engage the ecological issue but need assistance.

Rather than frame your messages as a rebuke, offer to help. This help could be as simple as sending resources provided for the diocesan website. It could be volunteering to write an essay for the diocesan newspaper or giving a talk. Such small steps may lead to bigger and better engagement.

CASE STUDY:

Being a squeaky wheel

“It was no secret that I was passionate about creation care when I started working in the communication office at a diocese. One day the bishop asked me if I would lead a project focusing on the message of *Laudato Si'*. The reason he had decided this was an important teaching to cover was because many parishioners from across the diocese had repeatedly contacted and met with him asking him to express a stronger focus on creation care. If there is something you want to see from your parish or diocese, ask and ask again, and get others to ask as well. And if there is something about which you are passionate and informed, make sure your church leaders know so that they will come to you when they need your help.”

“Unfortunately, if we scan the regions of our planet, we immediately see that humanity has disappointed God’s expectations...We must therefore encourage and support the ‘ecological conversion’ which in recent decades has made humanity more sensitive to the catastrophe to which it has been heading.”

–Saint John Paul II, General Audience, 2001

GOAL FOUR

Adopting sustainable lifestyles



Whether you call it green living, simple living, or living out *Laudato Si'* – an “ecological conversion” can inspire us to change the ways we buy and consume food, clothing and shelter, how we use energy, and how to make our way around the world.

“More than in ideas or concepts as such, I am interested in how such a spirituality can motivate us to a more passionate concern for the protection of our world,” Pope Francis writes in *Laudato Si'*. “A commitment this lofty cannot be sustained by doctrine alone, without a spirituality capable of inspiring us.”

You may want to focus on how our way of life impacts people who are poor, weak or vulnerable. Inaction and inadequate or misguided responses to climate change will likely place even greater burdens on people who are already suffering.

The power of stories

The justice and peace coordinator of the Archdiocese of Portland told the Catholic Sentinel of a parish worker attempting to live without waste or plastic. The paper decided to write a story and a reporter met Amanda Jewett at her apartment, where she showed a worm bin, linen produce bags, glass storage jars and homemade soap.

Jewett explained that she was inspired by *Laudato Si'*, a copy of which sat on her coffee table. The reporter also took a photo of Jewett dipping her hands into the soil and worms, bringing up a glorious mess. The headline “Zero Waste Woman” gave a superhero quality to the story that played well on social media.

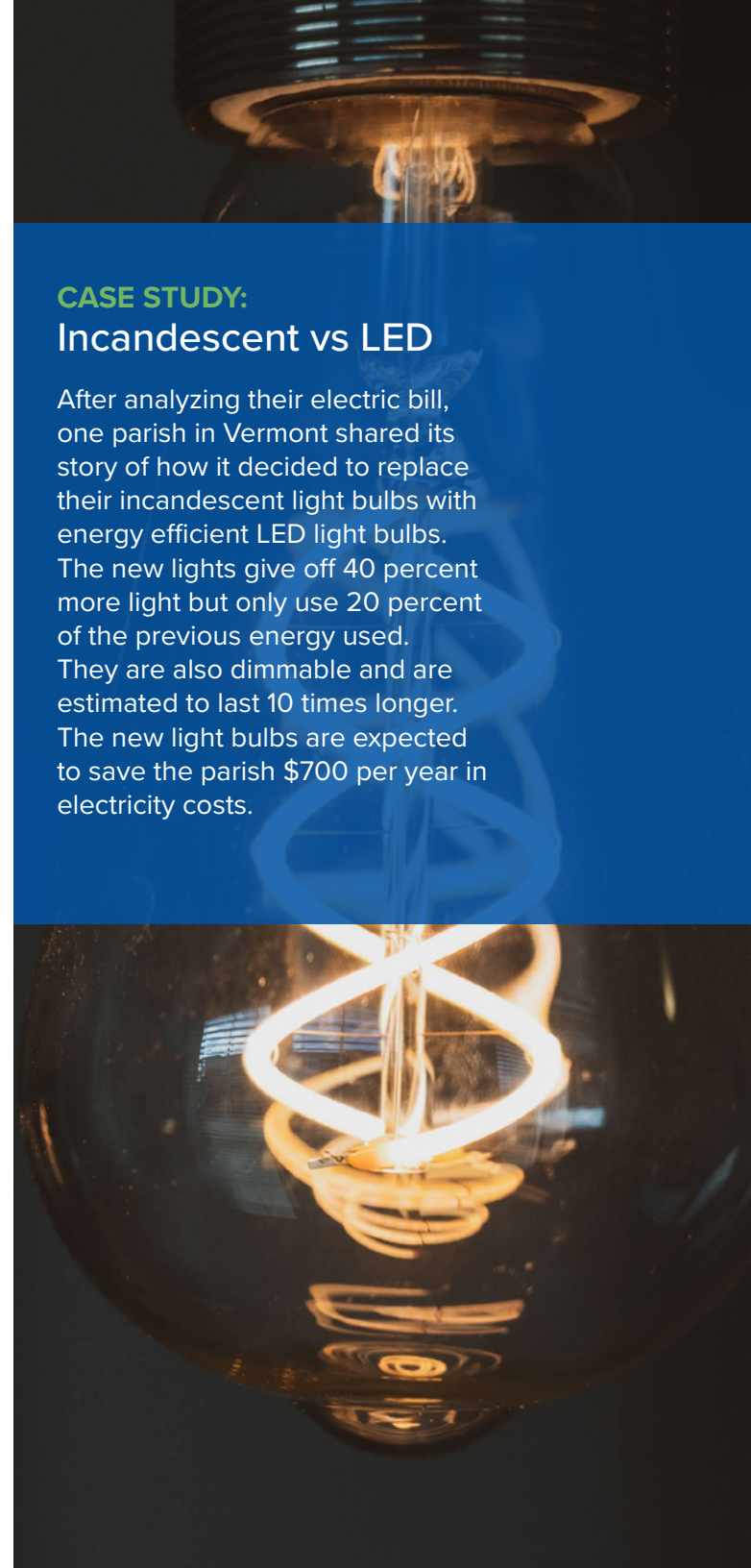
After reading an article about a parish in the Midwest introducing recycling and composting, another parish was inspired to do the same during its annual fundraising dinner. That in turn led several people to “green” their own homes and lifestyles as well. One success story led to another, thanks to a news article.

Don't forget the finances

There is a misconception that living sustainably is expensive, but this is not true. Do the math and give examples to persuade others of impact. Groups like Catholic Energies employ experts to help you take advantage of new tax breaks to make projects like installing solar panels both environmentally sustainable and economically profitable.

CASE STUDY: Incandescent vs LED

After analyzing their electric bill, one parish in Vermont shared its story of how it decided to replace their incandescent light bulbs with energy efficient LED light bulbs. The new lights give off 40 percent more light but only use 20 percent of the previous energy used. They are also dimmable and are estimated to last 10 times longer. The new light bulbs are expected to save the parish \$700 per year in electricity costs.



“The relationship between a good aesthetic education and the maintenance of a healthy environment cannot be overlooked.”

–Pope St. John Paul II, World Day of Peace, 1990

GOAL FIVE

Helping Catholic schools teach ecological education



Whether you are working with kindergarten teachers, college faculty, high school principals or parents, each requires carefully crafted language. The more ready-made materials you can provide — sample curricula, prayer cards, letter templates — the easier you will make it for educators to adopt *Laudato Si'* into their work. Here are a few ideas:

K-8 Educators

Share sample lesson plans, appropriate to student ages. For example, see [Catholic Environmental Education Curriculum for Grades K-2](#).

Link classroom conversations to local service opportunities for students. Create a draft letter that schools can use to send home to parents explaining why the school is teaching creation care. Encourage schools to launch student contests: coloring, posters, essays, nature photography or nature video. Classes can invite student households to compete in reducing electricity or water usage from the start of school until Earth Day.

High School Educators

Provide schools with examples of success. For instance, [Bishop O'Dowd High School](#) in Oakland, California has created a 5,000-square-foot Center for Environmental Studies and a 4-acre Living Lab. Salpointe Catholic High School in Tucson, Arizona has implemented a schoolwide *Laudato Si'* curriculum. It includes lessons for classes across all disciplines and grade levels, and replication is encouraged: <https://www.laudato-si-for-all.com>

Pastors and Parish Education Staff

Offer creation care homily aids for school Masses on creation care. Create prayer cards for a *Laudato Si'* week. Give curriculum kits to diocesan communications directors and schools superintendents.

CASE STUDY:

Hands-on learning

At St. Rose School in Portland, Oregon students embrace the goal of becoming globally aware people who care for the earth's resources. In preparation for the school's Earth Day prayer service, students study the resourcefulness of God's creatures — how birds create nests out of found materials. Students in preschool through eighth grade collected manmade materials headed for the landfill and used them to instead create more than 200 nests. The display was a stark reminder and way to communicate to the public about animals' resourcefulness, juxtaposed with the wastefulness of humans.



“Time is running out! Deliberations must go beyond a mere exploration of what can be done and concentrate on what needs to be done, starting today. We do not have the luxury of waiting for others to step forward or prioritizing short-term economic benefits.”

–Pope Francis

GOAL SIX

**Encouraging ecological
economics**



There are many ways to support and communicate about ecological economics. For example, divestment reflects the belief that, just as Catholics should not invest in nuclear weapons or abortifacients, neither should they provide financial support for companies involved in the extraction or sale of fossil fuels.

In a [2020 guide on implementing Laudato Si'](#), the Vatican recommends fossil fuel divestment and reinvestment in sustainability. To date, about 250 Catholic institutions around the world have committed to divestment.

Explore the particulars of an organization's form of engagement in this or other forms of more ecological economics. Are they involved in shareholder initiatives? Are they able to leverage labor practices? Or sustainable production of products? Can they point to examples of how their engagement has influenced a company's behavior regarding fossil fuel extraction, promotion or sale?

Don't frame your conversation as an either-or choice, which often encourages debate rather than dialogue. Rather, show how various options can serve the common good — in some cases, by using the church's financial capital to

help transition our economy from one powered by fossil fuels to one that uses renewable resources, or supporting better labor practices and sustainable production of goods.

In the case of investments, three general options all come with positives to help achieve that end: engagement, impact investing, and divestment.

Divestment

A wide range of Catholic institutions — universities, hospital systems, companies and dioceses — are faced with decisions about how best to live up to the values of Catholic Social Teaching when it comes to the climate crisis. These are complicated decisions, and it's wise to acknowledge that at the outset of any communications about them. Communication about financial decisions — such as where to invest parish, diocesan, or institutional funds — involves a wide array of information and expertise.

When discussing how to ethically invest, or disinvest, the topic becomes even more complex. After all, investments are used by the church to protect retirement payments, assist with educating seminarians, and to support a wide range of charitable works. At the same

time, the ways we generate and use our funding also send messages and can have an impact on corporate decision making.

Engagement

Engagement is a strategy rooted in the belief that an institution can be more effective by trying to persuade and work with oil, gas, and coal companies rather than by divesting and disengaging with such firms. Institutions that pursue the engagement strategy are often involved with share-holder initiatives urging or requiring companies to reduce their carbon footprint and lessen the harm their operations do to the environment.

Among the arguments made by groups favoring engagement over divestment is that fossil fuel stocks sold by a divesting organization will simply be purchased by others, thus minimizing the impact of divestment. Engagement advocates point to the [recent success of Catholic shareholder activists](#) in pressuring fossil fuel companies to address their role in creating the climate crisis.

Impact investing

Impact investing is the act of purposefully making investments that help achieve certain social and

environmental benefits while generating financial returns. This approach provides Catholics with the opportunity to grow personal and organizational resources with investments that reflect church teaching areas such as the climate crisis, racial equity, and a wide range of social justice issues.

How to talk about complicated financial choices

Research your audience before you begin formulating your approach. What values do they hold? What are their financial goals? Who in the institution is making the final financial and investment choices? Once you know a little about all this, you can tailor your message by showing examples of how similar organizations have benefited from the approach that you seek to encourage.

Don't be deterred by the complexities of finance. Your goal is to communicate with honesty. If you're not a Certified Public Accountant and you're communicating with someone who is, acknowledge that they have a level of professional expertise that you do not. This builds credibility.

You may not be an investment expert or a moral theologian, but you can still have an opinion — just make sure that you can back it up!

Follow the model given to us by St. Thomas Aquinas: Provide an argument for one approach, followed by the arguments against it, and then synthesize both the arguments for and against various approaches. There's a benefit to demonstrating that you're conversant and even sympathetic with all sides of an argument. This is a way to build credibility by showing your audience that you've done your homework.

CASE STUDY:

The domino effect of publicly divesting

Ahead of Earth Day on April 22, 2023, 31 faith-based organizations announced that they are ending financial investments in fossil fuels. The religious bodies divesting from coal, oil and gas companies included 13 Catholic institutions from seven countries. Overall, the faith organizations manage more than \$2 billion in total assets, according to organizers of the joint announcement. Publicizing divestment decisions helped lead to a domino effect of more faith groups taking this step.



“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.”

–United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2001

GOAL SEVEN

Building community resilience & empowerment



Christians have a duty to work for the common good in the world of politics, Pope Francis has said, echoing similar remarks by his predecessors. In fact, Francis said, engaging in politics can be “one of the highest forms of charity.”

“Do I as a Catholic watch from my balcony?” the Pope asked. “No, you can’t watch from the balcony. Get right in there!”

Form networks to effect change

It’s a political truism: networks of people committed to a cause are far more effective than individual efforts. Form lay networks of committed policy advocates for creation care/ecological justice.

For example, through [Maryland Catholics for Our Common Home](#), parishioners from the Washington D.C., Baltimore, and Wilmington dioceses have lobbied legislative bodies with great success.

Together, MCCCH took the following actions in 2023:

- Submitted written testimony on 19 bills at 18 different hearings;
- visited 21 different legislative offices
- Circulated a petition supported by Catholics from 34 different parishes and religious communities across the state
- Sent 118 targeted emails of support in the last days of the legislative session

These actions helped accomplish a number of ecological goals. Of the ten bills prioritized by Maryland Catholics for Our Common Home, six will be signed into law this year. The new measures include: improving access to public transportation for lower-income people; reforming Maryland’s energy efficiency program to direct more resources to low-income people; cleaning up emissions from heavy trucks, which affect low-income communities; strictly limiting the presence of toxic so-called “forever chemicals” in pesticides; and promoting the construction of offshore wind energy farms to deliver clean electricity to Maryland.





Quote church leaders and documents

It's important to let political leaders know that your advocacy is supported and inspired by your Catholic faith, which some of them may share. Cite bishops' documents as encouragement for Catholics to get involved and share talks by Catholic leaders that frame political advocacy as acts of faith.

For example, Bishop Robert McElroy of San Diego delivered an impassioned talk on the climate crisis, the threats of deforestation and the use of fossil fuels. He encouraged Catholics to support the [Energy Innovation and Dividend Act](#), promoted by Citizens Climate Lobby.

CASE STUDY:

'Catholics are still in'

When former President Donald Trump announced that the United States would withdraw from the Paris Agreement, Catholic Climate Covenant and its member organizations sprung into action. They quickly wrote and circulated a petition eventually signed by more than 800 Catholic institutions, archdiocese, dioceses, parishes, healthcare systems, colleges, universities and religious communities.

"As Catholic communities, organizations, and institutions in the United States, we join with state, tribal, and local governments, as well as businesses, financial institutions, and other faith organizations, to declare that we are still in on actions that meet the climate goals outlined in the Paris Agreement," read the beginning of the Catholic Climate Declaration.

The joint effort was successful in showing a united Catholic front and recruiting thousands of Catholics to the cause.



Additional Resources

Webinar: Communicating Climate Change to People of Faith

Bulletin blurbs

Prayers

Teaching: Creation care is Pro-life

Teaching: 10 myths about caring for creation

Homily messages integrating Laudato Si' and creation

Resources to reduce our environmental impact

Socially responsible investment guidelines

How to write letters to the editor and op-eds



LAUDATO SI'

AND THE U.S. CATHOLIC CHURCH

A Conference Series on Our Common Home

