## Opening Prayer Service

## Respect for God’s Creation

#### The Story of Creation: Genesis 1

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

*Six people of different ages (a family and/or mixed group) process to the front of the room, each with a lighted candle. (Each person should have a pillar candle.) They place their candles on the prayer table.*

And God said, “Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

*Two people process to the front with two clear bowls or pitchers of water and place them on the prayer table.*

And God said, “Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. Then God said, Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it. And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

*Six people process to the front with a variety of plants, trees, and bowls of fresh vegetables and fruit, and place them on the prayer table.*

And God said, “Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth.” And it was so. God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

*Two people, one holding a large picture or drawing of the sun and the other of the moon, process forward and place the two pictures on the prayer table.*

And God said, “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.” So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.” And it was so. God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

*At least six children process to the front, each holding one large stuffed animal to represent the living creations of the earth. They place them on or around the prayer table.*

Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

So God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

*At least six people of different ages, from children through older adults, process to the front of the room and stand around the prayer table.*

God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” God said, “See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

#### Intergenerational Storytelling & Faith-Sharing

1. What is one of your favorite natural objects/places (e.g., mountains, ocean/lake, forest, sunrise/sunset) or living creature (animal, fish)?
2. Share a story of a time when you enjoyed or were amazed by creation (e.g., visiting a national park, at the ocean).
3. When have you experienced God in nature? Do you experience God in the vastness of the ocean, the peace of a forest, the intricacy of a spider’s web, etc.? How has the natural world made you more aware or appreciative of God? How does nature help you to understand the character of God?

#### Images of Creation: Psalm 104

Women and Girls:

Bless the Lord, O my soul.
   O Lord my God, you are very great.
You are clothed with honor and majesty,
   wrapped in light as with a garment.
You stretch out the heavens like a tent,
   you set the beams of your chambers on the waters,
you make the clouds your chariot,
   you ride on the wings of the wind,
you make the winds your messengers,
   fire and flame your ministers.

Men and Boys:

You set the earth on its foundations,
   so that it shall never be shaken.
You cover it with the deep as with a garment;
   the waters stood above the mountains.
At your rebuke they flee;
   at the sound of your thunder they take to flight.
They rose up to the mountains, ran down to the valleys
   to the place that you appointed for them.
You set a boundary that they may not pass,
   so that they might not again cover the earth.

Women and Girls:

You make springs gush forth in the valleys;
   they flow between the hills,
giving drink to every wild animal;
   the wild asses quench their thirst.
By the streams the birds of the air have their habitation;
   they sing among the branches.
From your lofty abode you water the mountains;
   the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work.

Men and Boys:

You cause the grass to grow for the cattle,
   and plants for people to use,
to bring forth food from the earth,
   and wine to gladden the human heart,
oil to make the face shine,
   and bread to strengthen the human heart. `
The trees of the Lord are watered abundantly,
   the cedars of Lebanon that he planted.
In them the birds build their nests;
   the stork has its home in the fir trees.
The high mountains are for the wild goats;
   the rocks are a refuge for the coneys.
You have made the moon to mark the seasons;
   the sun knows its time for setting.
You make darkness, and it is night,
   when all the animals of the forest come creeping out.
The young lions roar for their prey,
   seeking their food from God.
When the sun rises, they withdraw
   and lie down in their dens.
People go out to their work
   and to their labor until the evening.

Women and Girls:

O Lord, how manifold are your works!
   In wisdom you have made them all;
   the earth is full of your creatures.
Yonder is the sea, great and wide,
   creeping things innumerable are there,
   living things both small and great.
There go the ships,
   and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it.

Men and Boys:

These all look to you
   to give them their food in due season;
when you give to them, they gather it up;
   when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.
When you hide your face, they are dismayed;
   when you take away their breath, they die
   and return to their dust.
When you send forth your spirit, they are created;
   and you renew the face of the ground.

All:

May the glory of the Lord endure for ever;
   may the Lord rejoice in his works—
who looks on the earth and it trembles,
   who touches the mountains and they smoke.
I will sing to the Lord as long as I live;
   I will sing praise to my God while I have being.
May my meditation be pleasing to him,
   for I rejoice in the Lord.
Let sinners be consumed from the earth,
   and let the wicked be no more.
Bless the Lord, O my soul.
Praise the Lord!

#### Intergenerational Storytelling & Faith-Sharing

How would the world be different if everyone believed that every person, every animal, every plant, every rock, everything was specially hand-crafted by a loving God? Does such a belief challenge you?

#### Closing Prayer

We join with God’s creation and with each other

To bring new life to the land,

To restore the waters,

To refresh the air.

We join with God’s creation and with each other

To renew the forests,

To care for the plants,

To protect the creatures.

We join with God’s creation and with each other

To celebrate the seas,

To rejoice in the sunlight.

To sing the song of the stars.

We join with God’s creation and with each other

To recreate the human community,

To promote justice and peace,

To remember our children.

We celebrate God’s creation. Amen.

## Handout #2.

## How Environmentally Friendly Are You?

How environmentally friendly are your family and home today? Use the following twenty items to determine several of the ways your family has an impact on the environment. Circle the item hat is true about your family’s practices or about your home.

1. We recycle cans.
2. We recycle bottles.
3. We recycle magazines and newspapers.
4. We use public transportation, walk, bicycle, or carpool to work or school.
5. We take short showers (an average of all family members).
6. We have installed water saving devices in our home, e.g., a low-flow shower head or a low-flow toilet (or toilet dam to reduce the amount of water in every flush).
7. We have purchased energy-efficient appliances.
8. We have replaced standard light bulbs with energy-efficient lights.
9. We eat meat at dinner less than three times per week.
10. We have insulated our house to conserve energy.
11. We turn down the thermostat in winter (68 degrees or lower).
12. We set the air conditioner to use less energy in the summer.
13. We turn off the lights and other appliances when out of the room or house.
14. We turn off water while brushing teeth, shaving, washing dishes, and so forth.
15. We have reduced or eliminated the use of pesticides in our garden and on our lawn.
16. We purchase organic grown fruits, vegetables, and other foods which do not use pesticides.
17. We purchase products that are made from recycled materials and from companies that produce environment-friendly products.

#### How did you do?

* If you checked 15 or more items, you are in the environment-friendly hall of fame.
* If you checked 11-15 items, you are making progress in becoming environment-friendly, so identify what areas you need to improve next.
* If you checked 6-10 items, you have begun to become environment-friendly, but there are lots of improvements you can make.
* If you check under 5 items, you haven’t begun to think about the environmental impact your family alone has on the environment. You have lots of work to do.

#### Reflection

* How is your family living environment-friendly practices? Which practices are strengths in your home?
* What more could you do as a family? Where do you see improvement?

## Handout #3.

## Speaking for God’s Creation

#### I speak for the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

(Name the animal, plant, or other part of God’s creation that you love and want to protect.)

#### What It’s Like to Be Me:

(Describe your size and shape, how you move, how you sound or smell or feel.)

#### What Some People Have Done to Me:

(Describe how people have misused or hurt you.)

#### Why I’m So Special:

(What is it that people love about you? How do you make life better for humans?)

#### How I Want You to Treat Me from Now On:

(Tell the humans how you want them to treat you; be specific.)

## Handout #4.

## Our Impact on God’s Creation

#### 1. How do human beings abuse God’s creation? Identify examples in the following categories:

a. As individuals. . .

b. As families. . .

c. As businesses, companies, factories. . .

d. As a nation. . .

#### 2. Why are we seeing the degradation of God’s creation? What are the factors that contribute to the abuse of God’s creation?

#### 3. What is your biggest fear or sadness concerning the abuse of God’s creation?

## Handout #5.

## Analyzing Our Impact on God’s Creation

What impact do we as individuals, as families, as businesses, and as a nation make on God’s creation? Consider the following impact statements based on the best research from scientists and researchers.

#### Did You Know?

* People in the “developed” countries of the North, like the U.S. and the countries of Western Europe, make up less than 1/4th of the world’s population but consume 80% of the world’s resources.
* America consumes more of the world’s gasoline and more paper, steel, aluminum, energy, water, and meat per person than any other country on the planet.
* The average American produces twice as much garbage as the average European. Each individual American discards nearly a ton of trash per year.
* The U.S. alone produces and consumes almost one-third of the world’s paper, despite having just 5 percent of the world’s population and 6 percent of its forest cover.
* Each year U.S. energy use pours more than 4.58 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. This means that each person in the U.S. contributes an average of 20 tons a year; five times more than the per-capita average for the world as a whole.
* Recent scientific estimates indicate that at least four additional planets would be needed if each of the planet’s 7 billion inhabitants consumed at the level of the average American.

We know that our actions have an impact on God’s creation. Explore how our use of energy, water, and the forests, along with the loss of biodiversity, affects God’s creation.

#### Energy

Energy is integral to virtually every aspect of life. It is hard to imagine life without it. Yet many of our most serious threats to clean air, clean water, and healthy ecosystems stem from humans’ energy use. The atmosphere knows no boundaries. Polluting the air in one place can cause environmental and health problems on the other side of the world.

**Consider the following…**

* Burning fossil fuels, which produce carbon dioxide (CO2), is one factor that contributes to the warming of the earth by trapping more heat from the sun in our atmosphere. Emissions from cars, factories and power plants are contributing to this warming.
* The earth has warmed about 1 degree F. since the middle of the last century. Between 1901 and 2018, the globally averaged sea level rose by 15–25 cm (6–10 in). 2500 scientists who are part of ICCO (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) report that global warming triggers more extreme weather, floods, and droughts that damage croplands and forests, cause deadly heat waves and a rise in the sea level that would flood coastal areas, and severely affect human, animal and plant health and survival.
* The Arctic is warming almost four times as fast as the rest of the planet because of a build-up of heat-trapping gases. It is possible that the Arctic Ocean will become almost ice-free in the summertime by the end of the 21st century. Current thawing of Arctic ice is affecting the habitat of animals such as polar bears and seals.
* Acid rain and mercury pollution from coal power plants damage forests, wildlife, and human health. A nuclear power plant produces radioactive wastes that can poison the environment for thousands of years.
* Air pollution may aggravate or even causes asthma and other respiratory diseases. Adverse pregnancy outcomes such as stillbirths and low birth weights have also been associated with air pollution.
* Urban air pollution, acid rain, contamination by toxic chemicals, depletion of the stratospheric ozone layer and changes in the global climatic system are all important environmental threats to ecosystems and human well-being.
* In the U.S., about 80 per cent of our energy is produced from fossil fuels.
* The greatest increase in energy use has occurred in transportation, where about 90 per cent of the energy consumed is derived from petroleum.

#### Water

Pure water is essential for all life on Earth. What we do to our water, we do to ourselves.

A fixed amount of water exists on and around the Earth. Although 70% of the Earth is water, most of it is not fit to drink. Only a tiny fraction of the Earth’s water is fresh, clean, and accessible for human use. We are putting this essential resource in serious danger. The world’s groundwater resources are becoming polluted and depleted. In addition, those who have access to the most water are wasting vast amounts of it.

**Consider the following…**

* Groundwater levels have reached an all-time low on every continent. With water tables falling throughout the world, the availability of water is among the most challenging resource issues of the 21st century.
* Human and industrial waste, urban runoff, agricultural fertilizers, sewage, heavy metals, and pesticides poison our oceans and contaminate our rivers and groundwater.
* The changing climate in a warming world is likely to affect our supply of freshwater resources. Scientists predict that severe weather events will become more frequent, bringing increased flooding in wet regions while causing more frequent and severe droughts in drier areas.
* Burning fossil fuels to produce energy causes acid rain that contaminates our waterways.

#### Forests

Forests play a vital role in our planet’s natural systems. They purify our air, protect our water and soil, and provide essential habitat for millions of animals and plants. Rain forests are home to about half of the Earth’s 5 to 10 million plant and animal species. When we destroy the rain forests, we are wiping out the guardians of the planet’s freshwater resources and the garden that gives life to medicinal plants, foods, and many other products.

**Consider the following…**

* A majority of forest loss is caused by human activity. The most common causes of forest loss are logging, conversion of forest habitat to agriculture, and development schemes that promote forest habitat loss.
* About 15 billion trees are cut down every year. Globally we deforest around ten million hectares of forest every year. That's an area the size of Portugal every year. Around half of this deforestation is offset by regrowing forests, so overall we lose around five million hectares each year.
* The world has lost about half of its original forest cover since pre-agricultural times. The main threats to forests come from commercial logging, land clearing (for infrastructure, mining, farms, shopping malls and other development), and the building of roads for logging and mining.
* Deforestation affects the quality of water, air and soil. It also destroys the habitat of species that live in the forest. By failing to protect our forests, we are losing a reliable ally in the struggle with global warming, floods, droughts and soil erosion.

#### Biodiversity

Biodiversity is the variety of life in all its forms, levels, and combinations. It includes ecosystem

diversity, species diversity, and genetic diversity. Certain estimates put the number of species on Earth at a possible 14 million. Of these, only about 1.75 million plants, animals and microorganisms have been identified and named. The greatest diversity of biological life is in

tropical forest ecosystems. These ecosystems may contain up to 90 per cent of the biodiversity of the entire planet, although these forest regions cover less than 10 per cent of the Earth’s surface. For example, in one fifteen-hectare section of the Borneo rain forest approximately 700 trees species have been identified. This is equivalent to the total number of tree species in all of North America.

**Consider the following…**

* Biodiversity loss can result from human population growth coupled with unsustainable patterns of consumption, increased production of waste and pollutants, urban development, international conflict, and continued inequity in the distribution of wealth and resources.
* Over the past several decades, the decline and extinction of species have emerged as major environmental issues. The current rate of extinction is many times higher than the “background” rate, which is the rate that has prevailed over long periods of geological time. Estimates based on fossil records suggest that the background extinction rate for mammals and birds has been one species lost every 500-1,000 years. By comparison, 58 fish species and one mammal species have been recorded as extinct since 1970. Assessments by BirdLife International indicate that nine bird species have become extinct during this period. If these rates were to be used as indicators, it would imply that species extinction is taking place at an astonishing rate that is approximately 45,000 times greater than the background rate!

Humanity is far more than a steward of nature. We are interdependent with the natural world. Our survival can therefore not be separated from that of other species on Earth.

## A Concluding Reflection from Laudato Si’ (On Care for Our Common Home), Pope Francis:

If we approach nature and the environment without…openness to awe and wonder, if we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world, our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs. By contrast, if we feel intimately united with all that exists, then sobriety and care will well up spontaneously. (#11)

There is a growing sensitivity to the environment and the need to protect nature, along with a growing concern, both genuine and distressing, for what is happening to our planet… Our goal is not to amass information or to satisfy curiosity, but rather to become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it. (#19)

The human environment and the natural environment deteriorate together; we cannot adequately combat environmental degradation unless we attend to causes related to human and social degradation. In fact, the deterioration of the environment and of society affects the most vulnerable people on the planet… The impact of present imbalances is also seen in the premature death of many of the poor. (#48)

We have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor. (#49)

When nature is viewed solely as a source of profit and gain, this has serious consequences for society. This… has engendered immense inequality, injustice and acts of violence against the majority of humanity, since resources end up in the hands of the first comer or the most powerful: the winner takes all. Completely at odds with this model are the ideals of harmony, justice, fraternity and peace as proposed by Jesus. (#82)

Along with the importance of little everyday gestures, social love moves us to devise larger strategies to halt environmental degradation and to encourage a “culture of care” which permeates all of society. When we feel that God is calling us to intervene with others in these social dynamics, we should realize that this too is part of our spirituality, which is an exercise of charity and, as such, matures and sanctifies us. (#231)

Many things have to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change. (#202)

All is not lost. Human beings… are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start… and [embarking] on new paths to authentic freedom. (#205)

A change in lifestyle could bring healthy pressure to bear on those who wield political, economic and social power. This is what consumer movements accomplish by boycotting certain products. They prove successful in changing the way businesses operate, forcing them to consider their environmental footprint and their patterns of production… This shows us the great need for a sense of social responsibility on the part of consumers. “Purchasing is always a moral – and not simply economic – act.” Today, in a word, “the issue of environmental degradation challenges us to examine our lifestyle”. (#206)

[Concern for others and the natural environment attunes us to] the moral imperative of assessing the impact of our every action and personal decision on the world around us. If we can overcome individualism, we will truly be able to develop a different lifestyle and bring about significant changes in society. An awareness of the gravity of today’s cultural and ecological crisis must be translated into new habits. (#208-209)

I would like to offer Christians a few suggestions for an ecological spirituality grounded in the convictions of our faith, since the teachings of the Gospel have direct consequences for our way of thinking, feeling and living. 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. (#216)

[T]he ecological crisis is also a summons to profound interior conversion…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. (#217)

## Handout #6.

## The Bible Teaches . . . Care for God’s Creation

### Psalm 104

Bless the Lord, O my soul.
   O Lord my God, you are very great.
You are clothed with honor and majesty,
   wrapped in light as with a garment.
You stretch out the heavens like a tent,
   you set the beams of your chambers on the waters,
you make the clouds your chariot,
   you ride on the wings of the wind,
you make the winds your messengers,
   fire and flame your ministers.

You set the earth on its foundations,
   so that it shall never be shaken.
You cover it with the deep as with a garment;
   the waters stood above the mountains.
At your rebuke they flee;
   at the sound of your thunder they take to flight.
They rose up to the mountains, ran down to the valleys
   to the place that you appointed for them.
You set a boundary that they may not pass,
   so that they might not again cover the earth.

You make springs gush forth in the valleys;
   they flow between the hills,
giving drink to every wild animal;
   the wild asses quench their thirst.
By the streams the birds of the air have their habitation;
   they sing among the branches.
From your lofty abode you water the mountains;
   the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work.

You cause the grass to grow for the cattle,
   and plants for people to use,
to bring forth food from the earth,
   and wine to gladden the human heart,
oil to make the face shine,
   and bread to strengthen the human heart.
The trees of the Lord are watered abundantly,
   the cedars of Lebanon that he planted.
In them the birds build their nests;
   the stork has its home in the fir trees.
The high mountains are for the wild goats;
   the rocks are a refuge for the coneys.
You have made the moon to mark the seasons;
   the sun knows its time for setting.
You make darkness, and it is night,
   when all the animals of the forest come creeping out.
The young lions roar for their prey,
   seeking their food from God.
When the sun rises, they withdraw
   and lie down in their dens.
People go out to their work
   and to their labor until the evening.

O Lord, how manifold are your works!
   In wisdom you have made them all;
   the earth is full of your creatures.
Yonder is the sea, great and wide,
   creeping things innumerable are there,
   living things both small and great.
There go the ships,
   and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it.

These all look to you
   to give them their food in due season;
when you give to them, they gather it up;
   when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.
When you hide your face, they are dismayed;
   when you take away their breath, they die
   and return to their dust.
When you send forth your spirit, they are created;
   and you renew the face of the ground.

May the glory of the Lord endure for ever;
   may the Lord rejoice in his works—
who looks on the earth and it trembles,
   who touches the mountains and they smoke.
I will sing to the Lord as long as I live;
   I will sing praise to my God while I have being.
May my meditation be pleasing to him,
   for I rejoice in the Lord.
Let sinners be consumed from the earth,
   and let the wicked be no more.
Bless the Lord, O my soul.
Praise the Lord!

### Psalm 148

Praise the Lord!
Praise the Lord from the heavens;
   praise him in the heights!
Praise him, all his angels;
   praise him, all his host!

Praise him, sun and moon;
   praise him, all you shining stars!
Praise him, you highest heavens,
   and you waters above the heavens!

Let them praise the name of the Lord,
   for he commanded and they were created.
He established them for ever and ever;
   he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed.

Praise the Lord from the earth,
   you sea monsters and all deeps,
fire and hail, snow and frost,
   stormy wind fulfilling his command!

Mountains and all hills,
   fruit trees and all cedars!
Wild animals and all cattle,
   creeping things and flying birds!

Kings of the earth and all peoples,
   princes and all rulers of the earth!
Young men and women alike,
   old and young together!

Let them praise the name of the Lord,
   for his name alone is exalted;
   his glory is above earth and heaven.
He has raised up a horn for his people,
   praise for all his faithful,
   for the people of Israel who are close to him.
Praise the Lord!

## Handout #7.

## The Church Teaches . . . Care for God’s Creation

1

Christian responsibility for the environment begins with appreciation of the goodness of all God’s creation. In the beginning, “God looked at everything he had made, and he found it very good” (Genesis 1:31). The heavens and the earth, the sun and the moon, the earth and the sea, fish and birds, animals and humans—all are good. God’s wisdom and power were present in every aspect of the unfolding of creation (see Proverbs 8:22-31).

The earth, the Bible reminds us, is a gift to all creatures, to “all living beings–all mortal creatures that are on earth” (Genesis 9:16-17).
(United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Renewing the Earth*)

2
. . . the earth is ultimately *a common heritage, the fruits of which are for the benefit of all*. In the words of the Second Vatican Council, “God destined the earth and all it contains for the use of every individual and all peoples” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 69). This has direct consequences for the problem at hand. It is manifestly unjust that a privileged few should continue to accumulate excess goods, squandering available resources, while masses of people are living in conditions of misery at the very lowest level of subsistence. Today, the dramatic threat of ecological breakdown is teaching us the extent to which greed and selfishness - both individual and collective - are contrary to the order of creation, an order which is characterized by mutual interdependence.

(Pope John Paul II, *1990 World Day of Prayer*, #8)

3

“On a planet conflicted over environmental issues, the Catholic tradition insists we show our respect for the Creator by our stewardship of creation. Care for the earth is not just an Earth Day slogan, it is a requirement of our faith. We are called to protect people and the planet, living our faith in relationship with all of God’s creation. This environmental challenge has fundamental moral and ethical dimensions that cannot be ignored.”

(United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Sharing Catholic Social Teaching*)

4

“At its core, the environmental crisis is a moral challenge. It calls us to examine how we use and share the goods of the earth, what we pass on to future generations, and how we live in harmony with God’s creation.”

(United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Renewing the Earth*)

5

Respect for creation stems from respect for human life and dignity. It is on the basis of our recognition that the world is created by God that we can discern an objective moral order within which to articulate a code of environmental ethics. In this perspective, Christians and all other believers have a specific role to play in proclaiming moral values and in educating people in *ecological awareness*, which is none other than responsibility towards self, towards others, towards creation.

(John Paul II and the Ecumenical Patriarch His Holiness Bartholomew I, *Common Declaration on Environmental Ethics*, June 10, 2002)

6

For many people, the environmental movement has reawakened appreciation of the truth that, through the created gifts of nature, men and women encounter their Creator. The Christian vision of a sacramental universe–a world that discloses the Creator’s presence by visible and tangible signs–can contribute to making the earth a home for the human family once again. Pope John Paul II has called for Christians to respect and protect the environment, so that through nature people can “contemplate the mystery of the greatness and love of God.”

Reverence for the Creator present and active in nature, moreover, may serve as ground for environmental responsibility. For the very plants and animals, mountains and oceans, which in their loveliness and sublimity lift our minds to God, by their fragility and perishing likewise cry out, “We have not made ourselves.” God brings them into being and sustains them in existence. It is to the Creator of the universe, then, that we are accountable for what we do or fail to do to preserve and care for the earth and all its creatures. For “[t]he LORD’S are the earth and its fullness; the world and those who dwell in it” (Ps 24:1). Dwelling in the presence of God, we begin to experience ourselves as part of creation, as stewards within it, not separate from it. As faithful stewards, fullness of life comes from living responsibly within God’s creation.

Stewardship implies that we must both care for creation according to standards that are not of our own making and at the same time be resourceful in finding ways to make the earth flourish. It is a difficult balance, requiring both a sense of limits and a spirit of experimentation. Even as we rejoice in earth’s goodness and in the beauty of nature, stewardship places upon us responsibility for the well-being of all God’s creatures.
(United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Renewing the Earth*)

7

Guided by the Spirit of God, the future of the earth lies in human hands. To maintain landscapes in integrity, to safeguard endangered species, to preserve remaining wilderness, to ensure the feeding of a hungry world will require much human decision, social cooperation, experimentation, and invention. To restore the purity of air and water, to halt the loss of farmland, to sustain ecological diversity in plant and animal life, concerted human action will be needed over many decades. To avert further depletion of the ozone layer, to check the production of greenhouse gases, and to redress the effects of global warming will require unprecedented collaboration and commitment among the nations of the earth. Even as humanity’s mistakes are at the root of earth’s travail today, human talents and invention can and must assist in its rebirth and contribute to human development.

Incontestably, people need to exhibit greater respect for nature than they have for some centuries, but we will also need to apply human reason to find remedies for nature’s ills. Scientific research and technological innovation must accompany religious and moral responses to environmental challenges. Reverence for nature must be combined with scientific learning. In a Catholic worldview, there is no necessary clash between an environmentally responsible morality and an active application of human reason and science.

(United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Renewing the Earth*)

8

The environmental crisis of our own day constitutes an exceptional call to conversion. As individuals, as institutions, as a people, we need a change of heart to save the planet for our children and generations yet unborn. So vast are the problems, so intertwined with our economy and way of life, that nothing but a wholehearted and ever more profound turning to God, the Maker of Heaven and Earth, will allow us to carry out our responsibilities as faithful stewards of God’s creation.

Only when believers look to values of the Scriptures, honestly admit their limitations and failings, and commit their selves to common action on behalf of the land and the wretched of the earth will we be ready to participate fully in resolving this crisis.
(United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Renewing the Earth*)

### Key Quotes from Laudato Si’ (On Care for Our Common Home)

### Pope Francis

(Selected by Catholic Climate Covenant: <https://catholicclimatecovenant.org/files/inline-files/CatholicClimateCovenantencyclicalexcerpts.pdf>)

**The Problem**

The earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor (2)

Never have we so hurt and mistreated our common home as we have in the last two hundred years. (53)

Doomsday predictions can no longer be met with irony or disdain. We may well be leaving to coming generations debris, desolation and filth. The pace of consumption, waste and environmental change has so stretched the planet’s capacity that our contemporary lifestyle, unsustainable as it is, can only precipitate catastrophes, such as those which even now periodically occur in different areas of the world. (161)

**Policy and Political Leadership**

There is an urgent need to develop policies so that, in the next few years, the emission of carbon dioxide and other highly polluting gases can be drastically reduced, for example, substituting for fossil fuels and developing sources of renewable energy. (26)

International negotiations cannot make significant progress due to positions taken by countries which place their national interests above the global common good. Those who will have to suffer the consequences of what we are trying to hide will not forget this failure of conscience and responsibility. (169)

True statecraft is manifest when, in difficult times, we uphold high principles and think of the long-term common good. (178)

**Reality of the Problem and Necessity to Act**

Obstructionist attitudes, even on the part of believers, can range from denial of the problem to indifference, nonchalant resignation or blind confidence in technical solutions. We require a new and universal solidarity. (14)

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. (217)

It must be said that some committed and prayerful Christians, with the excuse of realism and pragmatism, tend to ridicule expressions of concern for the environment. Others are passive; they choose not to change their habits and thus become inconsistent. (217)

**Your Action Matters**

Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home. (13)

Young people demand change. They wonder how anyone can claim to be building a better future without thinking of the environmental crisis and the sufferings of the excluded. (13)

Our goal is not to amass information or to satisfy curiosity, but rather to become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening in the world into our own personal suffering and thus discover what each of us can do about it. (19)

Reducing greenhouse gases requires honesty, courage and responsibility, above all on the part of those countries which are more powerful and pollute the most. (169)

A great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set out on the long path of renewal. (202)

**Climate Change**

The climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all. (23)

A very solid scientific consensus indicates that we are presently witnessing a disturbing warming of the climatic system. In recent decades this warming has been accompanied by a constant rise in the sea level and, it would appear, by an increase of extreme weather events, even if a scientifically determinable cause cannot be assigned to each particular phenomenon. Humanity is called to recognize the need for changes of lifestyle, production and consumption, in order to combat this warming or at least the human causes which produce or aggravate it. (23)

If present trends continue, this century may well witness extraordinary climate change and an unprecedented destruction of ecosystems, with serious consequences for all of us. (24)

Climate change is a global problem with serious implications, environmental, social, economic, political, and for the distribution of goods; it represents one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day. (25)

The warming caused by huge consumption on the part of some rich countries has repercussions on the poorest areas of the world, especially Africa, where a rise in temperature, together with drought, has proved devastating for farming. (51)

**Living More Sustainably**

Education in environmental responsibility can encourage ways of acting which directly and significantly affect the world around us, such as avoiding the use of plastic and paper, reducing water consumption, separating refuse, cooking only what can reasonably be consumed, showing care for other living beings, using public transport or car-pooling, planting trees, turning off unnecessary lights, or any number of other practices. (211)

There is a nobility in the duty to care for creation through little daily actions (211)

Along with the importance of little everyday gestures, social love moves us to devise larger strategies to halt environmental degradation and to encourage a “culture of care” which permeates all of society. (231)

**The Faith Perspective**

Clearly, the Bible has no place for a tyrannical anthropocentrism unconcerned for other creatures. (68)

Nature is usually seen as a system which can be studied, understood and controlled, whereas creation can only be understood as a gift from the outstretched hand of Father of all, and as a reality illuminated by a love which calls us together into universal communion. (76)

Creation is of the order of love. (77)

A fragile world, entrusted by God to human care, challenges us to devise intelligent ways of directing, developing, and limiting our power. (78)

The entire material universe speaks of God’s love, his boundless affection for us. Soil, water, mountains – everything is, as it were, a caress of God. (84)

All of us are linked by unseen bonds and together form a kind of universal family, a sublime communion which fills us with a sacred, affectionate and humble respect. (89)

Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth. (92)

**Ecology and Social Justice**

We have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor. (49)

Every ecological approach needs to incorporate a social perspective which takes into account the fundamental rights of the poor and the underprivileged. (93)

We are not faced with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the underprivileged, and at the same time protecting nature. (139)

**Consumerism**

The emptier a person’s heart is, the more he or she needs things to buy, own and consume. (204)

Obsession with a consumerist lifestyle, above all when few people are capable of maintaining it, can only lead to violence and mutual destruction. (205)

Many people know that our current progress and the mere amassing of things and pleasures are not enough to give meaning and joy to the human heart, yet they feel unable to give up what the market sets before them. (209)

**Sustainable Business**

The lessons of the global financial crisis have not been assimilated, and we are learning all too slowly the lessons of environmental deterioration. (109)

The principle of the maximization of profits, frequently isolated from other considerations, reflects a misunderstanding of the very nature of the economy. As long as production is increased, little concern is shown about whether it is at the cost of future resources or the health of the environment; as long as the clearing of a forest increases production, no one calculates the losses entailed in the desertification of the land, the harm done to biodiversity or the increased pollution. In a word, businesses profit by calculating and paying only a fraction of the costs involved. (195)

**Future Generations**

Each community can take from the bounty of the earth whatever it needs for subsistence, but it also has the duty to protect the earth and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations. (67)

Intergenerational solidarity is not optional, but rather a basic question of justice, since the world we have received also belongs to those who will follow us. (159)

## Handout #8.

## Taking Action to Care for God’s Creation

1. **Calculate your carbon footprint**. Understanding which activities are carbon-intensive allows you to know where you can take action. Here are two carbon footprint calculators you can use – one from the EPA - [https://www3.epa.gov/carbon-footprint-calculator](https://www3.epa.gov/carbon-footprint-calculator%20) and another from the Carbon Footprint website: <https://www.footprintcalculator.org/home/en>.
2. **Meditate 15 minutes every morning.** Before starting with each day’s obligations, take 15 minutes to meditate and pray to connect with God and nature, and give thanks for another day of life. If it is outdoors and in silence, so much the better. You can also use tools to help you, such as the [Laudato Si’ Movement Prayer Book.](https://docs.google.com/document/d/19tfzzg2f3LrcuPyxsIR335ZwPm77U3RcvhFlkMwdxmU/edit#heading=h.klw9lqpnsu6c)
3. **Take a daily walk**. Connecting with nature (even if you live in a city) and with your own body is essential to be in harmony with the spirit. Take the opportunity to contemplate and give thanks for what surrounds you. Going for a walk, jogging or cycling will disconnect you from the pressures of the day and connect you more with yourself.
4. **Be energy efficient**. During the summer months, close your curtains to block heat from the sun. During the winter, open your curtains during the day to allow the sun to warm your home. These simple steps can significantly reduce the need for air conditioning and heating, which are likely the most energy-intensive aspects of your home.
5. **Adjust the thermostat.** Turning down your air conditioning or heating when you leave the house will further shrink your carbon footprint. A change of just 5 degrees is a good start.
6. **Adjust your driving routine**. By combining multiple errands into one trip, you reduce the amount of fossil fuel you use.
7. **Go meatless** on Fridays (or another day of the week). Livestock production accounts for 4% of Americans’ greenhouse gas, according to the EPA. By going meatless one day per week, you’ll help to care for Creation.
8. **Implement vegetarian recipes** in your menu more often. Avoid processed foods and meats. Be conscious of what you consume, alienating body, mind and spirit.
9. **Recycle More**. Recycling reduces your carbon footprint both because landfills emit greenhouse gases through decomposition, and because manufacturing from scratch is carbon-intensive. Find where and how to recycle almost anything in your area at <https://search.earth911.com>.
10. **Use less water**. Water processing accounts for approximately 3% of energy use in the United States, according to the EPA. Saving water means saving energy. Post a “please conserve water” sign at sinks and showers, install low-flow spigots, or select the “eco” setting on laundry machines and dishwashers.
11. **Don’t make unnecessary purchases.** We are surrounded by things we don’t really need. Make a resolution to live for a few days with what is necessary. Reuse and recycle things you find in your home and go to second hand stores if you need a specific product.
12. **Petition policy makers**. Your elected officials have the power to take action on climate change. Write policy makers to tell them that you stand for the stewardship of creation.

## Handout #9.

## Action Plan to Respect God’s Creation

**As an individual or family, I/we commit to taking the following actions to respect God’s creation in our homes and lives.**

Action #1: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

How I/we will do this:

Action #2: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

How I/we will do this:

Action #3: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

How I/we will do this:

Action #4: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

How I/we will do this:

Action #5: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

How I/we will do this:

**As an individual or family, I/we commit to working with others to respect God’s creation in our community, nation, and world.**

Action Project #1: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Date:

Responsibilities:

Action Project #2: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Date:

Responsibilities:

## Handout #10.

## Reflecting on a Justice and Service Experience

Use the following questions to develop a set of reflection questions for families and individuals to share experience and learning from a justice or service project that focuses on caring for God’s creation.

#### Reflecting on Our Experience

* What struck you most strongly? What happened?
* What images stand out in your mind? What sights and sounds, touches and smells? What experiences and conversations? Why did they make the impression they did?
* What was happening in your heart? What did you feel? What touched you most deeply today? Why? What did you find most frustrating? Most hopeful? Why?

#### Reflecting on the People Served

* What did you learn about the people you met? How is their experience most like yours? How is it most different? How would you feel if you had to change places for a week? a year? Why?
* What did you learn about yourself today? What do you like about what you learned? What do you dislike and most want to change?

#### Reflecting on Justice Issues Addressed

* How were justice and injustice present in the situations you faced?
* Did you learn anything new about the causes of injustice and the changes that are necessary?
* How did your action project try to address the justice issue you studied?

#### Reflecting on Our Faith

* How was God present in what happened within and around you? How did you express respect for God’s creation?
* How did you experience the Church in action? How was the Church living its teachings through your action project?

#### Reflecting on Our Lives

* How did your involvement start you thinking about how you are living your life as an individual and as a family? What changes might you make in your life and/or in your family’s life? What changes might you make in your priorities and/or your family’s priorities,

## Prayer Service

### Gather

Light the candles on the table.

**Reader 1**: How wonderful, O Lord, are the works of your hands! The heavens declare your glory, the sky displays your handiwork.

All: All creation reveals God’s glory and greatness.

**Reader 2**: In Your love, You have given us the power to behold the beauty of Your world,

robed in all its splendor.

All: All creation reveals God’s glory and greatness.

**Reader 3**: The sun and the stars, the valleys and the hills, the rivers and lakes all disclose your presence.

All: All creation reveals God’s glory and greatness.

**Reader 4**: The roaring breakers of the seas tell of your awesome might; the beasts of the fields and the birds of the air speak of your wondrous will.

All: All creation reveals God’s glory and greatness.

**Reader 5**: In Your goodness You have made us able to hear the music of the world. The raging of the winds, the whisperings of trees in the wood, and the precious voices of loved ones reveal to us that you are in our midst.

All: All creation reveals God’s glory and greatness.

### Listen

Genesis 9:9-16, Psalm 8, or Psalm 148

“How do we live in creation? Do we relate to it as a place full of “things” we can use for whatever need we want to fulfill and whatever goal we wish to accomplish? Or do we see creation first of all as a sacramental reality, a sacred space where God reveals to us the immense beauty of the Divine?

“As long as we only *use* creation, we cannot recognize its sacredness because we are approaching it as if we were its owners. But when we relate to all that surrounds us as created by the same God who created us and as the place where God appears to us and calls us to worship and adoration, then we are able to recognize the sacredness of all God’s handiwork.” (*Bread for the Journey*, Henri J. M. Nouwen)

### Respond: A Penitential Litany

Lord God, your peace demands justice for all and calls us to transform ourselves, our communities, our nation, and our world.

**Lord, have mercy.**

We confess, O Lord, as creatures privileged with the care and keeping of your creation, that we have abused your gifts of creation through arrogance, ignorance and greed.

**Lord, have mercy.**

We confess, O Lord, that we have risked permanent damage to your handiwork; we confess impoverishing creation’s ability to bring you praise.

**Lord, have mercy.**

We confess, O Lord, that the races and cultures of the earth reflect the richness of your creation and that we have too often mistreated and inflicted injustices upon the poor, minorities, and the marginalized.

**Lord, have mercy.**

O Lord, how long will it take before we awaken to what we have done? How many waters must we pollute? How many forests must we destroy? How much soil must we erode and poison, O Lord? How long will we deny the cries of the poor?

**Lord, have mercy.**

How much of the earth’s atmosphere must we contaminate? How many species must we abuse and extinguish? How many people must we degrade and kill with toxic wastes before we learn to love and respect your creation and our sisters and brothers? Before we learn to love and respect our fragile planet home?

**For our sins and failings, O God, we ask forgiveness.**

Leader: In sorrow for what we have done, we repent. We ask you, O Lord, to forgive our sins and send your Spirit to renew us and the face of the earth. Grant this through Christ our Lord.

 **Amen.**

### Send Forth: A Prayer of Commitment

We commit ourselves to care for all the gifts of Creation. We commit ourselves to explore and understand environmental concerns. We commit to work with others for environmental justice for all. Come Holy Spirit, enkindle in us the fire of your love. Send your breath over the waters and we shall be re-created. And we shall renew the face of the Earth.