

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY GUIDE

Six small group sessions

Participants are asked to read the introduction (articles 1–16) before the first session.

Gather. Welcome everyone to your group. Offer a special welcome to participants from other faith traditions who may join you. Ask participants to introduce themselves if needed.

As your class or group session gets underway, always begin with the Sign of the Cross.

Read. Moving around the circle in your group, read aloud the articles of this summary. Rotate readers with each paragraph. Group members should note items in the pope's teaching that strike them as especially important. Do not read aloud the article numbers. They are included to help you find this section in the original document if you want to explore in more depth certain elements of this encyclical.

Discuss and Pray. When you come to the group process notes, pause to continue around the circle, discussing as the notes direct. Use our suggestions as a starting point and add your own questions, prayers, or action plans.

Six sessions

SESSION ONE: <i>Chapter One: What is Happening to Our Common Home?</i>	page 8
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SESSION THREE: <i>Chapter Three: The Human Roots of the Ecological Crisis</i>	page 24
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Finish. As you come to the end of your process in each session, invite participants to identify the one or two large ideas that they hear the pope teaching in that segment of the document. Each participant may hear the text differently; there are no "correct" answers.

Conclude your session with a brief prayer and hospitality.

INTRODUCTION

For group process, before the first session please read this introduction and respond to the reflection questions at its conclusion.

1 “Praise be to you, my Lord.” These were the words of St. Francis of Assisi in his wonderful song to creation. He reminds us that the earth is our common home: “Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us...”

2 Indeed, the earth, which is our common home, cries out to us in pain because we have hurt her by how we’ve used and abused her. We have grown to believe that we’re the lords and masters of everything and can plunder the earth however we wish! The violence we render is now evident in the sickness of the water, the soil, and the air. The earth is being laid waste. In our sinfulness, we have forgotten that we are made from the dust of this very earth ourselves.

Nothing in this world is indifferent to us

3 In 1963 Pope St. John XXIII called “all men and women of good will” to reject war and embrace peace in his landmark *Pacem in Terris*.

I also want to address every living person on the planet about global environmental deterioration here on our shared home, the earth.

4 I stand in a long line of popes and other church leaders throughout the world who have spoken about this. Blessed Pope Paul VI in 1971 called attention to the ecological catastrophe that threatened to turn against the human family, depriving people of food and homes. **5**] Pope St. John Paul II called for a global ecological conversion. We humans exploit our natural environment, he said, wildly consuming as much as we can. A true conversion, he taught, would lead to an “authentic human ecology.” God has entrusted the world to us, and we must steer all development toward the human person, not merely toward financial gain.

6 Likewise, Pope Benedict XVI asked us to realize fully that we have damaged the earth almost beyond repair, both physically and socially. These two march along together, he taught. “The book of nature,” he said, “is one and indivisible,” including the environment, life, sexuality, the family, and social relations. When we begin to think that we own the world, that the world is simply our property, that God and the family of God (all men and women) have no place in it, then misuse is the result.

United by the same concern

7 The various statements from my predecessors reflect the consensus of scientists, philosophers, theologians, and civic leaders. They’ve all helped shape the church’s thinking on these matters. Outside the Catholic Church, others have also raised these issues, especially the beloved Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. **8**] Patriarch Bartholomew has called on each of us to take small, personal actions to care for the planet, reversing our own small ways of harming her. We have sinned against creation, he teaches firmly. “To commit a crime against the natural world,” he teaches, “is a sin against ourselves and a sin against God.” **9**] Bartholomew has gone even farther. He calls us to a deep change with-

in our hearts, to “replace consumption with sacrifice, greed with generosity, wastefulness with a spirit of sharing.” We should see the world as a “sacrament,” he tells us, a way of sharing life with God and our neighbors. We meet on the earth, and we humans are drawn from her dust.

Saint Francis of Assisi

10 St. Francis of Assisi is our patron saint as we consider these issues. He lived the “integral ecology” of which we will speak, and he did so with authenticity and pure joy. I took his name as my guide when I became pope because I wish to follow in his footsteps. He lived simply, sustainably, and in solidarity with the world and her people.

11 St. Francis approached all of creation and all people with awe and wonder. He saw all creatures as sisters and brothers rather than viewing them as a mere economic commodity. Because of this, he felt compelled to care for all of creation as though it were part of his family. To him, all creation was beautiful and he couldn’t help but break into song with praise for it. The minute we wander away from his attitude, we start to see ourselves as lords and masters of creation, entitled to exploit it even to the breaking point, leaving little or nothing behind for the next generation. **12]** As a man of faith, St. Francis saw creation as a window through which he also saw God.

My appeal

13 We humans can shift to a more sustainable approach. God has not abandoned us; he will show us the way. My thanks go to all who are already working for this, especially those who assist the world’s poorest people.

14 My urgent appeal is for dialogue. Let’s tackle this together! There is a worldwide ecological movement, but powerful forces oppose it, while most people simply go their merry way and ignore the problem,

as though it will go away on its own. Others have come to believe that nothing can be done to repair the ecological damage we see. And still others think that all we need is more technology and development, as though adding to the problem will fix it. What I believe we need is a new and worldwide solidarity of will and talent to care for God's creation.

15 I hope this encyclical can help us all understand the urgency of the situation and face it squarely. This encyclical is now part of the church's social teaching. First, I will sketch the present crisis, drawing on the best science available today. Second, I will articulate principles drawn from the Judaeo-Christian tradition that will direct our response to the crisis. Third, I will discuss the deep roots of this crisis in order to understand the causes. Toward this end, I will propose broad dialogue and action, both personal and international. Finally, because I am convinced change will only happen if we are motivated and educated for it, I will offer guidelines drawn from our Christian beliefs.

16 Certain themes will be evident throughout this letter. These will include the close relationship between the poor and the fragile planet; the belief that we are all connected; the way in which we understand economics, technology, and progress; the belief that every person has dignity; the truly serious need for international policy; and the need for an honest dialogue about how to proceed, imagining a new and more sustainable lifestyle for us all.

Personal Process

Reflect: What is your personal view of the state of the natural environment? Are matters as serious as Pope Francis says they are?

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Reflect: What is your response to articles 8 and 9 from Patriarch Bartholomew?

SESSION ONE

What Is Happening to Our Common Home?

17 Instead of beginning with theology or philosophy, I want to sketch a picture of what is happening on our common home, the earth. **18]** Our lives seem to be speeding up. We might call the phenomenon of everything moving along so fast by the term “rapidification.” Human change is happening faster than the slower speed of biological evolution. And much of the change is not aimed at human dignity or ecological sustainability. **19]** The human family has just come through a period when we believed that we could do anything on earth, without regard to sustainability. But a growing number of people now see the need to protect nature. Let us take a brief look at the main questions about the environment that are before us. We can’t sweep these under the carpet any longer.

I. POLLUTION AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Pollution, waste, and the throwaway culture

20 Pollution is part of daily life for many people. Breathing in pollutants causes a host of health issues, especially among the poor who cannot escape it. Technology cannot solve this problem. **21]** Toxic waste is a culprit in the pollution puzzle. We pile it everywhere, but it's making the earth, which is our home, into an "immense pile of filth." Once beautiful landscapes are now littered with rubbish.

22 We live in a "throwaway culture" in which we think nothing of using a carton or other item once and then disposing of it. Paper, which is easily recycled, is often used once, for example. The dialogue to which I'm calling us as a human family could deal with this by creating a circular model of production in which everything is used and reused, we engage in moderate consumption, and we guard the non-renewable resources.

Climate as a common good

23 The climate belongs to everyone and is a complex system linked to what is needed to sustain human life. A "solid scientific consensus" has emerged that human activity has contributed significantly to the general warming of the planet. Other factors also play into this, such as volcanic activity and the solar cycle, but it is now undeniable that our dependence on fossil fuels triggers a large increase in greenhouse gases. Fossil fuels are at the center of the worldwide energy system. **24]** Climate change affects the carbon cycle, essential to all life. Potable water supplies decrease; agricultural output is reduced; water levels rise on our coasts; polar ice caps melt, producing increased methane gas.

25 The poor will be affected by these climate changes more than the rich are. Nearly two-thirds of all people on earth live along the coastlines. These changes adversely affect farming, fishing, and forestry, the means

of livelihood of most poor people on earth. The poor are forced to follow the migrations of animals and move away as deserts expand. They must leave behind their homes and live with even greater insecurity. How can we be indifferent to them?

26 The ones on earth with power and money, however, try to deny there is a problem at all. They argue with the scientific consensus on this while ignoring the plight of the suffering masses. We need an urgent plan to drastically reduce polluting gases and increase access to renewable energy.

Group or Personal Process

Reflect: As we get started here, what is your view of the argument going on in Western society today about climate change? If fossils fuels are largely to blame for climate change, what can you personally do to help?

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Reflect: What is your response to articles 25–26? Are you poor or are you in the group with power and money?

II. THE ISSUE OF WATER

27 In wealthy nations, the habit of wasting and discarding resources is astounding! We simply must address this, in part for the sake of the poor. **28**] Fresh and available water is primary. It is essential for human life. Our supplies of water, once abundant, are running low, and in some places “water poverty” has already appeared.

29 Unsafe water is the only water widely available in poor nations.

It is the cause of numerous diseases and much death. It results in poor production among farmers. Meanwhile, we continue to pollute the water supplies. 30] In some places, the sale of water has become a thriving business, but the poor cannot afford to pay. We must agree that access to safe drinking water is a basic human right. We have a “social debt” to the poor and must provide water, but few understand the seriousness of this crisis. 31] Water and its management is so important that the scarcity that is emerging, and the controls on it being imposed by multinational business, could lead to war.

III. LOSS OF BIODIVERSITY

32] The plundering of earth’s resources happens because developers are short-sighted. The loss of woodlands and waterways reduces biodiversity. Species are being lost at an alarming rate. 33] We can’t think of the loss of these species with indifference. We do not have the right to destroy them.

34] Not only are we losing large animals and birds, but also the smaller microspecies that live in the ground, wetlands, and trees. As we attempt to solve the problems we have created through industry and commerce, we often create an even larger problem in the process. The level of intervention to solve this, often in the service of business interests, is making the earth less rich and beautiful.

35] We crowd out many species and ruin their habitat by building highways, damming water sources, and tearing down forests. As a human family, we must pay close attention to these losses because they are an essential part of the balance of life on earth. 36] Those looking to turn a fast profit often don’t care about ecosystems. We are often complicit in this without knowing as we buy homes or products that result from this.