



IFCA INTERNATIONAL FORUM
of CATHOLIC ACTION

LAUDATO SI'

IN THE LIFE AND MISSION
OF CATHOLIC ACTION



A CONTRIBUTION SO THAT CATHOLIC ACTION MAY
DECISIVELY MAKE THE ENCYCLICAL
LAUDATO SI'

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On May 24 2015, Pope Francis published the encyclical "*Laudato si'*. *On care for our common home*", in which he gave us a picture of the present situation of our planet as regards the environment and the whole human development, an evaluation of this reality and a series of proposals starting from faith which invites us to become aware of our responsibilities in relation to ourselves, our neighbor, creation and the Creator.

As Catholic Action we want to put ourselves again at the service of the mission of the Church. We welcome this encyclical by the Pope so that, with humility, generosity, broad horizons and a missionary style, we will be able, both on a personal and community level, to bear witness to Jesus Christ. in situations where creation suffers because of humanity's actions.

The planet, just like vulnerable people and those excluded in this world, should not be a "momentary" or a passing problem. This is why the objective of this publication consists in making *Laudato si'* materialize in CA's life and mission. This is not a summary or a synthesis of the encyclical; this is not the intention. It is always necessary to read, study, reflect and pray, starting from the encyclical which Pope Francis has given us.

Ultimately, it is a proposal to help all CA groups in the world to decide to make *Laudato si'* their own. This is a guide to read and an ongoing invitation for our Christian commitment. To do this we have chosen some of the main aspects that the Pope transmits us in *Laudato si'*, so that, in all circumstances and in the various contexts and places in which we live, we will be able to give life to the encyclical with our Christian commitment.

The text is structured in such a way that it goes from the most personal dimension to that which is more communitarian with the Church and with society. It is thus divided into four main parts:

1. At personal level
2. At CA level
3. As an outgoing Church: our personal commitment and our communitarian commitment in the world
4. Dialogue for an integral ecology

In this way, those individuals and groups, who study *Laudato si'* in depth can, with the help of this material, begin a progressive process, starting from the closest and personal realities and then gradually widening the horizon to other contexts. In them Catholic Action's associative dimension, as well as that of the whole Church and of the whole of society, can be a better help for the laity's mission in the world.

1. At personal level

In the course of its long history, Catholic Action, as a typically lay association, has always been able to collaborate in the Church's mission. Besides, it has been able to nurture in its womb, figures of great lay men and women of deep faith, whose commitment and a public presence of incalculable value have been acknowledged.

These witnesses, among whom many have achieved holiness, are not born on the spur of the moment or by chance. The methodology used by Catholic Action (See - Judge - Act) is an element which helps us to take up our mission and to undertake an integral formation. "We look - judge - act" not from the outside, as critics or spectators. We are men and women immersed in the world, co-responsible for the realities which surround us and committed to transform them according to God's plans. For this reason, the personal dimension is the key to the whole journey which Catholic Action proposes to the laity, and it is important that every person, in a profound and sincere way, asks these questions every day: Lord, what do you want from me right now? What are you waiting for in this concrete situation?

Therefore, with the encyclical *Laudato si'* of Pope Francis, each of us should ask himself these same questions seriously regarding the urgent and worrying question of the care of the common home and our

responsibility and mission as regards all God's creation.

Pope Francis points out very important aspects, on a personal dimension, in relation to the environment. We should accept these, deep down in ourselves, and should try to develop habits which lead us to care and respect creation. We have grouped these under three headings:

1.1 - Become aware of the contribution by each person to the current situation

The first awareness must be on a personal dimension, in those small great things which we do everyday and occasionally in an unconscious way and which contribute to the deterioration of the world in which we live. Also, we must create an awareness of small gestures and actions which we could do, but we do not. Pope Francis says this very clearly, referring to the statements by Patriarch Bartholomew:

Patriarch Bartholomew spoke in particular of the need for each one of us to repent of the ways we have harmed the planet, for « inasmuch as we all generate small ecological damage», we are called to acknowledge « our contribution, small or great, to the disfigurement and destruction of creation». On this point, he has repeatedly expressed very firmly and persuasively, challenging us to acknowledge our sins against creation: «That human beings

destroy the biological diversity of God's creation; that human beings degrade the integrity of the earth and causing changes in its climate, by stripping the earth of its natural forests and destroying its wetlands; that human beings contaminate the earth's water, its land, its air: all these are sins». Because « a crime against nature is a crime against ourselves and a sin against God ». (LS 8)

We must therefore examine our personal behaviour to realize what we are doing in our daily life. We must become aware of our actions and authentically recognize our sins against creation. This personal, non-delegable, obligatory starting point in the journey of conversion, is essential, if we want to bring about a true transformation in our relation with creation both on an individual as well as on a collective level.

1.2 – Listen to both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor

For Pope Francis, an ecological change, which does not take into account the social aspect, is not authentic. We have to listen to “both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor”(LS 49), since “peace, justice and the preservation of creation are three absolutely interconnected themes” (LS 92) and essential components of intergenerational solidarity with all humanity (LS 162). At the same time, we cannot behave as if the world ended with us. A true ecological commitment should include the *intergenerational* justice

dimension: what are we leaving to future generations? What responsibility do we have at the moment of the future?

It needs to be said that, generally speaking, there is little in the way of clear awareness of problems which especially affect the excluded. Yet they are the majority of the planet's population, billions of people. (...) Today, however, 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. (LS 49)

These situations have caused sister earth, along with all the abandoned of our world, to cry out, pleading that we take another course (...)striking out on new paths and meeting the needs of the present with concern for all and without prejudice towards coming generations. (LS 53)

The natural environment is a collective good, the patrimony of all humanity and the responsibility of everyone. If we make something our own, it is only to administer it for the good of all. If we do not, we burden our consciences with the weight of having denied the existence of others. (LS 95)

1.3 - A profound change in the inner part of the human being

In his encyclical, Pope Francis repeatedly refers to “inner change”. It is wrong to think that the solution to



environmental degradation can only be achieved through technical development. If, together with technological transformations, there are no profound personal and social changes aimed at a new way of life, we will not be reaching the point of tackling this question. There is no doubt that safer and more effective methods for waste disposal are needed, but if the amount of rubbish continues to increase, we will only be reaching partial and provisional solutions which do not touch the ethical foundation of the issue. The Pope says this again quoting Bartholomew:

At the same time, Bartholomew has drawn attention to the ethical and spiritual roots of environmental problems, which require that we look for solutions not only in technology but in a change of humanity; otherwise we would be dealing merely with symptoms. He asks us to replace consumption with sacrifice, greed with generosity, wastefulness with a spirit of sharing, an asceticism which "entails learning to give, and not simply to give up. It is a way of loving, of moving gradually away from what I want to what God's world needs. It is liberation from fear, greed and compulsion". As Christians, we are also called "to accept the world as a sacrament of communion, as a way of sharing with God and our neighbours on a global scale. It is our humble conviction that the divine and the human meet in the slightest detail in the seamless garment of God's

creation, in the last speck of dust of our planet". (LS 9)

The absolutely necessary changes challenge us also to think and be creative, two wonderful faculties given to us by the Creator. The "noises", both those that come from within us and those from the environment, disturb, shape and even prevent us from thinking and from being creative. Once again, we need to re-create areas of reflection and silence which allow us to listen to the voice of the planet and of our brothers, which is definitely the voice of God.

Furthermore, when media and the digital world become omnipresent, their influence can stop people from learning how to live wisely, to think deeply and to love generously. In this context, the great sages of the past run the risk of going unheard amid the noise and distractions of an information overload. Efforts need to be made to help these media become sources of new cultural progress for humanity and not a threat to our deepest riches. True wisdom, as the fruit of self-examination, dialogue and generous encounter between persons, is not acquired by a mere accumulation of data which eventually leads to overload and confusion, a sort of mental pollution. Real relationships with others, with all the challenges they entail, now tend to be replaced by a type of internet communication which enables us to choose or eliminate relationships at whim, thus giving rise to a new type of

contrived emotion which has more to do with devices and displays than with other people and with nature. Today's media do enable us to communicate and to share our knowledge and affections. Yet at times they also shield us from direct contact with the pain, the fears and the joys of others and the complexity of their personal experiences. For this reason, we should be concerned that, alongside the exciting possibilities offered by these media, a deep and melancholic dissatisfaction with interpersonal relations, or a harmful sense of isolation, can also arise. (LS 47)

This search for spaces that heal, this ability to seek silence and a peaceful and calm reflection, should lead us to find a balance which promotes a spirituality which helps us to be at peace with ourselves, with others, with Creation and with God.

On the other hand, no one can cultivate a sober and satisfying life without being at peace with him or herself. An adequate understanding of spirituality consists in filling out what we mean by peace, which is much more than the absence of war. Inner peace is closely related to care for ecology and for the common good because, lived out authentically, it is reflected in a balanced lifestyle together with a capacity for wonder which takes us to a deeper understanding of life. Nature is filled with words of love, but how can we listen to them amid constant noise, interminable and nerve-wracking distractions, or the cult of appearances? Many people

today sense a profound imbalance which drives them to frenetic activity and makes them feel busy, in a constant hurry which in turn leads them to ride rough-shod over everything around them. This too affects how they treat the environment. An integral ecology includes taking time to recover a serene harmony with creation, reflecting on our lifestyle and our ideals, and contemplating the Creator who lives among us and surrounds us, whose presence "must not be contrived but found, uncovered". (LS 225)

And what are we doing as Christians? How do we face these challenges? Pope Francis makes a clear reading of the current situation and considers our responsibility on Creation as a consubstantial issue with being a Christian, not as an accessory or a piece of clothing that we can decide to wear or not, depending on whether we consider it opportune.

"The external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast". For this reason, the ecological crisis is also a summons to profound interior conversion. 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. So what they all need is an "ecological conversion", whereby the effects of their



encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them. 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. (LS 217)

We would like to linger on the following paragraph of the encyclical which concerns the centrality of the Eucharist, the sense of Sunday and of the rest for Christians. It is an appeal to put God at the centre of our lives, particularly to dedicate Sunday to our relationship with God and to be able to get to the bottom of concepts such as resting and celebrating.

On Sunday, our participation in the Eucharist has special importance. Sunday, like the Jewish Sabbath, is meant to be a day which heals our relationships with God, with ourselves, with others and with the world. Sunday is the day of the Resurrection, the "first day" of the new creation, whose first fruits are the Lord's risen humanity, the pledge of the final transfiguration of all created reality. It also proclaims "man's eternal rest in God". In this way, Christian spirituality incorporates the value of relaxation and festivity. We tend to demean contemplative rest as something unproductive and unnecessary, but this is to do away with the very thing which is most important about work: its meaning. We are called to include in our work a dimension of receptivity and gratuity, which is quite different from mere inactivity.

Rather, it is another way of working, which forms part of our very essence. It protects human action from becoming empty activism; it also prevents that unfettered greed and sense of isolation which make us seek personal gain to the detriment of all else. The law of weekly rest forbade work on the seventh day, "so that your ox and your donkey may have rest, and the son of your maidservant, and the stranger, may be refreshed" (Ex 23:12). Rest opens our eyes to the larger picture and gives us renewed sensitivity to the rights of others. And so the day of rest, centred on the Eucharist, sheds its light on the whole week, and motivates us to greater concern for nature and the poor. (LS 237)

1.4 - A profound change in the lifestyle of each person

Finally, we want to highlight some passages of the encyclical that urge us to reflect on the need to adopt a new lifestyle that is in harmony with the environment and consequently, with God. These passages of the encyclical also offer insights on the consequences which could result from the fact that many people decide to live "in another way".

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. When social pressure affects their earnings, businesses clearly have to find ways to produce differently. 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". (LS 206)

Political institutions and various other social groups are also entrusted with helping to raise people's awareness. So too is the Church. All Christian communities have an important role to play in ecological education. It is my hope that our seminaries and houses of formation will provide an education in responsible simplicity of life, in grateful contemplation of God's world, and in concern for the needs of the poor and the protection of the environment. Because the stakes are so high, we need institutions empowered to impose penalties for damage inflicted on the environment. But we also need the personal qualities of self-control and willingness to learn from one another. (LS 214)

Christian spirituality proposes an alternative understanding of the quality of life, and encourages a prophetic and contemplative lifestyle, one capable of deep enjoyment free of the obsession with consumption. We need to take

up an ancient lesson, found in different religious traditions and also in the Bible. It is the conviction that "less is more". A constant flood of new consumer goods can baffle the heart and prevent us from cherishing each thing and each moment. To be serenely present to each reality, however small it may be, opens us to much greater horizons of understanding and personal fulfilment. Christian spirituality proposes a growth marked by moderation and the capacity to be happy with little. It is a return to that simplicity which allows us to stop and appreciate the small things, to be grateful for the opportunities which life affords us, to be spiritually detached from what we possess, and not to succumb to sadness for what we lack. This implies avoiding the dynamic of dominion and the mere accumulation of pleasures. (LS 222)

Such sobriety, when lived freely and consciously, is liberating. It is not a lesser life or one lived with less intensity. On the contrary, it is a way of living life to the full. In reality, those who enjoy more and live better each moment are those who have given up dipping here and there, always on the look-out for what they do not have. They experience what it means to appreciate each person and each thing, learning familiarity with the simplest things and how to enjoy them. So they are able to shed unsatisfied needs, reducing their obsessiveness and weariness. Even living on little, they can live a lot, above all when they cultivate other pleasures and find satisfac-



tion in fraternal encounters, in service, in developing their gifts, in music and art, in contact with nature, in prayer. Happiness means knowing how to limit some needs which only diminish us, and being open to the many different possibilities which life can offer. (LS 223)

The universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely. Hence, there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person's face. The ideal is not only to pass from the exterior to the interior to discover the action of God in the soul, but also to discover God in all things. Saint Bonaventure teaches us that "contemplation deepens the more we feel the working of God's grace within our hearts, and the better we learn to encounter God in creatures outside ourselves". (LS 233)

Questionnaire

SEE

- ➔ 1. **Report** an event or some behaviour in your daily life, which you think, is consistent with a lifestyle which is in harmony with Creation. Or, recall an incident in your life where you acknowledge that in some respect, you did not take into account the "care of the common home".

TO HELP YOU IN YOUR REFLECTION, WE SUGGEST THAT YOU THINK ALONG THESE LINES:

- Do you make prudent use of plastic and paper?
- Are you careful in using only the necessary amount of water, food and electricity?
- Do you separate waste so that it can be recycled or properly treated?
- Do you deal with other living things carefully?
- Do you use public transport and / or share the same vehicle with other people to help reduce gaseous emissions?
- Do you get informed about what you buy and use? - the way it was manufactured; the resources that have been used.
- Do you consume what you need or do you consume what is available for sale?

- ➔ 2. Think now of your group of friends, companions and classmates in university, work colleagues, people who live in your neighborhood, in your city: observe their daily behavior, without the need of identifying anyone by name. Which lifestyle characteristics in relation to Creation do you notice? Which habits/behaviour, in your opinion, harm the common home?

- ➔ 3. Is there poverty in the place where you live? What do you think are the causes of our people's poverty? Does the poverty our people suffer have any relation to environmental issues?

JUDGE

LET US PRAY WITH THIS PASSAGE FROM THE LETTER OF SAINT PAUL TO THE ROMANS:

Romans 8, 18-25

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of



God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

What does God ask of me right now regarding environmental questions?

What attitudes and habits on my part, on the part of my group, at the place where I live, should be changed profoundly?

What do you feel God is asking of you right now in your relation to the common home?

A question helps us not to lose the sight of the goal: *What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?* (LS 160).

Do you understand and are you aware of the intimate relations between the poor and the fragility of our planet? We cannot be Creation's protectors if we ignore the suffering of our brothers.

What attitudes and habits could you start to change so as to improve the care of Creation and our fragile brothers?

What appeals reach you at personal level?

ACT

"I would like to ask you to be aware of the present grave situation and of the responsibility which you have to put it in practice, according to your way of life (...)"
Saint John Paul II said.

In other words, Pope Francis invites us "to change course".

What commitments do I take? How can I deal with the care of the common home and ensure that others care for it too?

2. At CA level

The Church guides and nourishes our faith. It helps us to live our faith and to be able to bear witness of our hope in the places and spaces in which each one of us is present. The Church helps us to discover and express why we are Christians, the reasons and the feelings from which our faith is born.

In this part we will highlight two fundamental aspects for the life of believers. Firstly, those paragraphs of the encyclical which highlight the reasons and the motivations of believers as regards the care of the common home. And secondly, the contribution which we, as Church, can give and which are proper to our faith. Basically, aspects which, if we as Christians do not practice or do not foresee, will hardly be achieved. These are elements to keep in mind in the CA formative plans, in the approach to spiritual formation, in the actions we propose to contribute towards the cultural development of society. Medium and long-term issues that require serious and constant planning, to be able to propose a renewed personal, cultural and social model, in which the environment is not a problem to be faced but one of the central elements which give meaning to the our lives.

2.1 - Stimuli of faith for the care of all creation

Below we review some passages from the encyclical *Laudato si'* which emphasize fundamental aspects of our faith by which we, Christians, commit ourselves to the care of the common home and respect for the environment.

“Without repeating the entire theology of creation, we can ask what the great biblical narratives say about the relationship of human beings with the world. In the first creation account in the Book of Genesis, God’s plan includes creating humanity. After the creation of man and woman, “God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very good” (Gen 1:31). The Bible teaches that every man and woman is created out of love and made in God’s image and likeness (cf. Gen 1:26). This shows us the immense dignity of each person, “who is not just something, but someone. He is capable of self-knowledge, of self-possession and of freely giving himself and entering into communion with other persons”. Saint John Paul II stated that the special love of the Creator for each human being “confers upon him or her an infinite dignity”. Those who are committed to defending human dignity can find in the Christian faith the deepest reasons for this commitment. How wonderful is the certainty that each human life is not adrift in the midst of hopeless chaos, in a world ruled by pure chance or endlessly recurring cycles! The Creator can say to



each one of us: “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you” (Jer1:5). We were conceived in the heart of God, and for this reason “each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary”. (LS 65)

The creation accounts in the book of Genesis contain, in their own symbolic and narrative language, profound teachings about human existence and its historical reality. They suggest that human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself. According to the Bible, these three vital relationships have been broken, both outwardly and within us. This rupture is sin. The harmony between the Creator, humanity and creation as a whole was disrupted by our presuming to take the place of God and refusing to acknowledge our creaturely limitations... (LS 66)

“Together with our obligation to use the earth’s goods responsibly, we are called to recognize that other living beings have a value of their own in God’s eyes: “by their mere existence they bless him and give him glory”, and indeed, “the Lord rejoices in all his works” (Ps 104:31). By virtue of our unique dignity and our gift of intelligence, we are called to respect creation and its inherent laws, for “the Lord by wisdom founded the earth” (Prov 3:19). In our time, the Church

does not simply state that other creatures are completely subordinated to the good of human beings, as if they have no worth in themselves and can be treated as we wish. The German bishops have taught that, where other creatures are concerned, “we can speak of the priority of being over that of being useful”. The Catechism clearly and forcefully criticizes a distorted anthropocentrism: “Each creature possesses its own particular goodness and perfection... Each of the various creatures, willed in its own being, reflects in its own way a ray of God’s infinite wisdom and goodness. Man must therefore respect the particular goodness of every creature, to avoid any disordered use of things”. (LS 69)

A spirituality which forgets God as all-powerful and Creator is not acceptable. That is how we end up worshipping earthly powers, or ourselves usurping the place of God, even to the point of claiming an unlimited right to trample his creation underfoot. The best way to restore men and women to their rightful place, putting an end to their claim to absolute dominion over the earth, is to speak once more of the figure of a Father who creates and who alone owns the world. Otherwise, human beings will always try to impose their own laws and interests on reality. (LS 75)

2.2 -Challenges and proposals

The encyclical by Pope Francis does not present a mere analysis of what is happening in our world, maltreated and wounded by our conscious or less conscious actions on the ecosystem. Throughout the document we also find some appeals and challenges for the future, as well as concrete proposals. We will refer to those which can be more directly related to our life and mission as Catholic Action

Humanity has the ability to change; the challenge is to be united in the search for an integral development:

The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change. The Creator does not abandon us; he never forsakes his loving plan or repents of having created us. Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home... (LS 13)

Building a culture to face the crisis and overcome the culture of waste:

...The problem is that we still lack the culture needed to confront this crisis. We lack leadership capable of striking out on new paths and meeting the needs of the present with concern for all and without

prejudice towards coming generations. The establishment of a legal framework which can set clear boundaries and ensure the protection of ecosystems has become indispensable, otherwise the new power structures based on the techno-economic paradigm may overwhelm not only our politics but also freedom and justice. (LS 53)

Protecting humanity from self-destruction by generating a new human being:

... Faith allows us to interpret the meaning and the mysterious beauty of what is unfolding. We are free to apply our intelligence towards things evolving positively, or towards adding new ills, new causes of suffering and real setbacks. This is what makes for the excitement and drama of human history, in which freedom, growth, salvation and love can blossom, or lead towards decadence and mutual destruction. The work of the Church seeks not only to remind everyone of the duty to care for nature, but at the same time "she must above all protect mankind from self-destruction". (LS 79)

... But one cannot prescind from humanity. There can be no renewal of our relationship with nature without a renewal of humanity itself. There can be no ecology without an adequate anthropology. (LS 118)



... Christian spirituality proposes a growth marked by moderation and the capacity to be happy with little. It is a return to that simplicity which allows us to stop and appreciate the small things... (LS 222)

Creation suffers the pains of childbirth as it seeks fullness and unity with the Creator:

...The Eucharist joins heaven and earth; it embraces and penetrates all creation. The world which came forth from God's hands returns to him in blessed and undivided adoration: in the bread of the Eucharist, "creation is projected towards divinization, towards the holy wedding feast, towards unification with the Creator himself". Thus, the Eucharist is also a source of light and motivation for our concerns for the environment, directing us to be stewards of all creation. (LS 236)

...The human person grows more, matures more and is sanctified more to the extent that he or she enters into relationships, going out from themselves to live in communion with God, with others and with all creatures. In this way, they make their own that trinitarian dynamism which God imprinted in them when they were created. Everything is interconnected, and this invites us to develop a spirituality of that global solidarity which flows from the mystery of the Trinity. (LS 240)

Questionnaire

SEE

- ➔ 1. Relate an event in your life in which Catholic Action has been a Church instrument which helped your awareness and commitment in the care of the common home to grow or which helped you to denounce situations which damage the environment. You may also speak about an event in your life where you realize that, faced with a situation of aggression towards Creation, you have not lived up to the situation

To help you remember those events when Catholic Action was present or not when needed, we invite you to consider our:

- Collaboration with our brothers affected by some extreme natural calamity (floods, droughts, earthquakes, hurricanes, etc.). The poor are those who suffer most from the damage inflicted on our planet. They are those who live close to the areas at risk and very often they cannot choose where to live.
- Support for local or international petitions for the planet. For example, in the discussion on a bill or in world summits on climate change.

- ➔ 2. What do you think are the causes of all this? And what are the consequences?

JUDGE

Let us reflect and pray with this passage from the Gospel:

Matthew 18, 18-20

“Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

“Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”

- ➔ 1. In your community, in your parish, who (individuals or groups) suffer most the harmful consequences of environmental damage? Why do you think these are the most affected persons / groups?

What action could the group/ the ecclesial community you belong to promote in favour of the care for the common home?



- ➔ 2. As CA, in what way does the encyclical *Laudato si'* 'appeal to us and what does it expect from us in our daily associative commitments?
- ➔ 3. As CA, what can we do so that the poor of our city do not suffer the consequences of environmental damage?
- ➔ 4. Are we properly trained? Have we included *Laudato si'* in our itineraries and programmes? Do we influence others with our testimony?

ACT

As Catholic Action, what commitments must we take so that *Laudato si'* may be felt in the life of our association?

3. An outgoing Church: personal and communitarian commitment in the world

In the third part of this text we are asking the following questions:

As believers and as Church, what can we do? What is God asking us in this environmental situation which the world, we live in and we are responsible for, is facing?

Pope Francis always encourages us to be permanently in a state of mission and not to withdraw within our securities or our fears. He asks us to be always attentive to what is happening and to be always an outgoing Church.

First of all, we will be looking at some of the characteristics of our living realities, and giving a brief look at the context in which we, as Christians, will be working and which Pope Francis has shown us in this encyclical.

3.1 - The Characteristics of our living realities

The missionary dimension, our ability to go out to the places where people's daily lives meet, requires a preview and a continuous approach to realities, so that, both our individual and collective apostolate, may be effective and real, linked to reality. to what is happening. It should also include an analysis of the causes and consequences, and should also focus on the places and the people who suffer most and

should lead us to do our best to be as close as possible to the way God looks at these realities. For this reason, this brief summary, of some of the most important analysing points Pope Francis includes in this encyclical, is very important.

Here we are giving some of the fundamental elements in the analysis of the current situation that we consider important to emphasise. Obviously, the characteristics of the present reality given in Pope Francis' encyclical are much more numerous. Understandably, we cannot enlist them all but we feel we should highlight the following aspects:

This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life. This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she "groans in travail" (Rom 8:22). We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth (cf. Gen 2:7); our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her



air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters.
(LS 2)

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: "Both everyday experience and scientific research show that the gravest effects of all attacks on the environment are suffered by the poorest"... (LS 48)

Humanity has entered a new era in which our technical prowess has brought us to a crossroads.
(LS 102)

The technocratic paradigm also tends to dominate economic and political life. (...) Yet by itself the market cannot guarantee integral human development and social inclusion.⁸⁹ At the same time, we have "a sort of 'superdevelopment' of a wasteful and consumerist kind which forms an unacceptable contrast with the ongoing situations of dehumanizing deprivation",⁹⁰ while we are all too slow in developing economic institutions and social initiatives which can give the poor regular access to basic resources. (LS 109)

The specialization which belongs to technology makes it difficult to see the larger picture. The fragmentation of knowledge proves helpful for concrete applications, and yet it often leads to a loss of appreciation for the whole, for the relationships between things, and for the broader horizon, which then becomes irrelevant. (LS 110)

... But humanity has changed profoundly, and the accumulation of constant novelties exalts a superficiality which pulls us in one direction. It becomes difficult to pause and recover depth in life ...
(LS 113)

Our difficulty in taking up this challenge seriously has much to do with an ethical and cultural decline which has accompanied the deterioration of the environment. Men and women of our postmodern world run the risk of rampant individualism, and many problems of society are connected with today's self-centred culture of instant gratification. We see this in the crisis of family and social ties and the difficulties of recognizing the other. (LS 162)

3.2 Challenges and proposals

On various occasions in different parts of *Laudato si* Pope Francis repeats many times that in the Church there is a real challenge as regards all that which concerns the environment. He also urges us to work together, to make everyone

aware and to be a single voice on this issue. Let us therefore use the catholicity of the Church and the communion from which we come and which we must live daily in our lives.

There are many concrete indications which reflect the sensitization, commitment and denunciation in situations where, to a greater or lesser extent, we commit attacks against creation. We have chosen the instances the Pope has indicated as priorities so that human beings may truly have a new relationship with nature, with the world we live in and we have to continue living with. With the Pope's help, as Catholic Action, we can involve ourselves in concrete commitments which help us to be people who live in harmony with the environment, and which make us instruments in the Lord's hands to generate a new environmental culture.

My predecessor Benedict XVI likewise proposed "eliminating the structural causes of the dysfunctions of the world economy and correcting models of growth which have proved incapable of ensuring respect for the environment"... (LS 6)

... We have not yet managed to adopt a circular model of production capable of preserving resources for present and future generations... (LS 22)

... 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... (LS 26)

Greater investment needs to be made in research aimed at understanding more fully the functioning of ecosystems and adequately analyzing the different variables associated with any significant modification of the environment... (LS 42)

Inequity affects not only individuals but entire countries; it compels us to consider an ethics of international relations. A true "ecological debt" exists, particularly between the global north and south, connected to commercial imbalances with effects on the environment, and the disproportionate use of natural resources by certain countries over long periods of time. (LS 51)

... This rediscovery of nature can never be at the cost of the freedom and responsibility of human beings who, as part of the world, have the duty to cultivate their abilities in order to protect it and develop its potential. If we acknowledge the value and the fragility of nature and, at the same time, our God-given abilities, we can finally leave behind the modern myth of unlimited material progress. A fragile world, entrusted by God to human care, challenges us to devise intelligent ways of directing,



*developing and limiting our power.
(LS 78)*

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

Any approach to an integral ecology, which by definition does not exclude human beings, needs to take account of the value of labour ... (LS 124)

*Given the scale of change, it is no longer possible to find a specific, discrete answer for each part of the problem. It is essential to seek comprehensive solutions ...
(LS 139)*

... This suggests the need for an "economic ecology" capable of appealing to a broader vision of reality. (LS 141)

... Ecology, then, also involves protecting the cultural treasures of humanity in the broadest sense. More specifically, it calls for greater attention to local cultures when studying environmental problems, favouring a dialogue between scientific-technical language and the language of the people. (LS 143)

Authentic development includes efforts to bring about an integral improvement in the quality of human life, and this entails considering the setting in which people live their lives... (LS 147)

*... Having a home has much to do with a sense of personal dignity and the growth of families. This is a major issue for human ecology...
(LS 152)*

Many specialists agree on the need to give priority to public transportation. Yet some measures needed will not prove easily acceptable to society unless substantial improvements are made in the systems themselves, which in many cities force people to put up with undignified conditions due to crowding, inconvenience, infrequent service and lack of safety. (LS 153)ž

*In the present condition of global society, where injustices abound and growing numbers of people are deprived of basic human rights and considered expendable, the principle of the common good immediately becomes, logically and inevitably, a summons to solidarity and a preferential option for the poorest of our brothers and sisters.
(LS 158)*

Questionnaire

SEE

1. Report an event in your life where the Church has not helped you to be a person who lives in harmony with creation, to discover that God is the creator of what exists.

In order to help you to remember in which events the Church has been present, we suggest to think of the life and values of St Francis of Assisi: the care for nature, justice towards the poor, the commitment in the society, interior peace, contemplation, gratitude, humility and austerity.

Are these the values reflected in the life of our Church?

JUDGE

LET US REFLECT AND PRAY WITH THIS PASSAGE FROM THE HOLY SCRIPTURE.

Genesis 1, 29-31. 2, 1-3.

Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground - everything that has the breath of life in it - I give every green plant for food." And it was so.

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning - the sixth day.

Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.

By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

1. What can we do as Church to care for the common home?
2. What proposals, in order to promote the challenges in our parish, communities, we can elicit from *Laudato si'*?

ACT

1. What can I propose in my group, in my parish community, in my diocese, etc. In order to promote a greater awareness and commitment among Christians in the Christian community for the care of the environment.

4. Dialogue for a holistic ecology

The care of our common home and of our most fragile brothers and sisters should be sufficient reason to be close to those we share the same world with, to dialogue sincerely with them in search for the good of all, to recognize common goods and to work together so that they are of all and for all. We have to get to the heart of the matter, to commit to look for the deeper causes and not just to recognize the symptoms:

I urgently appeal, then, for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet. We need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all. (LS 14)

Furthermore, although this Encyclical welcomes dialogue with everyone so that together we can seek paths of liberation, I would like from the outset to show how faith convictions can offer Christians, and some other believers as well, ample motivation to care for nature and for the most vulnerable of their brothers and sisters. (LS 64)

The majority of people living on our planet profess to be believers. This should spur religions to dialogue among themselves for the sake of protecting nature, defending the poor, and building networks of

respect and fraternity. Dialogue among the various sciences is likewise needed, since each can tend to become enclosed in its own language, while specialization leads to a certain isolation and the absolutization of its own field of knowledge. This prevents us from confronting environmental problems effectively. An open and respectful dialogue is also needed between the various ecological movements, among which ideological conflicts are not infrequently encountered. The gravity of the ecological crisis demands that we all look to the common good, embarking on a path of dialogue which requires patience, self-discipline and generosity, always keeping in mind that “realities are greater than ideas”. (LS 201)

Nature and the society which lives therein are intimately united, interpenetrated. Therefore,

“Recognizing the reasons why a given area is polluted requires a study of the workings of society, its economy, its behaviour patterns, and the ways it grasps reality” (LS 139). “Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature.” (LS 139).

Characteristics of a holistic ecology (environmental, economic and social)

● It respects cultural patrimony of societies and the variety of cultures (LS 143), which are treasures of humanity and which the consumeristic vision tends to level (LS 144), giving due attention to the contribution of aboriginal communities (LS 146).

● It penetrates deeply in daily life bringing quality of life in cities and in public life: public spaces, the way our housing is managed, public transport, health services etc. (LS 147-154); accepting the human body as God's gift, appreciating its femininity or masculinity (LS 155).

● It is indivisible from the common good which implies respect for the human person as such; social welfare, the development of intermediate groups; social peace, stability and security of a given order *"which cannot be achieved without particular concern for distributive justice; whenever this is violated, violence always ensues"* (LS 157). A common good which society, and in particular the State, is obliged to defend and promote.

● It ensures justice through generations: *"We can no longer speak of sustainable development apart from intergenerational solidarity"* (LS 159). Justice with

future generations is inseparable from justice with present generation, with solidarity towards present human beings. (LS 162)

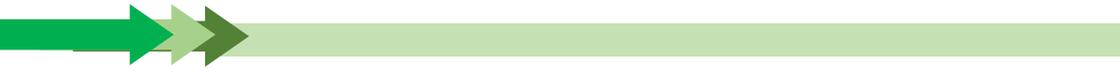
In the present situation of a global society, where injustices abound and growing numbers of people are deprived of basic human rights and considered expendable, the principle of the common good immediately becomes, logically and inevitably, a summons to solidarity and a preferential option for the poorest of our brothers and sisters. (...) We need only look around us to see that, today, this option is in fact an ethical imperative essential for effectively attaining the common good. (LS 158)

Lines of approach and action

Yet all is not lost. Human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start, despite their mental and social conditioning. (LS 205)

In Chapter V of the encyclical, Pope Francis proposes concrete actions to encourage us to move towards a holistic ecology, to help us take it up and to present it in all areas of social life CA members. They are involved and carry out their mission, with the aim of inspiring individual and social decisions and choices so as to direct them towards a more human and fraternal world.

● **Serious dialogue on the environment in the international community (LS 164 - 175)**



Beginning from the middle of the last century and overcoming many difficulties, there has been a growing conviction that our planet is a homeland and that humanity is one people living in a common home. An interdependent world not only makes us more conscious of the negative effects of certain lifestyles and models of production and consumption which affect us all; more importantly, it motivates us to ensure that solutions are proposed from a global perspective, and not simply to defend the interests of a few countries. (LS 164)

● **New national and local policies.** *“There are not just winners and losers among countries, but within poorer countries themselves. Hence different responsibilities need to be identified.” (LS 176).* Something which must be done at every level.

● **Transparency in decision making.** Impact studies, fight against corruption, analysis of the possible effects, at short and long term, of an intervention or a production system; clear information to the population on planned investments; precautions (*“to protect those who are most vulnerable and whose ability to defend their interests and to assemble incontrovertible evidence is limited” (LS 186)* related to a project which could affect them negatively).

● **Politics must not be subject to the economy nor should the economy be subject to the**

dictates of an efficiency-driven paradigm of technocracy (LS 189), but should be at the service of human life. *“A magical conception of a market, which suggests that problems can be solved simply by an increase in the profits of companies or individuals”* should be avoided. (LS 190).

● **This does not mean irrationally halting progress and human development, as some think (LS 191).** We need to convince ourselves of the fact that *“a decrease in the pace of production and consumption can at times give rise to another form of progress and development”* (LS 191) national and global. We need to redefine the concept of progress because *“the talk of sustainable growth usually becomes a way of distracting attention and offering excuses. It absorbs the language and values of ecology into the categories of finance and technocracy, and the social and environmental responsibility of businesses often gets reduced to a series of marketing and image-enhancing measures.” (LS 194).*

Yet only when *“the economic and social costs of using up shared environmental resources are recognized with transparency and fully borne by those who incur them, not by other peoples or future generations”, can those actions be considered ethical. (LS 195).*

● **There should be dialogue between religions and science**, since the empirical sciences do not completely explain life and this should spur religions to dialogue among themselves for the sake of protecting nature, defending the poor, and building networks of respect and fraternity (LS 201).

● **There is a need for an ecological education and spirituality**, which fosters an “awareness of our common origin, of our mutual belonging and of a future to be shared with everyone” (LS 202) and which predisposes us:

✦ **To embark on a different way of life**, which is more sober, less consumistic and which is far from self-destruction.

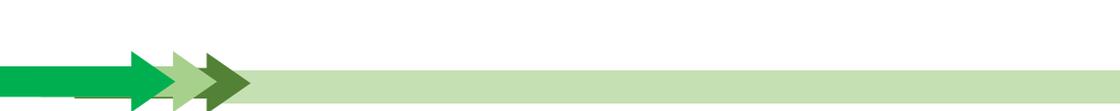
✦ **To provide an education which aims at creating harmony between humanity and the environment**, which translates into new habits (LS 210), and creates an ecological citizenship (LS 211).

✦ **To aim at an ecological conversion** by letting all the consequences of the encounter with Jesus Christ flourish in our relation with the world, following the style of Francis of Assisi (LS 217-218) so as to have and enjoy peace. (LS 222) “We must regain the conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for others and the world, and that being good and

decent are worth it.” (LS 229), by small gestures of reciprocal care, which have a civil and political transcendence (LS 231). Seeing God in everything, because all that which is good in things and in the world experiences is found, in an infinite manner, in God. (LS 233-234).

Daily prayers as a priority

At the conclusion of this lengthy reflection which has been both joyful and troubling, I propose that we offer two prayers. The first we can share with all who believe in a God who is the all-powerful Creator, while in the other we Christians ask for inspiration to take up the commitment to creation set before us by the Gospel of Jesus. (LS 246)



A PRAYER FOR OUR EARTH

All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe
and in the smallest of your creatures.
You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.
Pour out upon us the power of your love,
that we may protect life and beauty.

Fill us with peace, that we may live
as brothers and sisters, harming no one.

O God of the poor,
help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth,
so precious in your eyes.

Bring healing to our lives,
that we may protect the world and not prey on it,
that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction.

Touch the hearts
of those who look only for gain
at the expense of the poor and the earth.

Teach us to discover the worth of each thing,
to be filled with awe and contemplation,
to recognize that we are profoundly united
with every creature
as we journey towards your infinite light.

We thank you for being with us each day.
Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle
for justice, love and peace.

A CHRISTIAN PRAYER IN UNION WITH CREATION

Father, we praise you with all your creatures.
They came forth from your all-powerful hand;
they are yours, filled with your presence and your tender love.
Praise be to you!

Son of God, Jesus,
through you all things were made.
You were formed in the womb of Mary our Mother,
you became part of this earth,
and you gazed upon this world with human eyes.
Today you are alive in every creature
in your risen glory.
Praise be to you!

Holy Spirit, by your light
you guide this world towards the Father's love
and accompany creation as it groans in travail.
You also dwell in our hearts
and you inspire us to do what is good.
Praise be to you!

Triune Lord, wondrous community of infinite love,
teach us to contemplate you
in the beauty of the universe,
for all things speak of you.
Awaken our praise and thankfulness
for every being that you have made.
Give us the grace to feel profoundly joined
to everything that is.

God of love, show us our place in this world
as channels of your love
for all the creatures of this earth,
for not one of them is forgotten in your sight.
Enlighten those who possess power and money
that they may avoid the sin of indifference,
that they may love the common good, advance the weak,
and care for this world in which we live.
The poor and the earth are crying out.
O Lord, seize us with your power and light,
help us to protect all life,
to prepare for a better future,
for the coming of your Kingdom
of justice, peace, love and beauty.
Praise be to you!
Amen.



1st SEPTEMBER

World day of prayer for the care of creation

CA groups from different parts of the world, united in the International Forum of Catholic Action, call for prayers on the 1st September on the occasion of the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation.

The day aims at highlighting "the personal commitment and our vocation as custodians of creation with a prayer of thanks to God for the marvelous work he entrusted to our care", "imploing his help for the protection of creation and his mercy for the sins committed against the world we live in".

Initiatives to remember

- ✦ Personal prayer on the 1st September – Attend Holy Mass, recite Lauds and Vespers, pray the Rosary, spend some time in silence and adoration.
- ✦ When possible, join in communitarian prayer in the family, in the parish, in CA groups, etc.
- ✦ Prayers for the care of creation during the initiatives promoted by CA in September
- ✦ To meet, as a community, even on another date, and to involve the Christian Community, CA groups, other associations and movements particularly young people, inviting the Orthodox Christians and other Christians.
- ✦ Express CA's availability to work, at national and diocesan level, with the Commission for Justice and Peace, with the Councils for Lay Apostolate, the Family and Youth to "establish" adequate structures to promote and sustain this annual celebration as an occasion of prayer, reflection, conversion and to promote a coherent way of life.

During the time dedicated to personal and communitarian prayers we suggest that you recite the prayer for creation for Christians found in the Encyclical *Laudato si'* (n.246) and the very beautiful song by Saint Francis (*Laudato si'* n.87).

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Rome, April 8 2017 – Palm Sunday

LAUDATO SI'

IN THE LIFE AND MISSION OF CATHOLIC ACTION

“The external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast”. For this reason, the ecological crisis is also a summons to profound interior conversion. 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. So what they all need is an “ecological conversion”, whereby the effects of their encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them. 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.