

ON THE CLIMATE CRISIS

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— WITH —
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An Australian Group Reading Guide to
LAUDATE DEUM



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www.ncrnews.org

All numbered text and material marked
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NOTE: This Guide was prepared during the
lead-up to and the aftermath of COP28 in
Dubai. Pope Francis was unable to attend
due to ill health. However, the Pope's
stirring speech to COP 28, delivered on
his behalf by Cardinal Parolin, Vatican
Secretary of State, is found at:

<https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2023/12/02/0848/01842.html#inglise>

In spite of the potential conflict of interest
of COP 28 being hosted by a leading oil-
producing nation, its purpose, and that
of any future COP remained clear. In the
words of the United Nations:

COP is where the world comes
together
to agree on ways to address the
climate crisis, such as limiting global
temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius,
helping vulnerable communities
adapt to the effects of climate change,
and achieving net-zero emissions by
2050. (United Nations Framework
Convention on Climate Change
Secretariat, 2023)

Found at: <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/conferences/un-climate-change-conference-united-arab-emirates-nov/dec-2023/about-cop-28>

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Other

p 4 Courtesy of the Franciscans, p 8 Wild Kids, p 9
Climate Council (Australia), p 10 Climate Council
(Australia), p 18 Sisters of St Joseph Australia, p 19
Institute Mercy, p 22 Climate Council (Australia), p 26
Jacinta Schailer, p 28 Australian Religious Response to
Climate Change (ARRCC), p 29 Alice Carwardine

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY GUIDE

For individuals, families, students, parishes, or small groups

Using this Guide for group sharing is
an opportunity to practise the 'synodal
way' of Pope Francis, characterised as
'walking together' in love and faith
towards a shared goal. The reflective
processes recommended in the Guide
can offer an experience of the 'Prayerful
Conversion' method featured at the
Synod on Synodality in Rome (2023/24).
The 'see, judge, act' method of Catholic
Social Teaching scaffolds the Guide, as we
are invited to 'see' the realities humanity
faces; 'judge' these realities in the light of
science, human experience and faith, and
then 'act' decisively as a result.

FOR A GROUP FACILITATOR

Gather

Welcome everyone. Begin each session
with an Acknowledgment of Country
suited to your particular context.
(Information available online from
NATSICC <https://www.natsicc.org.au/acknowledgement-and-welcome-to-country.html>)

Offer a special welcome to participants
from other faith traditions who may join
you. Ask participants to introduce and
share briefly about themselves around the
circle.

Pray

Suggestions for Reflection and Prayer
accompany each chapter of this Guide.

Read

Moving around the circle in your group,
take turns to read aloud paragraphs from
the Pope's teaching in the chapter or
section you are considering.

Discuss and Pray

When you come to the group reflections,
pause to continue around the circle,
discussing or praying as the Guide
suggests. Use its suggestions and
questions as a starting point and feel free
to add your own questions, prayers, or
action plans.

Finish

As you end your process, invite
participants to identify the one or two
large ideas they hear the Pope teaching
in that segment of the document.
Each participant may listen to the text
differently; no 'correct' answers exist.
Conclude your session with hospitality.

Contents

Foreword

Introduction

Pope Francis reconnects with *Laudato Si'* and St Francis of Assisi

P
2



Chapter 1

The Global Climate Crisis
What humanity is facing

P
5



Chapter 2

A Growing Technocratic Paradigm
Is technology benefitting or dominating
life on Earth?

P
11



Chapter 3

The Weakness of International Politics
The strength of local community action

P
16



Chapter 4

Climate Conferences – Progress and Failures
How can we make global and local climate
structures work?

P
20



Chapter 5

Spiritual Motivations
Finding inspiration from our faith
to respond with action

P
25



Foreword

I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live (Deut 30:19–20)

Pope Francis issued the Apostolic Exhortation *Laudate Deum* on 4 October 2023, just prior to COP28 – the 28th Conference of States Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. It is a follow-up to his landmark encyclical *Laudato Si'* (On Care for Our Common Home) published in 2015.

Laudato Si' was inspired by St Francis of Assisi, Patron of the Environment, and informed by the best climate science. It has been called a love letter to humanity, urging us all towards an ecological conversion, expressed in a loving, courageous commitment to care for our common home. It marks a paradigm shift in Catholic social teaching, placing integral ecology at the centre.

Francis was addressing every person living on the planet with great urgency in the lead-up to the historic COP 21 in Paris in the awareness that the planet is approaching a tipping point.

One of the responses to the encyclical was the establishment of the *Laudato Si'* Action Platform. This innovative initiative is a project of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development implemented in partnership with the *Laudato Si'* Movement. It encourages families, health and educational institutions, religious institutes, parishes and dioceses, as well as businesses, organisations and groups, to make concrete plans for sustainability grounded in ecological spirituality. The Platform provides guides and resources shared by participants, a supportive community, webinars and events. Everyone can join this action directly through the Platform's website.

Eight years after *Laudato Si'*, with the 28th COP approaching, the situation remained alarming. In *Laudate Deum*, Francis says that much more action is still needed by governments, international organisations, and by all of us. He insists that sound science, common sense, human experience, and informed conscience make any denial of human-induced climate change indefensible, whether found in churches, board-rooms, families, or the public square. We must all face the truth. It is a matter of life and death.

We are called at this moment in history to give practical expression to the hope that is within us (1 Peter 3:8-15) acknowledging that the universe and everything in it is God's, and that we are God's creatures. We can witness to this truth and make change. Numerous inspiring and empowering examples are featured in this guide. The guide helps us to reflect on Pope Francis' message, and to discern how to positively respond. Each one of us can be a blessed part in shaping our shared planetary future.

(Dr Sandie Cornish, Senior Lecturer Australian Catholic University Specialist in Catholic Social Thought and Practice. Editor for the ACBC Catholic Social Justice Statement 2021–22 *Cry of the Earth Cry of the Poor.*)

Introduction

Pope Francis reconnects with *Laudato Si'* and St Francis of Assisi

Pope Francis writes in his Introduction to *Laudate Deum*:

- 1 St. Francis of Assisi urged us to 'Praise God for all his creatures'. He taught this through his life, his actions, and the gift of his songs. In this message, he was reflecting on both the beautiful Psalms of Creation (part of our prayer in this Reader's Guide) and the tender sensitivity of Jesus toward the Earth. 'Consider the lilies of the field', Jesus taught in Matthew 6. 'They neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.' And again, he taught in Luke 12 that God remembers every sparrow, no matter how insignificant they might seem to us. Let us imitate Jesus in loving nature!
- 2 I published an encyclical entitled *Laudato Si'* eight years ago, which dealt with the fate of the Earth. I pleaded with humanity to respond to the care of our common home. But our response has not been adequate to forestall the dangers that are before us on this planet. Many people – especially the poor – will lose their employment, access to resources, their homes, and even their native land as they're forced to migrate. It's already unfolding!
- 3 This is a global crisis, and human life's very dignity hangs in the balance. The U.S. bishops summarised this well in their statement on climate change in 2019. How we care for each other and how we care for the Earth are intimately linked. That said, climate change is one of the top challenges facing us today. The final document from the 2019 Amazon Synod agreed, saying that many people's lives are disrupted by climate change. Likewise, the African bishops speak of this as an example of corporate sinfulness.
- 4 This letter comes to you because the situation is even more urgent, and our unwillingness to address it is more evident than eight years ago. Let us take another look at our situation. These issues remain at the forefront of my mission and should be important to all Catholics and people of good will.

For Reflection and Discussion

- Share what you think the Pope is setting out to do in this Introduction.
.....
- How do you respond to his sense of urgency?



The Global Climate Crisis



What humanity is facing

Pope Francis writes in *Laudate Deum*:

- 5 Some people wish to deny, minimise, or even hide the issue of climate change, but the signs are all around us that it is real. We have all witnessed extreme weather in recent years: record heat, drought, and storms. The Earth groans in silent pain. Of course, we know that not every natural catastrophic event is caused by climate change. However, scientists have verified that what we are seeing is not normal. In numbers, every increase in average global temperatures increases the likelihood of rain, snow, and floods in some areas, while others suffer from drought. An average increase of just 0.5° C is a major increase, but we are now approaching a 1.5° C average increase! If we allow it to go higher, the ice caps will melt, causing an untold catastrophe.
- 9 Some people blame the poor for this crisis, claiming that their large families and dependency on local natural resources cause it. It is typical to blame the poor, but the reality is that a small number of wealthy people consume more and contaminate the environment far more than the poor. The '2022 UN Emissions Gap Report' makes this clear. The poor are not solely responsible.
- 10 Other people claim that shifting away from fossil fuels to clean energy will cost jobs, but they fail to mention that many people—people who depend on farming, fishing, and forestry in particular—have lost their jobs due to other elements of climate change. Furthermore, the conversion to clean fuel will produce countless jobs for many people around the world and is already doing that. Business and political leaders should recognise that and capitalize on it to make everyone a winner.

Resistance and confusion

- 6 Some people mock and minimize these facts, saying that we've always had warm summers and cold winters. They consider what we are seeing to be normal and deride those of us who are concerned as alarmists who will wreck the world's economy. But these doubters fail to mention another key fact: global temperatures are rising at such a rate that major changes will occur within several decades—within many people's lifetimes.
- 7 We must be careful not to confuse naturally occurring cycles in our weather with the irregularities we are now seeing unfold.
- 8 When speaking of climate change, we aren't referring to a local weather report here or there, nor to seasonal adjustments, but to the long view: decades of global data showing how the climate is deteriorating.

For Reflection and Discussion

Silently reflect on the Pope's words in Chapter One so far

Conversation:

- How do you respond to Pope Francis' words here?

-
- How would you respond to people in your family or friendship circle who resist the evidence presented by global climate change science and hence cause confusion?

Pray together

Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor

Lord, when we listen with your ears we hear:
the bush grown more silent,
the birdsong less vibrant,
the stream's sluggish ripple.
Have mercy and open our ears.

Lord, when we look with your eyes we see:
the soil depleted, the sky smudged,
the oceans rubbished and the great
currents slowed.
Have mercy and help us to see.

Lord, when we look with your eyes we see:
the workers who struggle to get by,
the women subjected to violence,
the people who are excluded.
Have mercy and help us to see.

Lord, when we listen with your ears
we hear:
the sound of hungry children,
the distress of the mentally ill,
the silent pain of homeless women
and men.
Have mercy and open our ears.

Send your Spirit upon us Lord to renew
our sight,
to restore our hearing, and to reclaim your
reign of justice
for all people and peace for creation

Amen.

(Office for Justice, Ecology and Peace,
ACBC, 2021).

Act

- Commit yourself to be open-minded and better informed through our sharing and learning together, hopefully more ready to dialogue with others about the realities of Climate Change when you encounter people who are sceptical, uncaring or in denial.

Human causes

Pope Francis writes in *Laudate Deum*:

- 11 We can no longer deny that we humans are causing climate change, and here is the evidence. Until the 1800s, greenhouse gases that cause global warming were stable below 300 parts per million. However, as industrial development unfolded around 1850, this changed, and the level of gases increased substantially. In recent years, the Mauna Loa observatory measured the increase in such harmful gases at 400 parts per million eight years ago and an alarming 423 parts per million in 2023. Nearly half of such gas has been produced since 1990.
- 12 Meanwhile, global temperatures have risen at an equally alarming rate in the past 50 years, greater than in any period of history in the last 2,000 years! The trend right now is an increase of 0.15°C per decade. Since 1850, the average temperature has risen by 1.1°C, including high in our atmosphere, deep in our oceans, and especially on our polar ice caps. This is all causing terrible harm to sea life, plants, and us humans. It is indeed a crisis! (This body of data comes to us from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, based on some 34,000 studies and reported in their Synthesis Report in 2023.)
- 13 Almost the entire scientific community agrees on these data. Only a tiny number of people in that community still deny this. But the world's top economic powerhouse nations seem unable or unwilling to respond. They are focused on maximising profit in the shortest amount of time.
- 14 I am mentioning all this again here because of how so many people – including within the Catholic Church – dismiss these concerns. It is undeniable, however, that the trends I just cited directly result from unparalleled and unchecked industrial activity. We are doing this to our planet. I feel obliged to make these clarifications, which may seem obvious, because of certain dismissive and scarcely reasonable opinions that I encounter, even within the Catholic Church. Natural events such as warmer-than-usual summers or volcanoes, while they do cause some warming, do not explain the significant trends we are seeing. These trends are the result of greenhouse gas emissions.