

Mary-Ann Casanova



WE CARE FOR GOD'S EARTH





Mary-Ann Casanova has been a Sister of St Joseph for almost 40 years and currently ministers the Sisters' *Laudato Si* Action Plan Project Office. Mary-Ann's prior ministries include teaching in Catholic schools in the Dioceses of Adelaide and Port Pirie, working for Catholic EarthCare Australia, as the Director of an Ecology Centre, and leading numerous practical and spiritual ecological initiatives.

A scholar of Tenison Woods and Teilhard de Chardin, and an alumnus of the California Institute of Integral Studies, Mary-Ann credits growing up on a sheep station near Port Lincoln as shaping her spiritual DNA. Pope Francis might say of Mary-Ann, 'She smells of the sheep!'

**Sr Mary-Ann Casanova, PhD CIIS,
MEd ACU**

General Introduction and message from the author

Since the 1950s, the Catholic Church has stated its position on evolution and creation. The Church holds that God is the creator and evolution is a credible theory which describes a process of natural change which can be observed in all creation. Pope Francis's remarks in 2014 bear this out. (*See the article Pope Francis Speaks Out on Evolution [And Why It's No Surprise].*)

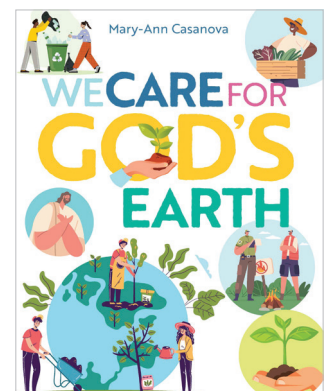
Pope Francis does not consider there to be rift between religion and science. Present generations of students have been born into a world where images of Earth taken from space are commonplace. They have grown up with an understanding of evolution, extinction, and an awareness of climate change. Often such concepts exist in a 'parallel universe' to their faith-formation and catechesis.

The weaving together of a faith-filled understanding of creation, evolution and climate change is at the heart of this resource. The presentation of cohesive, theologically, and scientifically correct information is in keeping with Pope Francis's description of environmental education. (*See paragraphs 209–215 of Laudato Si.*) He envisages education for a covenant between humanity and the environment.

For Pope Francis, environmental education:

...seeks to restore the various levels of ecological equilibrium, establishing harmony within ourselves, with others, with nature and other living creatures, and with God. Environmental education should facilitate making the leap toward the transcendent, which gives ecological ethics its deepest meaning. It needs educators capable of developing an ethics of ecology, and helping people, through effective pedagogy, to grow in solidarity, responsibility, and compassionate care (Pope Francis 2015, para 210).

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We Care for God's Earth
by Mary-Ann Casanova



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CHAPTER 1: THE STORY OF THE UNIVERSE



Teacher Information

There is a synergy between our faith story and the accepted scientific story of the origins and unfolding of the universe. Our faith tradition places God as the creating force within an unfolding story of wonder and inherent goodness. The scientific story fills in some of the details as to how the universe has continued to evolve.

Faith-filled people such as Teilhard de Chardin interpret the energy present in the universe from the Big Bang as being God's love and the holy work of the Spirit.

Activity

There are so many ways to begin the creation or construction of something. Some stories begin with 'once upon a time'. Some projects begin with a flat pack, a set of instructions or diagrams and a simple spanner. A Lego model begins with an idea and lots of tiny bricks. A cake begins with a list of raw ingredients and a recipe. Simulation games such as Minecraft begin from a basic level and the virtual environment becomes increasingly complex.

Invite students to share how they begin making things, like:

- Constructing a jigsaw puzzle. Do you begin with finding the corners, constructing the frame, sorting the pieces, joining pieces that interest you or ...?
- Baking a cake.
- Writing a story. Do you have an idea of who your characters are, for instance. Do you already have a plot or title. Or do you just sit down and begin to write, letting the story unfold as you go?

Invite students to reflect on some 'projects' which continue to unfold across time, like:

- tending a garden
- building a collection or hobby
- reading a series of novels – waiting for the next instalment to be released
- training a puppy.

Brainstorm other beginnings.

- Introduce the section from *We Care for God's Earth*.
- Assist the students to identify and discuss the beginning points of the universe. For example, God's dream for creation and the Big Bang.



Teacher Information

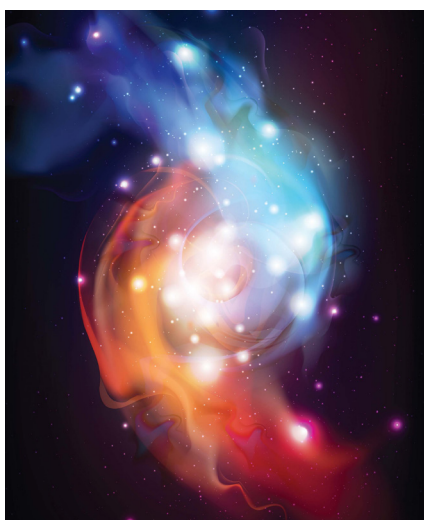
The term 'Big Bang' was coined in 1927 by the physicist Georges Lemaître. Knowing that the universe was expanding, he 'ran the video backwards' in his mind and theorised that the beginning point was a very small condensed single point. The initial expansion of this highly energised point was a big bang.

Lemaître's simple explanation is now a century old. Recent images from the Webb telescope suggest that there have been multiple 'Big Bangs'.

Activity

Viewing actions in reverse mode like Lemaître did is possible by reversing videos. Mr Reverse has a wealth of videos on YouTube, for example, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H4mpMKJFN_E

- Engage students in filming/recording actions and play these back in reverse. For example, getting off the school bus, practicing high jump or dance moves, eating an apple, drawing a cartoon, or tying a shoelace.
- Engage students in 'doing things backwards' – act out situations such as opening a door, packing a school bag, or folding a paper plane.
- Discuss how looking at actions in reverse can be informative. For example, detectives replaying CCTV footage, a sports coach looking to refine techniques, or umpires seeking a correct call by playing back video footage.
- Introduce the section from *We Care for God's Earth*.
- Assist the students to connect Lemaître's insight, the uses of considering events in reverse, and the Big Bang.
- Invite students to consider alternative explanations or metaphors in place of the Big Bang theory.



Teacher Information

Telescopes were invented in the 17th century. The first telescopes had limited magnification but allowed astronomers of the day to observe things beyond the capacities of the human eye – such as the rings around planet Jupiter.

Developments in technology have led to a diversity in types of telescopes and the data they take in. Some telescopes read light, others sound and radio waves. Some telescopes are hand-held, others are large stationary telescopes arrayed to work in conjunction with each other. The Hubble and Webb telescopes are located in space.

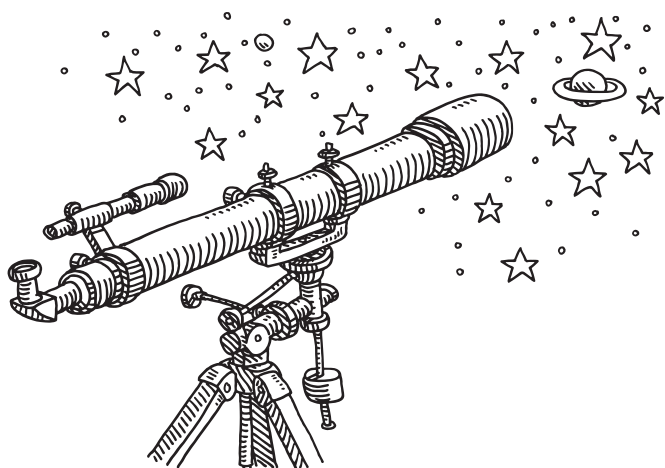
Like Georges Lemaître, telescopes read the universe backwards. There are lengthy delays (think in terms of light years) between the event and when we Earthlings can detect, observe or record it.

The NASA website regularly adds to their image gallery.

One of the world's largest radio telescopes is under construction in Western Australia. Australia's SKA-Low telescope is being built in the outback, in part to answer if we are alone in the universe.

Activity

- Introduce the section from *We Care for God's Earth*.
- Provide students with a variety of magnifying tools such as magnifying glasses (of varying capacities), hand lens, microscopes, telescopes etc. Various APPs are available for use with digital devices. Many cameras on digital phones have excellent macro and telephoto capacities.
- Encourage students to use these instruments to examine everyday objects in closer detail.
- Set up a telescope for students to use. Invite local experts and telescope enthusiasts to bring in their telescopes.
- Visit a planetarium or view via virtual planetariums such as:
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=huysYcz-AiQ>
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t57DPnH06V0>
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cvaV8TV11kY>



CHAPTER 2: THE STORY OF EARTH



Teacher Information

The first images of the whole of planet Earth taken from space were made in the 1960s. The beautiful blue, green and brown marbled planet we know today began forming about 4.5 billion years ago. The building materials for Earth were stardust from a supernova of an old star. The planet began as a gathering of extremely hot gas and molten rock which eventually settled into layers as it cooled.

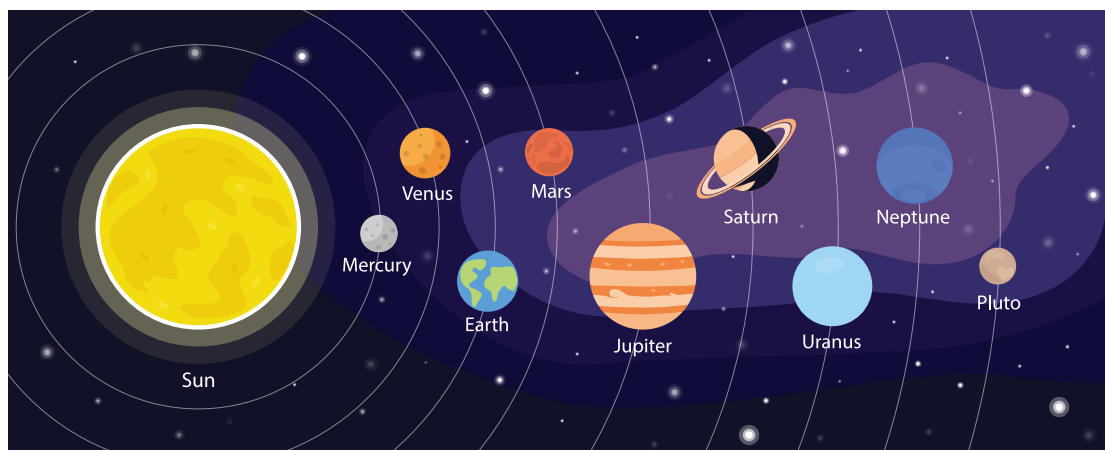
Earth continues to be formed. The movement of tectonic plates, volcanic eruptions and earthquakes shape the outer layers of our planet. The arrival of material from outer space constantly adds to the Earth's chemical make-up. Stardust sprinkles us daily. Larger bodies, such as meteorites impacts, are capable of reshaping Earth's crust, tilting the planet's angle and hastening the extinction of species.

Activity

Read the relevant sections in *We Care For God's Earth*. Assist students to identify the processes presented in the text which influence the ongoing formation of Earth.

Engage students in a range of activities which demonstrate the transformation of materials into another form. For example:

- Processes of layering and building up could be demonstrated via papier mâché, collage, or 'lasagna' gardening techniques.
- Processes of linking and joining via knitting or crochet.
- Processes of layering via sieving or sifting.
- Processes of changing states via freezing and heating water, beeswax, butter and other responsive materials.
- The influence of weight on layering could be demonstrated by placing various items in a clear bag and shaking them and allowing the heaviest items to settle on the bottom and the lightest on top. Shaking a bowl of freshly cooked popcorn will also show this principle.



How have geologists, palaeontologists and botanists come to know Earth's story?
Page 15–16

Teacher Information

People have always been interested in their surroundings, applying their intellect to help make sense of the wonders that surround them. Long before the emergence of modern science, there have been scientists studying the phenomenon of Earth.

There are many fields of scientific study associated with the Earth, most ending in 'ology' meaning the study of. New areas or fields of study emerge and merge.

Developments in the sophistication and sensitivity of scientific apparatus and techniques have increased our ability to read and interpret Earth's story. Access to the extremes of immensity and the microscopic continually expand. The invention of submersibles capable of withstanding immense pressures has allowed scientists to study deep ocean crevasses which were previously inaccessible.

Activity

Read the relevant sections in *We Care For God's Earth*.

Assist students to create a bingo activity to match specific fields of study with the spheres of Earth.

Refresh students' understanding of the spheres depending on year level of learning.

Geosphere	Earth's crust
Lithosphere	Hard rock layer
Biosphere	Living things
Hydrosphere	Water
Atmosphere	Gas layer
Cryosphere	Frozen water layer
Magnetosphere	Magnetic field
Pedosphere	Soil layer
Noosphere	Consciousness
Spiritual	



How have geologists, palaeontologists and botanists come to know Earth's story?
Page 15–16 cont.

Students research and list the 'ologies' and the general area of study.

Match areas of study with the spheres, for example:

Geosphere	Geography, geology
Lithosphere	Geology, vulcanology, mineralogy
Biosphere	Biology, zoology, conchology, virology, ichthyology, botany, entomology
Spiritual	Theology, cosmology
Atmosphere	Climatology, meteorology

Additional Activities

- Discussion could revolve around students identifying areas which are of interest to them or which they are considering as a career.
- Invite students (and members of the school community) who have a passion or expertise in various 'ologies' to make presentations to the group.



Teacher Information

There is a myriad of associations surrounding the concept of plans and planning. Often plans and planning are linked with the achievement of stated future goals and outcomes, the construction of a home, organising a holiday or changing one's career path. We record our plans in diaries and calendars. Organisations labour over the formation of strategic plans.

Differing personalities respond to the task of planning in differing ways. Some like a detailed and step-by-step approach, while others delight in arriving at the broad concepts and leaving the actualisation up to others. Some like to know the entire scope of a plan a long time in advance, while some are satisfied with incremental steps or a more flexible approach.

But how might God plan? It would seem that God's mode of planning is organic. God allows creation and life to develop as it will, in response to present conditions. God's plan is for the inherent goodness of all creation to reach its fullest potential. God's plan for Earth (and the whole of creation) is that it flourishes like a beautiful, lush garden.

Activity

Help students reflect on the style of planning and individual preferences for planning present in the group.

Invite students to consider their preferred position and to move into groups as directed by the teacher. For example:

- Those who prefer to plan well ahead, or not.
- Those who like to skip the details and go with the general concept, or not.
- Those who don't like varying from the plan, or those who like to make it up as they go along.
- Those who document the plan in some way (words, diagrams, maps).
- Those who visualise the end product and work backwards.
- Those who find it difficult to imagine the product.
- Those who find reading/interpreting/following step-by-step instructions difficult, easy or unnecessary.
- Those who like an organic approach.

Introduce the section from *We Care for God's Earth*.

Assist the students to identify and describe God's mode of planning.

Challenge students to imagine what Earth and creation may look like and how the web of life might interact if God used a different style of planning. Students could role-play these.

Invite students to consider what their dream for a flourishing Earth would entail. How might this dream be achieved? What steps and actions can begin now?



CHAPTER 3: GOD MADE THE EARTH



Teacher Information

The biblical stories of the creation of Earth do not record a literal account. God is portrayed as desiring creation into being, of taking time to create and appreciate all that comes forth.

God created the Earth and all the creatures that live on it. While the sciences have helped us to understand the processes and history that have shaped our planet, there are gaps. Not all things can be explained. We know God in this mystery.

Pope Francis reminds us in *Laudato Sí* that ‘God’s love is the fundamental moving force of all created thing’ (Pope Francis 2015, para 77).



Teacher Information

Every part of creation acknowledges God as Creator. And, in their own unique ways, each part of creation offers praise and thanks: the songs of birds, the fragrance and colours of flowers, the busyness of ants and bees, the graceful bound of a kangaroo, the chatter of galahs and parrots, and the breaching of a whale. These may all be acts of praise and thanks.

We praise and thank our Creator in many different ways: through our words and actions; in music, art and song; in silence and laughter; in smiles and our appreciation of beauty.

Activity

Introduce the section from *We Care for God's Earth*.

Assist the students to identify other examples of nature engaged in praise. Encourage students to use rich language and descriptions.

Assist the students to create a zine based on their observations and experiences of nature praising our Creator God. Students could create pages across a week or set period as a record of some of the examples of nature's praise.

Alternative suggestions:

- Curate a soundscape of nature voicing its praise (ocean waves, wind rustling leaves, dogs barking, children laughing etc.).
- Create a visual feast to accompany St Francis of Assisi's Canticle of Praise.
- Contribute to a gallery of beautiful places and species.



Is humanity the only part of creation that 'forgets' to be grateful?

Pg 24

What can we do help creation to praise God?

Pg 25



Teacher Information

Like each species, habitat, planet and part of the universe, we humans have a role to play in helping creation praise God. We can facilitate creation's praise by allowing every other part of creation to flourish. Our role is not to obstruct other species or parts of creation.

We have a growing awareness of the damage the human species has wrought through the destruction and modification of the environment, hunting species to extinction, releasing poisonous substances into waterways, the atmosphere and soil. Such adverse outcomes silence a voice of praise. As Pope Francis reminds us in *Laudato Sí*, 'the degree of human intervention, often in the service of business interests and consumerism, is actually making our earth less rich and beautiful, evermore limited and grey.' (Pope Francis 2015, para 31.)

Pope Francis presents a very clear message about humanity's role. He writes, 'Each year sees the disappearance of thousands of plants and animal species which we will never know, which our children will never see, because they have been lost forever. The great majority become extinct for reasons related to human activity. Because of us, thousands of species will no longer give glory to God by their very existence, nor convey their message to us. We have no such right.' (Pope Francis 2015, para 33.)

Activity

Discuss the meaning of flourishing and the factors which contribute to the flourishing of different species. For example, what are the basic requirements for the flourishing of:

- one's pets (perhaps the school dog or companion animals)
- students' favourite species or habitat
- humpbacked whales
- lettuce, daffodils, moss
- the local agricultural crops (cereals, legumes, fruit, sugar, horticultural)
- local flora and fauna
- local beauty spots and natural tourist attractions such as National Parks?

Assist students to draw up a charter of rights for Earth's species and creation.

Include the roles and responsibilities of the human species in assisting other expressions of creation to flourish.

Additional activities

- Compile a dossier or timeline of extinct and endangered species. Highlight the role of the human species in the threats to the species.
- Assist students to write a letter or create a visual message to send to Pope Francis informing him of the efforts of the local community to support the flourishing of creation in ways which enable species to give glory to God by their very existence.

CHAPTER 4: A HUMAN TIMELINE



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Teacher Information

The story of the evolution of the human species is part of the greater story of God's dream for creation. Pope Francis notes that "The Bible teaches that every man and woman is created out of love and made in God's image and likeness" (Pope Francis 2015, para. 65).

The ability to adapt and change across long passages of time is common to all species, and *Homo sapiens sapiens* is no exception. Those who study fossils (palaeontologists) and those who study civilisation and culture (anthropologists) have used evidence from as far back as 6 million years to assemble the lineage of our species.

Various techniques have been developed to assist in the dating of fossil and archaeological material. Scientists date materials in relation to other materials, such as the rock in which a fossil is embedded. Relative dating and absolute dating are two common techniques.

Activity

Introduce students to the topic of dating fossils in *We Care for God's Earth*.

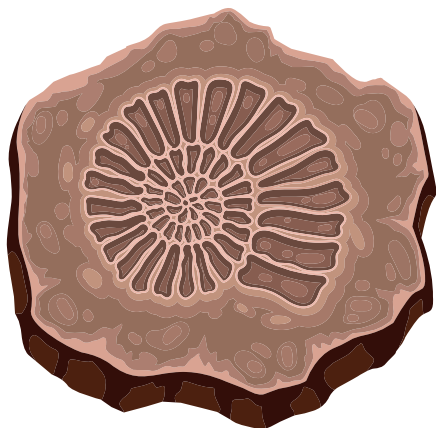
Use the video clip to further explain Relative and Absolute Dating methods.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jvvfo7qqGkk>

Additional activity

Provide sets of jumbled series of images from differing historical periods or showing a series of artifacts across time (models of vehicles, school uniforms, mobile phones etc.).

- Ask students to arrange the images in chronological order.
- Discuss the criteria, visual clues and associated knowledge they used to construct the sequence.
- Link this modern anthropological and archaeological exercise to that of fossil science.



What are the unique gifts that God has blessed humans – *Homo sapiens* – with?
Pg 30

Teacher Information

Pope Francis reminded the readers of *Laudato Sí* that we ‘human beings must be recognized as a part of nature’. (Pope Francis 2015, para 26.) We share many traits and capabilities with our fellow species.

There are many traits and capacities which human beings do not rely on for survival and these are not uppermost in our list of gifts. For example, a polar bear can smell prey from many kilometres away while we can detect the aroma of a delicious meal from several metres. Our ability to jump or swim underwater is limited compared with other species.

Our species name reflects our unique gift. We are named *Homo sapiens* which translates as wise one. The particular form of wisdom we carry is associated with our complex level of consciousness. The human species is gifted with spiritual and religious hearts and minds. We have been gifted with an ability to reflect – to think about ourselves and others in our environment.

Activity

Introduce students to the relevant section in *We Care for God’s Earth*.

Engage students in a conversation about:

- The gifts the human species shares with other species and with inanimate creation.
- The purpose of our consciousness, i.e. why might God have gifted us with spiritual hearts and minds?
- How might we use these gifts more fully to praise God?

Have students draw up lists of the gifts of our fellow species and inanimate creation.

Use these lists to compose a prayer of blessing for the group. For example,

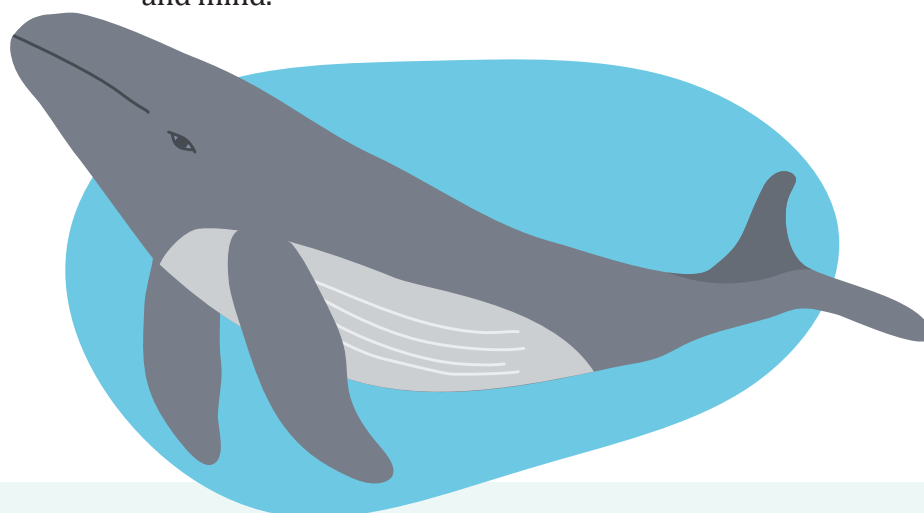
May you be blessed with the gentle movement of the summer breeze,

May you be free as a penguin swimming in the Antarctic,

May you be as strong as an ancient eucalyptus tree,

May you play as often as young lamb...

Conclude the prayer of blessing with a reference to the spiritual heart and mind.



CHAPTER 5: CREATION STORIES



Teacher Information

Creation stories are a universal phenomenon. From time immemorial, cultures and civilisations have constructed and retold their stories of origin. It is a common urge across the human species to ask primal questions such as:

- Where did we come from?
- Where did the other living things I see come from?
- How is the landscape and seascape formed?
- Is there something/someone greater than us?

The Bible contains several creation stories which were taken from the oral tradition. The Catholic faith tradition has long held that these stories are not intended for literal interpretation. Rather they are cosmological stories which convey layered messages about the relationships between God, people and creation.



What are the Bible creation stories?

Pg 32–33

Are creation stories only found in the Bible?

Pg 35–36

Teacher Information

We are used to different versions or editions of a story: one might be in book form, one in animated form and another as a musical. Each version is intended for a different audience.

Important stories evolve across time while the message remains the same regardless of the technology, format and genre. It's the same for the different biblical versions of the creation story and the modern scientific version.

Biblical hermeneutics is the technical term which refers to the study of the meaning and intent behind religious texts. Hermeneutics seeks to uncover the agenda and circumstances which result in differing versions of the same subject matter.

Activity

Ask students to identify a story known by the group.

Divide into small groups and ask each group to retell the story in their own words. Discuss:

- The similarities and differences in the modes of story-telling.
- The focus and key messages of each version.
- Explore reasons for the variations.
- Is there a 'right' version?

Introduce the section from *We Care for God's Earth*. Assist the students to compare and contrast.

Guide students through the chapter.





CHAPTER 6: A TIME FOR EVERYTHING



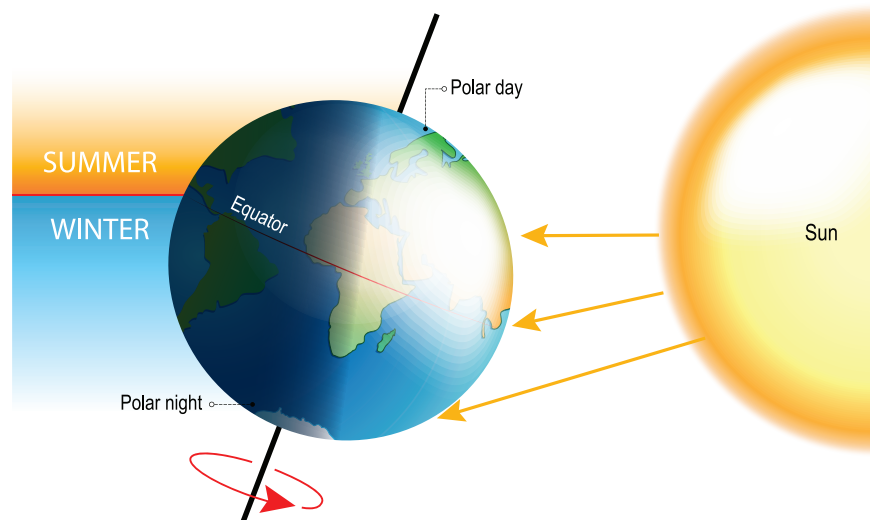
Teacher Information

The measuring of time is a human concept. It has taken millennia for the natural cycles and seasons of Earth to become established (but not fixed). Subtle and dramatic changes in the number of daylight hours, soil or ocean temperature, the shift from monsoon season to the dry – for example – have effects on the reproductive cycles of plants, fungi, animals and all other living things.

The angle of Earth's tilt governs our planet's general calendar. Early civilisations devised ways of dividing the passage of time and often used rituals to mark the transition between important units of time. Recurring patterns were observed and linked with reliable changes, such as the phases of the moon with tidal movements and animal behaviours. The survival of social groups depended on the awareness of such associations.

By the time the Bible came to be written, many sophisticated calculations had been made and the seven-day week was established as a way of measurement for the human experience of time. The first chapter of Genesis is one example of this. It was understood that God experienced time in ways which differed from that of humans. God's desire for a flourishing Earth and universe is seen in the provision of all the possible environmental conditions needed for every species; each in turn, each at an optimal time.

EARTH'S SEASONS



Teacher Information

The ways in which humans measure units of time must take into account the longest and the shortest passages of time we can imagine.

The invention of all manner of machines and ways of recording time have been an important part of each civilisation.

Activity

Assist the students to create a list of the units of time by which we presently measure time. For example:

- Seasons – the four seasons, the wet or dry season, cyclone season, footy season, lambing.
- Celebrations – birthdays, Christmas, Easter, New Year.
- Accurate times – transport timetables (plane, bus, train, shuttle) little athletics, swimming carnival, lessons/ periods.
- Long passages of time – light years, millions of years, billions of years, century, decade.
- Commonplace – day, month, year, minute, seconds, week, hour, time zones.

Discuss the need for, and usefulness of, differing units of time.

Invite students to speculate on the importance of knowing or sensing the time for the survival of a species or social group. For example, squirrels gathering a store of nuts, fruit trees bursting into blossom when pollinating insects are active.

Invite students:

- To ponder why God’s creation includes so many different periods of time. (Link with God’s plan for life to flourish in all its expressions.)
- Imagine Earth if time and seasons were fixed.
 - What would the consequences be for plants?
 - For migrating species?
 - For the human species?

Guide students through the relevant sections in *We Care for God’s Creation*.



Why is the seventh day (Sunday) considered a day of rest?

Pg 42–43

Teacher Information

The seventh day, the Sabbath, is intended for resting and enjoying the goodness of creation. The Sabbath brings the first creation account (Gen 1) to a close and sets up a cycle for creative work and creative rest.

On our rest day we have time to care for ourselves, for others, and for Earth and to be extra mindful of the Creator God. The setting aside of a day for resting and for spiritual practices is common in many religious traditions.

Activity

Lead students through the relevant section in *We Care for God's Earth*.

Invite students to share ways in which they relax, rest and are refreshed by creation.

Guide students in a conversation about tending to their inner spirit.

- What gives them life, for example surfing, spending time with their pets, unwinding in the outdoors?
- What signals and sensations indicate that they need to attend to their need for creation and for God?



CHAPTER 7: OUR EARTH NEEDS HELP



Teacher Information

Everything on our Earth is interconnected. A change to one part of our planet can affect the whole planet. Humans have the ability to help or hurt Earth. God invites us to care for the Earth as God does.

Human beings are a part of the Earth. When Earth hurts, we hurt too. When we damage the Earth, we damage ourselves in the process. Pope Francis uses the metaphor of the desert to describe the impact of Earth's pain on our wellbeing. He says that our hearts are in danger of becoming deserts and our world of becoming increasingly grey and colourless. We, and our fellow species, are at risk of losing the *viriditas* or fresh greenness of life.

The twelfth century mystic Hildegard von Bingen used the Latin word '*viriditas*' – literally meaning 'greenness', but in essence meaning vitality, lushness or growth – in reference to spiritual and physical health.

Many of Earth's ecological problems stem from human activities. The most severe adverse effects are experienced by the most vulnerable and poor.

Activity

Engage students in the relevant sections of *We Care for God's Earth*.

Assist students to create a world map of key 'hot spots' of Earth's trauma.

Encourage the students to consider the root causes of each example and to identify how the poorest and most vulnerable people and other species are impacted.

Additional activities

- Invite members of local organisations and local government to share ways in which they are addressing sites and remediating local issues such as pollution, climate change, microplastics, acidification, erosion and deforestation.
- Expose children to the work of organisations such as Caritas Australia, Catholic Mission and other faith-based NGOs.
- Assist the students to prepare video clips and social media posts to inform others of the problems, causes and ways of helping Earth to heal.
- Join a local community project, such as a Clean Up Day, tree propagation or planting event.
- Assist students to organise raise funds and awareness for a project sponsored by Caritas or Catholic Mission for example.



CHAPTER 8: ALL ABOUT GOD'S BOOK



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Teacher Information

Christians have access to two 'God books' – the book of nature and the sacred scriptures – where we are able to meet God in creation and through the inspired text. As we 'read' these books we open ourselves to the possibility of learning more about God.

The authors of the Book of Wisdom describe how skilled artists and artisans shine through their works; something of the creator can be glimpsed in their work. So, too, with creation and sacred scripture, as Saint Paul wrote to in a letter to the Romans, "ever since the creation of the world God's [his] eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things God [he] has made" (Romans 1:20) (The Holy Bible: Containing the Old and New Testaments with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books : New Revised Standard Version 1998, p 120).

Activity

Guide students through the relevant sections of *We Care for God's Earth*.



What is God's other book called?

Pg 58–59

Teacher Information

Nature is the prime, or first, 'God book'. The volume which belongs to Earth has been in existence for billions of years. The Book of Nature is available to everyone regardless of their level of literacy, spoken language, or time in which one lives. In this constantly changing story, moment to moment new, varied and fresh aspects of this 'God book' are before us. No two sunsets or snowflakes, for example are identical.

Theologians are careful to distinguish between God and creation. A pantheistic position names creation as an expression of God. Breaking down this technical word into its parts helps us understand this position; 'pan' translates as all; 'en' translates as in, while 'theistic' means God. Pantheism places all creation in God. This allows God to be much more than creation, since there are no limits to God.

The Book of Nature is a source of inspiration and a portal to becoming more familiar with God. We have been gifted with the sense of smell, touch, taste, hearing and vision. Each of our basic senses help to read God's book of nature.

Activity

Guide students through the relevant sections of *We Care for God's Earth*.

Engage students in a range of exercises to heighten their sensory awareness (see page 59 for examples).

Additional Activity

Expose the students to opportunities of reading the 'God book' of nature. Multiple experiences will be more beneficial than one-off experiences.

Students could prepare a sensory feast for their classmates.

- Divide the group into five groups and allocate a sense to each group.
- Members of each group gather/prepare/curate a set of natural objects, sounds and smelly things to match their allocated sense. For example, a touch bag could contain samples of bark, feathers, sand, pine cone, and a sea shell. A sound video might include recordings of magpie song, rustling leaves, running water and so forth.
- Using the sense of the collection, challenge members of the class/group to identify the natural items and to suggest what this reveals about God. Why is this part of the God book?



Teacher Information

Pope Francis is deeply interested in environmental education. He sees such education as a means of building a strong covenant between humanity and the environment. The precedent of this covenant is found in the Old Testament story of Noah and the Ark (Genesis 7-8).

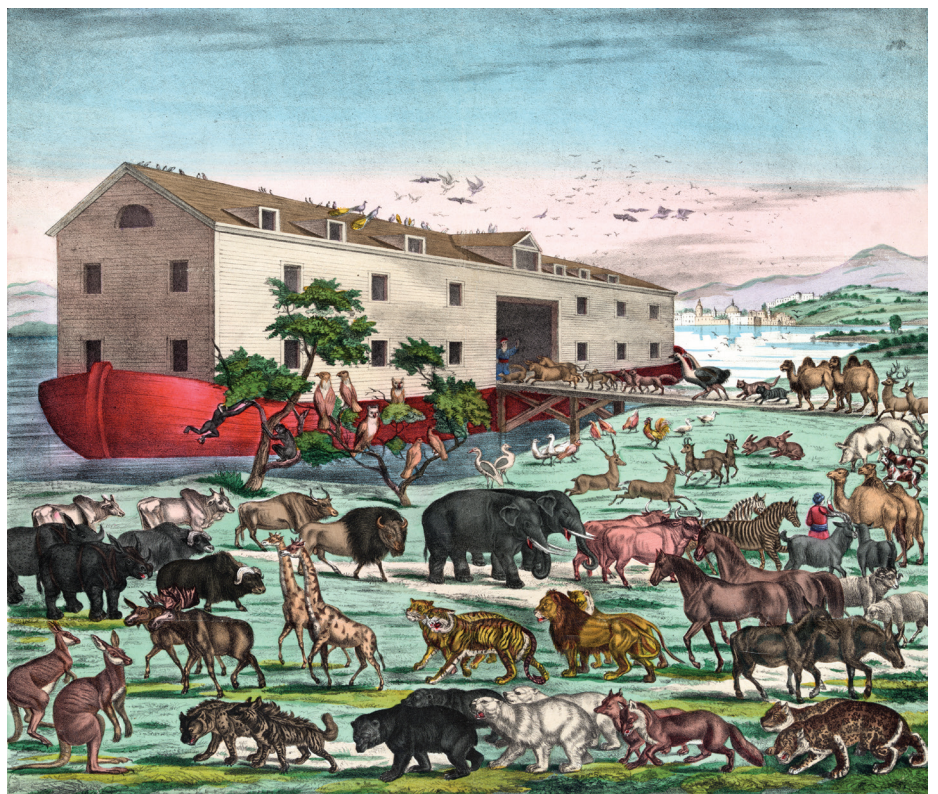
The story of Noah and the Ark is one of the best-known stories from the Old Testament. The story was part of the oral tradition before it was written down. It is thought that early written versions appeared around 600 BCE. The story has captured the imaginations of young children and adults alike, despite the lack of information the Bible passages contain. It is an instructional or teaching story, full of images and messages.

For those who interpret the Bible in a literal way, believing in the exact meaning of the words, the story is a factual story of real events. Others argue that the story of Noah's Ark is a symbolic story that was written to deliver a specific message to the people who heard it or saw drawings and images of it.

Noah and God enter a covenant, a binding agreement. The covenant that God made with Noah was on behalf of the generations of all life on Earth. This agreement has no expiry date. In this covenant God makes a solemn promise, for the earth, humans and people never again to be destroyed. We can trust that God wants life on Earth to flourish. Pope Francis's desire is for humanity to live up to our side of the covenant.

Activity

Lead students through the relevant sections of *We Care for God's Earth*.





CHAPTER 9: BEING RESPONSIBLE CITIZENS



Teacher Information

God's dream for flourishing creation is our human dream too. Our unique gifts of spiritual awareness and highly developed minds and hearts is accompanied with an important role in caring for Earth. We human beings are part of the Earth community. We are citizens of Earth. Pope Francis reminds us that we need one another, and we have a shared responsibility for our fellow citizens. The same goodness which God placed in creation is within each and every one of us. The challenge is to find appropriate and effective ways of exercising our responsibility and innate goodness.

Activity

Guide students through the chapter material in *We Care for God's Earth*.

Invite students to:

- Add to the examples given in the text.
- Nominate and commit to particular actions for an agreed period of time.

Assist students to organise and host a skill sharing event. For example, students could run various cafes and teach their classmates skills such as:

- **REPAIR CAFÉ SKILLS**
e.g. sewing on a button, repairing their bike or scooter, fixing broken items.
- **UPCYCLING CAFÉ SKILLS**
e.g. art and craft activities using recycled materials.
- **EXCHANGE CAFÉ SKILLS**
e.g. bring and swap books, toys, or clothing.

Alternatively, ask members from the school community to share their skills with the students.

Students could submit topics for skill development – what skills would be useful for you to learn?

Students could collaboratively compile a 'directory' of useful online tutorials to address these gaps.

Alternatively, students could produce their own tutorials showcasing their skills and ways in which they act as responsible citizens and care for God's Earth.



CHAPTER 10: CARING TIMES



Teacher Information

School communities are vibrant and alert to important issues. Schools are places where students, their parents and carers, and teachers continually learn and share their skills with one another. The most important learning for each member of the community is not the learning of facts and information, nor is it the learning of practical and useful skills; it is what your heart learns – learning to love Earth and to care for it as God expects us to.

School communities have implemented numerous initiatives and projects which engage staff, students and parents in caring for God's Earth. As new areas of concern arise other responses are introduced.

Activity

- Assist students to identify the project and initiatives to help the school community to care for God's Earth.
- Arrange for members of the class to prepare a series of articles promoting these. Articles could be included in the school newsletter and other modes of internal communication.

Additional activity

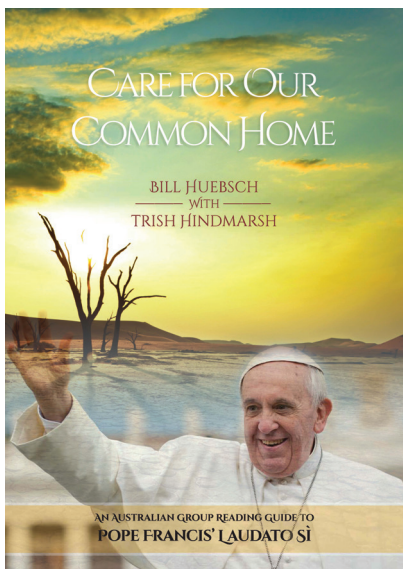
- Students could identify a new project, concern or action and develop a plan for its adoption using the school's protocols. Preparing a proposal would include aspects of analysis of the problem, prioritizing possible actions, drafting lists of resources, budgets and timeframes, presenting a case to the Environmental Council, Principal, student body and other organisations.



CHAPTER 11: POPE FRANCIS AND CARING FOR GOD'S EARTH



What does Pope Francis tell us about living with climate change?
Pg 82–89



Teacher Information

The Pope is passionate about caring for the Earth. In 2015, Pope Francis wrote an important letter (aka Encyclical) to ‘every person living on this planet’ (para 3). He called it *Laudato Si'*: on care of our common home. It may seem like a long time has passed since the Pope wrote the letter, but its message is still relevant to us.

Pope Francis has a particular concern for young people and for future generations. He desires environmental justice and intergenerational justice. Pope Francis believes in the goodness, love, hope and ideals of justice which young people embody.

Laudato Si'

Pope Francis emphasises the need to ‘hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor’ (para 49). They cry because of climate change and the way in which it hurts the Earth. Pope Francis is concerned that people are ignoring the way their decisions harm the environment and others, and that this makes it ‘difficult to hear the cry of nature itself’ (Pope Francis 2015, para 117).

Laudate Deum

In October 2023, Pope Francis wrote a second letter known as *Laudate Deum*. The topic of this letter was the climate crisis, and he addressed this letter to all people of good will. Planet Earth is, he writes, ‘approaching a critical point. Small changes can cause greater ones, unforeseen and perhaps already irreversible’ (Pope Francis 2023, para 17).

Pope Francis is concerned by the lack of response shown to his first letter and urges all readers to wake up and do all that they can to care for God’s Earth. He calls on educators to nurture gospel values and sound ethics and morals in their students.

Activity

Guide students through the relevant sections of *We Care for God’s Earth*.

- Assist students to reflect on their personal commitment to caring for God’s Earth. Assist students to write a letter to Pope Francis outlining their commitment and assuring him of their desire to wake up, to take action, and to work with others.
- Students could identify a new project, concern or action and develop a plan for its adoption using the school’s protocols. Preparing a proposal would include aspects of analysis of the problem, prioritising possible actions, drafting lists of resources, budgets and timeframes, presenting a case to the Environmental Council, Principal, student body and other organisations.

Additional activity

- Students could write a letter to planet Earth assuring the planet of their desire to wake up, to take action, and to work with others in caring for Earth.

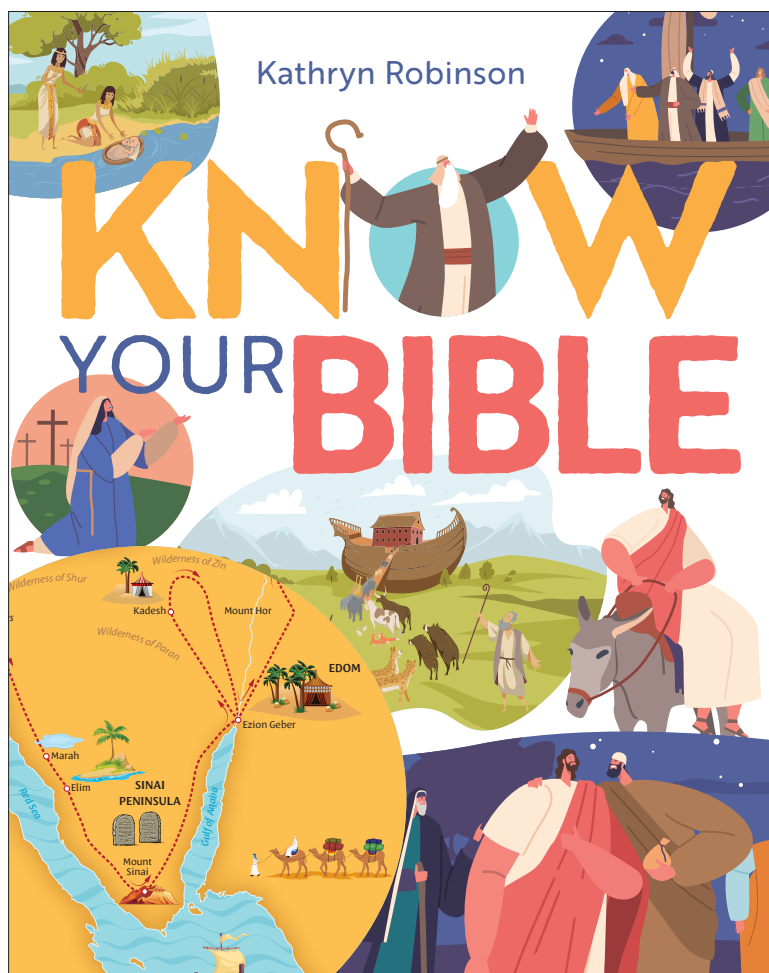
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