



Blessed Are You, Lord God of All Creation!

Youth Ministry Toolkit -- Stewardship of Creation



“The Holy Father ... reminds us that our preeminent duty is to protect and safeguard all of human life from the moment of conception to natural death and that is in harmony with our duty also to take care of His creation, which makes that life possible.”

Bishop Burbidge, 2021

Purposes of This Toolkit:

- To give you tools to help the youth you work with to:
 - » Learn Church teaching, ever ancient and new, about our relationship with and stewardship of the natural world;
 - » Recognize that preservation of the earth’s environment and habitat is fundamental to our Catholic commitment to respect and nurture human life;
 - » Become sensitive to how our interaction with the environment affects the poor and most vulnerable of our brothers and sisters;
 - » Transform their natural concern about the future of the earth into active protection and nurturing of God’s creation and care for the poor.
- To support you in evangelizing youth and attracting them to the Faith by helping them discover that their Church cares deeply about them and is calling them to help preserve a world that will support their lives and the lives of their children.

The Background

Young people are concerned about the increasingly apparent consequences of the warming and pollution of the earth. They know it has implications for their futures. What they may not know is what the Church thinks and teaches about this, or that our Magisterium is calling all of us to unite in a worldwide effort to preserve the gift of creation that God has given us. In his 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis invited us to see our relationship with the natural world through eyes of faith. He committed our Church to preserving the Earth which supports our lives, and to hearing the cry of the poor, who suffer most from the inequities that environmental damage creates.

Why Care for Creation?

- *Because the Word sanctified all of creation by becoming flesh and dwelling among us.*
- *Because we are a Pro-Life People.*

Teaching our youth to treat the environment with integrity is integral to our Catholic pro-life commitment. As we save the unborn from abortion, we also embrace the Church's commitment to uphold and protect human life from conception until natural death by cultivating a habitable planet that can support their lives.

Eight years after promulgating his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis challenges us to put our faith into action. The Pope has asked all Catholics and people of good will to embark with him on a multi-year journey to learn and practice the teachings of *Laudato Si'*, and to embrace the Church's defense of life by cherishing the Creator's design and by caring for the most vulnerable. In this way, in Jesus' words, we "might have life and have it more abundantly." (John 10:10). *Bishop Burbidge has committed our diocese to make this journey with the Holy Father and is inviting all families, schools and parishes to join in this effort.*

Bishop Burbidge blessing solar panels at Our Lady Queen of Peace parish on World Day of Prayer for Care of Creation, September 1, 2020.



But how do you integrate these lessons into an already crowded schedule of learning and activities with your youth? And what do you want them to learn and take to heart?

That's where this toolkit comes in. It provides content for you to choose from, and tips for how to use it. It provides ideas for incorporating *Laudato Si'*'s lessons into activities you're already doing, and for enlisting other parish ministries to support your efforts.

Laudato Si'. The Basics.

***“Defense of the environment
has no other purpose than the defense of life.”
Pope Francis, 2018***

Laudato Si' follows in the great line of Church teaching about our relationship with the natural world. That relationship is grounded

in the Incarnation of Christ, who sanctified all of creation by becoming human. “Jesus lived in full harmony with creation. . . . He was far removed from philosophies which despised the body, matter and the things of the world. . . . From the beginning of the world, but particularly through the Incarnation, the mystery of Christ is at work in a hidden manner in the natural world as a whole[.]” *Laudato Si'* 98-99.

Pope St. John Paul II positioned our stewardship of the natural world squarely within the commands of the Gospel of Life. In *Evangelium Vitae* he teaches us that “As one called to till and look after the garden of the world (cf. Gen 2:15), man has a specific responsibility towards the environment in which he lives, towards the creation which God has put at the service of his personal dignity, of his life, not only for the present but also for future generations. It is the ecological question –ranging from the preservation of the natural habitats of the different species of animals and of other forms of life to ‘human ecology’ properly speaking--which finds in the Bible clear and strong ethical direction, leading to a solution which respects the great good of life, of every life.” *Evangelium Vitae*, Section 42

Pope Benedict XVI, too, echoes this teaching. While stating that we can use creation for our good, we “cannot manipulate [it] at will,” he says, for “matter is not just raw material for us to shape at will, but . . . the earth has a dignity of its own and . . . we must follow its directives.” *Speech to the German Bundestag*, 2011.

This understanding follows from the teaching of the saints down through the centuries, including St. Francis of Assisi and St. Hildegard of Bingen, Doctor of the Church, who cautioned us that “All nature is at the disposal of humankind. We are to work with it. For without it we cannot survive.”

Read a fuller discussion of Church teaching [here](#).



Bishop Burbidge celebrated Mass at St. Bernadette parish to close the 2021 Laudato Si' Anniversary year, and urged us to "stand up and defend all of life."

Bringing Care for Creation Alive for Your Students

What do we want to help them do?:

1. See our relationship with creation through the eyes of faith.
 - ***Learn Church teaching*** down through the ages and through the present day.
 - » ***Recognize our duty as pro-life people*** to preserve a world that will support human life until the Lord comes again.
 - ***Introduce prayer*** that cultivates reverence for God in His creation (e.g., prayers and prayer services, novenas, Rosaries, examination of conscience)
2. ***Learn the effects*** of environmental damage:
 - ***on the poorest*** of our brothers and sisters and our obligation to care for them (preferential option for the poor)
 - ***on healthy pregnancies, unborn babies and young children***
 - ***on environmental systems that sustain life*** and prevent disease – animals, insects, etc.
3. ***Understand how they can actively care for our common home*** in ways big and small, and encourage in them a desire to do so.

A blueprint for working with students

FOR YOU: SEE THESE RESOURCES AND HOW-TOS FOR IMPLEMENTING THE IDEAS THAT FOLLOW:

- [*PRAYER AND CONVERSION OF HEART*](#)
- [*LEARNING*](#)
- [*ACTING*](#)

How to integrate Care for Creation into an overcrowded schedule

- Incorporate stewardship of creation into activities you're already doing. A few examples:
 - » At your gatherings, pray out in nature together whenever possible. Use prayers with a nature theme.
 - » Use reusable plates and utensils at your gatherings; eliminate plastic water bottles and instead, have the youth bring their own reusable bottles and refill at the water fountain. Have them serve soup suppers with reusable plates and utensils; invite adult ministries to sponsor the event and help with the dishwashing.
 - » If you have Life Teen Sundays, have an evening with a *Laudato Si'*/creation theme, using resources from this toolkit.
- Give them simple things they can take home and do with their families – prayer, learning and action.



Some suggestions for a game plan:

- Prayer and Learning
 - » Have a study session and discussion about *Laudato Si'* and longstanding Church teaching so they can begin to internalize the message.
 - » Hold a high school and/or middle school morning or evening of recollection or Holy Hour with a creation theme. If starting with Mass, use environmental-themed preaching resources, prayers of the faithful, music. If not, use prayer services and other resources.
 - » Have students read up on and discuss the effects of climate change on agriculture, weather, animal species, on unborn and young children, and on the poor. Discuss how it drives migration, disease, and conflict over scarce resources.
 - » Seek their input on what they as individuals and all of you as a group can do to be part of a solution.
- Action
 - » Approach your parish creation care team, if you have one. They'll be thrilled to co-sponsor and participate in dishwashing at your events as you try to move away from single-use plastics and paper. They can also partner with your youth group for parish cleanups, provide clean water demonstrations, or help with parish gardens. These can be both learning and action experiences. Give Confirmation service hours for participation. If you don't have a parish creation care team, reach out to other parish ministries. And feel free to



“I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live.”

Deuteronomy 30:19

“How can we separate, or even set at odds, the protection of the environment and the protection of human life, including the life of the unborn?”

Pope Benedict XVI -- Address to the Members of the Diplomatic Corps, January 2010

“The most profound and serious indication of the moral implications underlying the ecological problem is the lack of respect for life evident in many of the patterns of environmental pollution.”

Pope St. John Paul II, 1990 World Day for Peace Message, #7



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