

CRY OF THE EARTH CRY OF THE POOR



SOCIAL JUSTICE STATEMENT 2021-22



Australian Catholic Bishops Conference

Foreword

Pope Francis reminds us that encounter, dialogue, and listening with an open heart enable God's transforming love to move more powerfully in the world.¹ Yet when faced with complex interrelated crises – the pandemic, the ecological crisis, the economic crisis, hunger, threats to peace and security – we can find ourselves overwhelmed by information or bogged down in disagreements about details. In the annual Social Justice Statements, we seek to discern the signs of the times and, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, to recognise how God is calling us to respond. As bishops our task is to bring the light of the Gospel to bear as we seek to respond to the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth.

With Pope Francis, we avoid getting “mired in theoretical discussions” and instead seek to “hear the true stories” of people's experience, look at reality through the eyes of those most affected, and “listen with an open heart to the stories that they tell”.² Our task is to listen to people, to the earth, and to all of God's creation, since every created thing is interconnected,

speaks of the wellbeing of each part and of the whole, and reveals something of the Creator.³

This Statement draws from Scripture, from the theological tradition, from Catholic social justice teachings and from the wisdom of the world, including insights of the First Nations peoples. All these are placed in dialogue with human experience. This year we offer some theological foundations for a genuinely Christian response to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor: creation in and through the Trinity; the sacramentality of all created things; the wonder and beauty available to the contemplative eye; and the need for conversion and change of life. Our hope is that these will ground and inspire comprehensive and effective responses not only from the Catholic community but from all who want to care for our common home in this time of great need.



✠ Archbishop Mark Coleridge
President, Australian Catholic
Bishops Conference

Acknowledgements

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference thanks those involved in the drafting of the Social Justice Statement 2021-22 including Professor Gerard Moore and Dr Sandie Cornish with the assistance of Dr Emmanuel Nathan, and Dr Patricia Hindmarsh.

Editor: Dr Sandie Cornish

Typesetting and page make-up: Project X Graphics. Printing: Imagination Graphics.

Cover image: © Australian Catholic Bishops Conference 2021

ISBN 978-0-6452081-0-8 (print)

ISBN 978-0-6452081-1-5 (online)

An electronic version of this Statement is available on the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference website at www.catholic.org.au and the Office for Justice, Ecology and Peace website at www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au



Australian Catholic Bishops Conference

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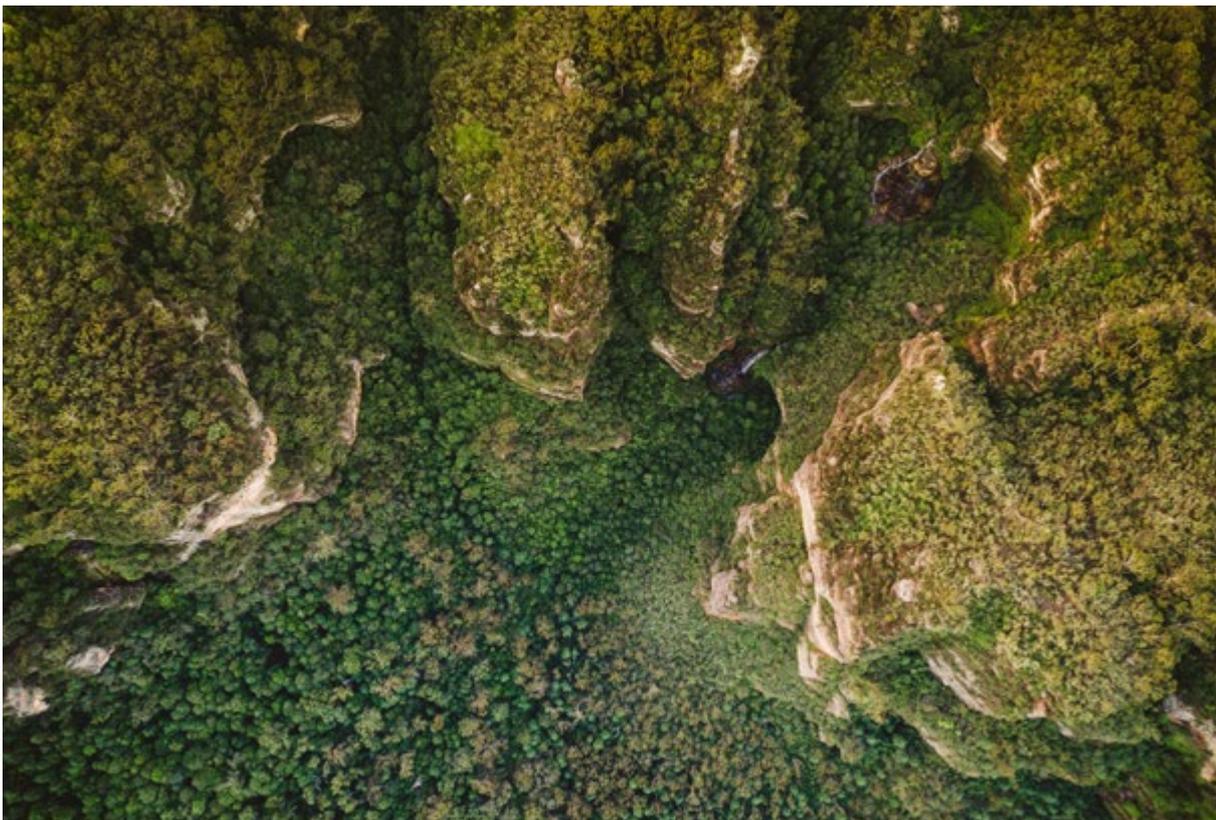
Cry of The Earth Cry of The Poor

Introduction

The millennium drought, the 2019-2020 bushfire season, COVID-19, and the 2021 floods have raised questions for many Australians about our common home. In response to these events, Catholic agencies developed better ways of coordinating emergency help.⁴ However, planning at the national level for mitigation and adaptation to the changing frequency and intensity of severe weather events, and a just transition to a low carbon economy is also needed. We know that the safety, health, and livelihoods of those who are the poorest and most vulnerable in our communities are usually the most severely impacted. That is why Pope Francis often speaks of responding to the cry

of the earth *and* the cry of the poor. Social, economic, and ecological issues can only be effectively addressed in an integral way.⁵

In this Social Justice Statement, we offer some theological foundations for our response to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor. They emerge from Scripture, the theological tradition, our Catholic social justice teachings, and the wisdom of the world - including insights of the First Nations peoples - placed in dialogue with experience. These foundations are: creation in and through the Trinity; sacramentality within all created things; wonder and beauty; and conversion. We hope that these will ground and inspire faithful and effective responses by the whole Catholic community.



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The Signs of the Times Through the Eyes of Those Most Affected

By listening with an open heart to those who are most affected, we can begin, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to discern the signs of the times.

Listening to Our Communities

Fires, floods, and droughts have become less predictable and more intense. Even experienced people like Neil Ward, a natural resources and conservation manager from Victoria, can find themselves confounded by the increasing ferocity of bushfires:

"Throughout my career in natural resource management, I have attended quite a few large fires, saved houses, and have even been stranded in front of a fire, but never had I felt such confusion as trying to resolve what seemed the sensible thing to do when my gut feeling was to stay and defend."⁶

Families that have been farming for generations are rethinking their operations while others are

leaving the land. For example, New South Wales farmer Lucinda Corrigan says:

"The first thing that we've done much more successfully, in the past few years since the Millennium drought, is protect our soil resources by better management of livestock, using the water when it falls more efficiently and preserving it in pasture and in the landscape..."

I feel concerned about the future viability of farms. The way forward is not completely clear for everybody, is it?"⁷

The mining sector may only employ 2-3% of the Australian workforce, but it is a very important employer in some communities.⁸ These communities are anxious about the future, as a Lithgow resident explains:





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*"...the domino effect that the closure of this mine will have would be disastrous for the local community. Schools will be forced to lay off staff, shops will close, and people will move away... the town [is] hanging by a thread as it is."*⁹

Whether planned and managed by governments or not, a transition away from a carbon-based economy is already underway. A new energy trajectory is being set as we speak.¹⁰ Rather than delaying a commitment to sustainable energy sources, concern for the future of communities that have been reliant on extractive industries should be built into the transition.

Our "interference with the intricate balance of natural ecosystems" is contributing to the outbreak and spread of zoonotic diseases which are caused by pathogens jumping from animals to humans.¹¹ Nearly 70% of zoonotic infections are linked to human environmental changes.¹² Both COVID-19 and the Hendra virus are zoonotic. Katherine Barraclough and Fiona Armstrong explain that in Queensland the extensive destruction of east coast forests and unsustainable land clearing for new housing estates and other projects:

*"... resulted in bats... coming into closer contact with horses. Infected horses appeared to have contracted Hendra virus from bat urine or faeces, and were then able to infect people."*¹³

Inspired by Scripture, Pope Francis sees the pandemic in terms of its potential for positive change. Just as the great deluge was an opportunity for renewed humanity, the

COVID-19 crisis can become our Noah moment. We can find our way to the Ark and to a new future if we recognise and foster the ties that bind us and all things together.¹⁴

The way in which we have built our cities has also resulted in urban heat islands. In places like western Sydney, it is becoming more difficult for children to play outdoors, or to learn, because it is just too hot. Dr. Sebastian Pfautsch says:

*"... looking at Bureau of Meteorology data we know that ambient heat during school days in summer is rising. This means if you have no air conditioning, you see more days of high classroom temperatures too. You learn less in these classrooms."*¹⁵

*January 4th 2020, Penrith was the hottest place on Earth at 48.9°C (half-way to boiling point) and in 2019 Parramatta sweltered through 47 days with temperatures over 35°C." Climate Council*¹⁶

For First Nations people, the ecological crisis is particularly painful. Vanessa Cavanagh's words reflect a deep connection with country:

"... for this grandmother tree, the combination of ongoing drought and persistent flames ended her reign at the far edge of the yard. The sight of this old tree with her crown removed brought warm, stinging tears to my eyes. It was a deep hurt of losing someone far older and wiser than me. Losing someone who

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was respected and adored. Someone with knowledge I cannot fathom or comprehend. When I told my mum that evening, she reacted similarly, a personal and family loss. To others she might just be a big tree.”¹⁷

Along with the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor, we also hear a cry of the young. They see their future being threatened, and want change, as a matter of intergenerational justice. One Year 11 student sums up the feelings of his generation:

“I reckon (the community) should listen to us because at the end of the day it’s our future, right? They’re going to be going and it’s going to be up to us to continue.”¹⁸

Listening to Our Neighbours

Rising sea levels, bigger king tides, more frequent and severe storms, coastal erosion, coral bleaching, and decreasing fish stocks are already a daily reality for Pacific island nations.¹⁹ Some islands are in imminent danger of disappearing beneath the waves and their communities are facing the painful task of relocating. Merineta from Tuvalu explains:

“As a mother of a seven-month-old baby I am worried about his future and his life - all the children of Tuvalu have a right to life - a right to an environment with good quality. I love my country, I love my people and traditions, I love my culture and I don’t want to lose them because of climate change. We all want to stay

in our own lands because it defines who we are. We don’t want to migrate or relocate.”²⁰

Recognising this tragedy, the Migrant and Refugee Section of the Vatican’s Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development has released a detailed document on the pastoral care of people displaced by the climate emergency.²¹

Archbishop Peter Loy Chong of Fiji notes that extractive activities like gravel and stone quarrying, black sand mining, the dredging of coral reefs, deep sea mining, and felling forests for palm plantations are harming both the natural and social environments of many Pacific nations. “By displacing or sowing discord among local communities” they damage “the connectivity of family, tribe, clan that has been formed over many years,” he explains.²²

As President of the Federation of Catholic Bishops Conferences of Oceania, Archbishop Loy Chong is currently proposing an Assembly on the Oceans. As Marlene Moses, former Nauruan Ambassador to the United Nations, points out:

“For the people of small islands, understanding the importance of the ocean to human survival is as natural as breathing. If the ocean is healthy, we are healthy; if the future of the ocean is uncertain, so is ours.”²³

This is not a matter for the peoples of the Pacific alone. Pedro Walpole SJ explains that the rain that feeds the rivers and sustains the tropical forests of Australia and Asia depends on weather

patterns determined by moisture-bearing winds that are like a river above Asia and the Pacific:

*"All of it is kept alive by this river above. It's beautiful. It's so integral. If you want a picture of how to live, it's all there in this river above. That's what gives life to the whole of Asia."*²⁴

Listening to Creation

Every creature speaks to us of the Creator, but human beings do not always listen. The First Nations people remind us of the interconnectedness of people and the rest of creation:

"The Aborigines and the environment are but one, and all things on earth have a cycle, and they recycle. All rivers, trees, creatures, and plants are alive just as we are, today and in the beginning. They are part of nature as we are, and our connection to all things natural is spiritual." Pat Dodson²⁵

"The land and environment is our Mother. Treat her with love and tenderness, nurture and never mistreat her, or take more than what is required." Vicki Clark²⁶

We forget that it is not all about us. It is estimated that nearly three billion native animals were in the path of the 2019-2020 bushfires.²⁷ As we watched on our televisions and social media platforms, the cries of pain of injured and dying animals, and of starving animals deprived of

habitat, were unavoidable and deeply disturbing. The impact on precious livestock and beloved domestic animals hit many of us hard.

But at other times, when there isn't extensive reporting on a crisis, we have to listen a little harder to hear the pain of the acceleration of extinction rates.

The suffering of our rivers and waterways, our groundwater, reefs, and oceans, is plain to see. Successive bleaching events in the Great Barrier Reef send a loud message, and mass fish deaths in the Menindee Lakes, caused by inadequate water flowing in the river, poor water quality, and a sudden change in temperature, have shocked the nation.²⁸ The Great Artesian Basin cries out for our protection. It is at risk from over extraction of water and the potential introduction of pollutants and petro carbons from fracking. If we do not take sufficient care of this source of water below, the balance between waters above, on the surface, and below, could be destroyed forever.²⁹

Furthermore, as Fr Joshtrom Kureethadam, of the Vatican Dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human Development says, "the COVID-19 crisis is part and parcel of recent warnings from the natural world."³⁰ We need to start listening more attentively to creation.

We do not have to understand all these signs of the times completely and with certainty before responding. Our faith provides wisdom sources that can help us to take our next steps now.



Drawing Wisdom from Our Own Wells

Our wisdom sources are like wells from which we draw life-giving and renewing water. We draw wisdom from Scripture, our theological tradition, Catholic Social Teaching, and human knowledge to water the seeds of change. We acknowledge the unique place of the wisdom of the First Nations peoples, who were caring for country before Abraham set out for the promised land, and who continue to do so today.

Listening to the Word of God in Scripture

Infused in the Scriptures is the absolute love and commitment of God to all creation. The opening chapter of the Bible sings of the goodness of creation which springs from the power of the creative Word (Gen 1-2:4). The Book of Revelation brings the Bible to a close with the vision of all creation made new (Rev 21:5). Mindful that Christ is the beginning and the end of all things, the alpha and the omega, we are drawn into the mystery of the incarnation revealed for us so compellingly in the Gospel of John. As we are taught of Christ, the glory of God, full of grace and truth, we are also reminded that all things come into being in

Christ (Jn 1:3) and the incarnation sees the divine fully among us as Word made flesh (Jn 1:14). God's care for creation is timeless, boundless, and continuous.

This overarching truth allows us to see the Scriptures afresh in view of the ecological crisis and the poverty it engenders. As Pope Francis points out, some previous readings of humans having 'dominion' over creatures (Gen 1:26-31) appear deficient in the contemporary context where creation is now endangered by this form of mastery.³¹ Now we can better appreciate that we are creatures within creation, in relationship with the whole earth, plants, birds, beasts, fish, soil and garden. We are called to be caretakers (Gen 2:15) rather than exploiters.



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The Scriptures teach that we are immersed in a world that continues to reveal the presence of the divine Word. Psalm 104 reflects on how the glories of creation lead us to praise the Creator delighting in creation:

*O LORD, how manifold are your works!
In wisdom you have made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures
May the glory of the LORD endure forever;
may the LORD rejoice in his works (Ps 104:
24,31)*

Jesus refers to God's care for the birds of the air and the flowers of the ground as examples of the care that God holds for even the most passing of the things of nature. He shows us the tenderness and attentiveness of God's care which encourages us to care for the things of the earth as much as God does (Mt 6:25-34). This passage also demonstrates that the Scriptures often focus on the relationship of the divine to humanity, with nature given a secondary place. It is assuring to know how much more God cares for us than for ephemeral plants, but we can fail to notice the arrogance we sometimes show towards the things of the natural world. Often the biblical considerations of care for the earth are not overt. These ancient texts were not composed in the context of the environmental degradation we have created today, nor the poverty inflicted upon so many of our sisters and brothers.

However, the Scriptures do equip us with the power of lament. The lament psalms and the harrowing texts of the Book of Lamentation give us the courage to stand before God in prayer, sorrow, remorse, and contrition as we face up

to the extinction of creatures, the loss of habitat and the difficulty of truly caring for the earth. Biblical lament does not leave us powerless; it is a necessary step towards conversion and new life.

Some Theological Foundations

The three-person God is a Trinity of love. Every creative act and every part of creation emerges from this divine interplay of love. The entire creation is upheld and sustained in the continuous love of God its creator, energizer, governor, sustainer, and completion.³² This love extends from the existence of the smallest particle of star dust, through to the mysterious laws that govern the universe, to the creation of humans with free will and radical choice. The 'mystery of God's will', the 'good pleasure of God' (Eph 1:9) is one of absolute love.

In Christ, this love is made more fully manifest to us. In Christ, all things are made (Col 1:16), and all things in heaven and on earth are gathered and fulfilled (Eph 1:10). In the incarnation through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus we see just how completely all that is human, all that is matter, all that comprises the forces of the universe, are incorporated within the divine dance. From within the incarnation, we can take up two of the great paradoxes of creation. First, all material things are created in love and are loved in their nature as matter. All creation goes through cycles of change across time, and nothing escapes entropy or death or reenergizing or re-emergence. This is the cycle of matter and its transformations. The second paradox is the part that humans play in creation.



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God respects the freedom in which we are made and holds all things in love, even though we may fail to love creation itself.

The more we recognise this divine presence the more we uncover the sacramentality of creation. The universe is infused with the love of God, and we are immersed in a world that continues to reveal the presence of the divine Word. The psalms rejoice in the divine artisan: "I look upon the heavens, made by your fingers, at the moon and the stars you set in place (Ps 8: 3)". The saints appreciate it in song and prayer. St Francis sings, "Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces varied fruits with coloured flowers and herbs."³³

The liturgy takes up this underlying sacramentality in all things as it uses water, wheat, grape, oil, music, smell, and touch to transform us into a new creation. The blessing tradition of the liturgy enables us to recognise the paradoxes of material degradation and human sin within creation, reminding us that Christ is the centre of all goodness. Within the realm of created things, we humans carry a sacramental trace of Christ. Jesus teaches that to care for one of the least is to care for him (Mt 25:40).

This underpinning of love in all creation and all of humanity allows us two responses. One is that we live in a world of wonder. Every moment and encounter is an opportunity to be amazed by beauty, enraptured by amazement, and consoled by the traces of divine presence. We are part of

a world in which God is alert to the needs of the birds of the air, and attentive to the beauty of the lilies (Mt 6: 25-34). A second is that we are invited into ongoing conversion to transform our outlook and actions to be in accord with the loving presence of God at the heart of all reality, to be attentive to the beauty in all things, to recognise Christ in the stranger, and to hear and respond to the cry of the earth.

"We like the way [Jesus] uses the things of nature to teach, and the important part nature plays in the Sacraments ... We can appreciate also the community nature of the Church, because we are very conscious of being part of a group bound by Religious ties. We are strong on ceremony through dance and song and painted bodies. Our ceremony closely involves groups and group participation... So the ceremony of the Mass, the ceremony of the Sacraments and the ceremony of the liturgy should find a ready response in us, provided it is made meaningful, based on a theology that is tuned to the Aboriginal mind." Deacon Boniface Perdjert³⁴

Wisdom from Catholic Social Teaching

Promoting a relationship of care and kinship with the rest of creation is not a new thing in our social justice tradition. We need only recall St Francis' Canticle of the Creatures.

What Pope Francis calls the "technocratic paradigm" with its ideology of domination of nature is a modern phenomenon.³⁵ Pope John XXIII recognised that it had reached potentially catastrophic proportions with the development of nuclear weapons capable of destroying the planet. In the 1970s Pope Paul VI spoke on the fate of the earth at the Stockholm Conference and at the United Nations. During the 1980s Bishops Conferences around the world, especially in Asia and Africa, began to speak out about the environmental impact of dominant models of development. Throughout the 1990s and into the new millennium, Pope John Paul II spoke increasingly often about our stewardship of creation. He frequently affirmed the harmonious relationships of indigenous peoples with creation on his many travels.³⁶ Pope Benedict XVI lamented the exploitation and hoarding of non-renewable energy sources by rich nations and stressed the need for international solidarity and coordination.³⁷

Now Pope Francis is helping us to understand stewardship in a less human-centred and more mutual way. We are in communion with our fellow

creatures who also sustain and care for us. He has shifted the language to care for our common home. Pope Francis is calling us to a relationship based less on duty and more on love.

When we love someone or something, we want what is good for them and act to bring it about. Pope Benedict XVI reminds us that there is also "a good that is linked to living in society: the common good. It is the good of 'all of us'"³⁸. A commitment to the common good leads us to take action to ensure conditions in which everyone, including future generations, can meet their needs and reach their potential.³⁹ Every person, and every creature, is loved by God who made us and wants the good of all of us.

We are being challenged to understand that we do not stand outside of creation but are part of it, "joined in a splendid universal communion" with other creatures.⁴⁰ We are in communion with all creation, the "ultimate purpose of other creatures is not to be found in us. Rather, all creatures are moving forward with us and through us towards a common point of arrival, which is God ...".⁴¹

In 2022 we reach the 20th anniversary of our *Social Justice Sunday Statement A New Earth: The environmental challenge*, which called for an ecological conversion and led to the establishment of Catholic Earthcare Australia (now a project of Caritas Australia).⁴² The call to ecological conversion is a major theme in



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Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'* along with the need for an integral approach to economic, social and ecological issues:

*"... we have to realise 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."*⁴³

Listening to and Learning from the World

The Second Vatican Council understood that, as well as teaching, the Church must continue to listen to and learn from the world. Our Catholic Social Teaching develops through dialogue with the people, places, and events of history – that is to say, with the ongoing unfolding of the creation story. The physical and biological sciences are obviously important in understanding the ecological crisis, and the fields of economics, policy, and sociology can also help us to understand the dynamics at play. Furthermore, the ancient wisdom of indigenous peoples around the world can help us to recover insights that are not based in the technocratic paradigm.

We stand with Pope Francis in acknowledging that "a very solid scientific consensus indicates that we are presently witnessing a disturbing warming of the climatic system" and that "humanity is called to recognise the need for changes of lifestyle, production and consumption, in order to combat this warming or at least the human causes which produce

or aggravate it".⁴⁴ While there are also other factors contributing to climate change, we have a particular responsibility to address those related to human activity.⁴⁵ A key reason why Australia has fared so well in responding to COVID-19 is that Australian governments have based their responses on scientific advice. We also need to trust the science to respond successfully to the ecological crisis. Professor John Shine, President, of the Australian Academy of Science explains:

*"We must improve our understanding of fire behaviour and other adverse weather events, and we must continually develop new technologies, practices and behaviours to assist our nation to respond and adapt to, manage, and mitigate against such extreme events."*⁴⁶

While political parties have found themselves stalemated in debates on energy policy, financial institutions, investors and businesses have been reducing their involvement in carbon-based activities.⁴⁷ They want to avoid 'stranded assets' and non-performing investments. Consumers and the energy market itself are driving the shift to renewable energy.⁴⁸

We need to listen with a discerning heart to the voices competing to be heard in discussions about the future of our world. Through his COVID-19 Commission, Pope Francis is calling us to prepare positively for a better future by listening especially to those most affected - the earth, the poor and the young. In *Fratelli Tutti* he spells out his approach of encounter, dialogue and listening with an open heart.⁴⁹

A Call to Care for Country

When it comes to human knowledge of the lands and waters now known as Australia, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are our first teachers. We need to learn how to listen more attentively to them. The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council notes that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples see themselves as inextricably connected to country in Australia and its waters. They say:

“This connection to country and all of God’s creation reveals our Spirituality as people and our ancestors, a home we have looked after with special regard for millennia.

It is time that all Australians, particularly those following in the footsteps of Christ, recognise that God’s creation, our wonderful home here on earth, needs to be loved, looked after and kept, not degraded or abused. We have long felt the ‘cry of the earth’ following the arrival of Europeans and others who do not always share our deep regard for our country. This hurts us to the core of our very being.

To enable us to participate more fully in discussions around the care for our country and to share our knowledge, we need a seat at the table and an opportunity to communicate in our own language. We notice, and have

noticed, the changes in our environment through the behaviours of certain animals and the changes in our landscapes. Some are obvious – like the loss of our homes to rising sea levels in the Torres Strait - but some are more subtle, like the changes in our seasons. We want to help save our Earth.

We invite the Catholic Church to stand in solidarity with us on caring for our country at its Plenary Council - to begin to walk with us so that Care for Our Country is part of who we all are with God. Our future generations are crying out to the world for justice in this area.”⁵⁰

“It is essential to show special care for indigenous communities and their cultural traditions. For them, land is not a commodity but a gift from God and from their ancestors who rest there, a sacred space with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identity and values.” Francis, Laudato Si’ n 146



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The Conversation on Caring for Creation Continues

The call to care for creation goes to the heart of what it means to be human before God and in the world. It requires a profound conversion expressed in new ways of living, both personally and collectively. What seeds of change can we water today?

The Dynamics of Ecological Conversion

Pope Francis invites us to conversion saying: “many things have to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change.”⁵¹ The state of our common home calls us to a “profound interior conversion... whereby the effects of [our] encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in [our] relationship with the world around [us]”.⁵² It is not just a matter of awareness or changing our minds, but a shift at the level of the heart and will that results in changed action.

To achieve reconciliation with creation, “we must examine our lives and acknowledge the ways in which we have harmed God’s creation through our actions and our failure to act. We need to experience a conversion, or change of heart”.⁵³ Lament, repentance, the effort to repair damage

done, and the transformation of behaviour – these are elements of a process of conversion.⁵⁴

Such an ecological conversion calls us to a renewed way of understanding the cosmos and humanity – a new vision of what it is to be a human being before God and in the world.⁵⁵ It calls us to a new spirituality, or way of understanding and expressing our relationship with the Divine in our lives. To bring about lasting change, it must also be a “community conversion”⁵⁶. We are being called to a new way of thinking, feeling, understanding, and living.

Economic Conversion and the ‘Economy of Francesco’

By calling us to a humbler, more sustainable way of living, our ecological conversion entails an economic conversion.⁵⁷ Pope Francis advocates a:



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“... circular model of production capable of preserving resources for present and future generations, while limiting as much as possible the use of non-renewable resources, moderating their consumption, maximising their efficient use, reusing and recycling them”.⁵⁸

In a key youth-focussed initiative, Pope Francis reached out to young economists, entrepreneurs, and change-makers. He invited them to an event in Assisi to promote a different type of economy in the spirit of St Francis of Assisi and *Laudato Si'*. Due to the pandemic, the event - called *The Economy of Francesco* - was eventually held online in November 2020.⁵⁹ Now *The Economy of Francesco* has become a community, bound together by a common commitment to promote a better economy.⁶⁰

At the same time, the Vatican COVID-19 Commission is working through a variety of task forces and working groups to prepare practical proposals that bring the integral approach of *Laudato Si'* to life.⁶¹

The Laudato Si' Action Platform

During the *Special Laudato Si' Anniversary Year*, which concluded on 25 May 2021, the Dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human Development announced a *Laudato Si' Action Platform*. Its aim is to put Pope Francis's encyclical into practice, making communities around the world totally sustainable in the spirit of the integral ecology of *Laudato Si'*.⁶²

The *Platform* invites people and organisations in seven sectors to embark on a seven-year journey towards seven *Laudato Si'* Goals. The Goals are:

1. Responding to the cry of the earth
2. Responding to the cry of the poor
3. Ecological economics
4. Adopting simple lifestyles
5. Ecological education
6. Ecological spirituality
7. Community involvement and participatory action.

Now the Dicastery is fleshing out the *Platform* with a multitude of possible steps on the journey towards each *Laudato Si'* Goal. A huge international database of action ideas is being constructed and will continue to be developed to help participants in their journeys. It will be available to the public, and not restricted to those who have formally registered for the journey.

Families, parishes, dioceses, schools, universities and colleges, hospitals and healthcare organisations, businesses and farms, and religious orders from all over the world are all invited to join the journey.

Expressions of interest for the first cohort undertaking a seven-year journey towards the *Laudato Si'* Goals are now open. Each year for six more years, there will be another, larger intake, building towards achieving critical mass.



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Laudato Si' Week

Laudato Si' Week was first observed in the week leading up to the first anniversary of the encyclical on 24 May 2016. It was sponsored by the Dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human Development and facilitated by the Global Catholic Climate Movement. It aimed to encourage ongoing prayer, reflection and action inspired by the teachings of Laudato Si'.

Laudato Si' Week was again celebrated internationally in 2020 and 2021. In fact, the special Laudato Si' Anniversary Year commenced at the start of Laudato Si' Week 2020 and concluded with the end of Laudato Si' Week 2021.

The ecumenical Season of Creation is another period when we can focus on prayer and action for the care of creation.

The Season of Creation

The Orthodox liturgical year begins on 1 September with prayer to God the Creator. In 1989, the Patriarch of Constantinople, Dimitrios I, declared this day a day of prayer for all creation. The practice spread to other Christian communities around the world, and in 2015,

Pope Francis formally invited Catholics to join in keeping 1 September as a Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation.

Meanwhile, at St Stephen's Lutheran Church in Adelaide in 2000, Norman Habel and the congregation decided to celebrate creation for four weeks. Dr Habel further developed this initiative into a Season of Creation with the Uniting Church of Australia. It was eventually taken up by the ecumenical movement internationally through the World Council of Churches.⁶³

Various groups now celebrate the Season of Creation beginning with the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation on 1 September and continuing until 4 October, the feast of St Francis of Assisi, patron saint of ecology.

While this Season of Creation is not an official liturgical season like Lent or Eastertide in our Catholic liturgical calendar, Pope Francis has encouraged us to make this a special time of prayer and action, in common with others, in caring for our common home.

"I strongly encourage the faithful to pray in these days that, as the result of a timely ecumenical initiative, are being celebrated as a Season of Creation. This season of increased prayer and effort on behalf of our common home begins today, September 1, the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, and ends on October 4, the feast of Saint Francis of Assisi. It is an opportunity to draw closer to our brothers and sisters of the various Christian confessions. I think in particular of the Orthodox faithful, who have celebrated this Day for thirty years. In this ecological crisis affecting everyone, we should also feel close to all other men and women of good will, called to promote stewardship of the network of life of which we are part." Pope Francis⁶⁴

Our Next Steps in Caring for Creation

The signs of the times are clear - we know that we human beings need a change of heart, mind, and behaviour.⁶⁵ Pope Francis continues to call us to an ecological conversion and an economic conversion, and we want to respond.

At the national level, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference will continue its journey of conversion by taking three steps:

1. Renaming our Office for Social Justice the Office for Justice, Ecology and Peace to better reflect contemporary Catholic Social Teaching, especially the teachings of *Laudato Si'* and *Fratelli Tutti* on integral ecology and peace.

2. Embarking on a seven-year journey towards the *Laudato Si'* Goals articulated by the Dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human Development's *Laudato Si'* Action Platform.

3. Promoting the annual celebration of *Laudato Si'* Week (16 – 24 May) in Australia during this journey by providing suitable prayer and reflection materials.

As we set out on our seven-year journey, we hope that Catholic families, schools, and organisations will join us. We invite you to start planning your next steps too.



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NOTES

1. Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 2020, Chapter 6.
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5. Francis, *Querida Amazonia*, 2020, n 8; *Laudato Si'*, 2015, n 49.
6. <https://www.vox.com/2020/1/24/21063638/australian-bushfires-2019-experience>
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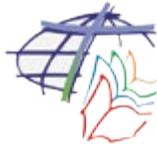


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