

Brief concept note on 'Living the Laudato Si' in the Saint John XXIII Parish

Background on Laudato Si¹

In early 2015, Pope Francis released an encyclical called 'Laudato Si: on care for our Common Home'. The document received its name from the beautiful song-prayer or canticle of St. Francis on the wonders of God's creation. The encyclical reminds all of us that 'our common home is like a sister and we are dust of the earth... we breathe her air and receive life and refreshment from her waters'. However, our common home is suffering from all the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as having dominion and a sense of entitlement over her and plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life.

The encyclical is developed around the concept of integral ecology, which links the fundamental relationship of the person: with God, with one's self, with fellow human beings and with the environment. Some principal concepts are continually taken up and enriched:

1. The intimate relationship between the poor and the fragility of the planet,
2. The conviction that everything in the world is connected,
3. The critique of new paradigms and forms of power derived from technology,
4. The call to seek other ways of understanding the economy and progress,
5. The value proper to each creature,
6. The human meaning of ecology,
7. The need for forthright and honest debate,
8. The serious responsibility of international and local policy,
9. The throwaway culture and the proposal of a new lifestyle.

Context

This note is an attempt to capture the thinking of the Laudato Si community² which was formed in November 2015 to put into action some of the suggestions raised at successful retreats to raise awareness and organise Laudato Si activities in the parish. Actions in 2015-2016 included:

1. organising a forum with Climate Justice pilgrims to share their reflections and advocacy on climate justice, faith and action in the lead up to the Paris Climate talks;

¹ This background is taken from the Laudato Si retreat presentation of Fr. Bob Vitillo in 2016.

² The community originally started with a group of 9 volunteers, out of which 5-6 core team remain active: Aimee, Annie, John, Josette, Leonard, Sara and Shyami. We are hoping to recruit an additional 2-3 members.

2. engaging with the regular ministries of the parish to raise awareness on Laudato Si (Catechism, Music and Liturgical ministries during April Earth day celebration);
3. teaming up with event coordinators and groups (e.g. Walking with Purpose and the hospitality ministry) to undertake some practical 'green' actions during major events in the parish such as the Kermesse and Advent dinner;
4. working with the Parish staff and volunteers in the regular parish upkeep and maintenance and communicating Laudato Si actions in the bulletin;
5. contributing time to mitigate the financial, administrative or organizational "costs" of green actions;³
6. planting sunflowers for the summer and spring flowers in time for Spring.

One year after, the core group agrees on the need for renewal to come up with new ways to 'energise Laudato Si' in the parish community and at the same time build upon and integrate the Laudato Si activities more sustainably in the various parish ministries.

'Energising' means getting more people involved to implement the Laudato Si in their own ministries. We need to ensure that they view this as an integral part of their ministry and not as a separate ad hoc activity and that adds burden to their already packed agenda and responsibilities. This is where the spiritual underpinning linking faith and caring for our common home is important.

'Energising' also means coming up with creative and fun activities to inspire and convince the younger generation to get involved, internalize empathy, humanity and caring in line with Laudato Si and demonstrate their commitment through practical actions.

'Energising' also means making sure that we are not just looking after the environment from a purely 'green' or conservation standpoint, but also ensuring that it is linked to the holistic approach of the Laudato Si and the basic social teachings of the Catholic church. We need to think how we can best link and integrate the economic, environmental and social dimensions in 'Living out the Laudato Si'.

Draft strategies/actions:

Some preliminary ideas for Living the Laudato Si in the Parish revolve around the following themes:

1. Mainstreaming Laudato Si in parish activities

³ Including physically sorting/managing wastes, doing the leg-work to locate and procure new eco-friendly products for parish facility use, providing volunteers to clean and manage reusable utensils so disposables are not consumed, etc. In short, we commit to "getting our hands dirty" to accomplish the practical greening actions. We will not be stand-offish Eco-Pharisees, recycling Nazi's, or Green-cops that issue "environmental tickets."

- Influence and enable procurement budget for 'green supplies' in the parish and various ministries;
- Plan and conduct bi-annual volunteer recruitment drive in the LS activities;
- Integrate 'Laudato Si' in various parish ministries (Liturgy/Bidding prayers, Music, Catechism, Homily).

2) Raising awareness of Laudato Si and Outreach

- Attend ministry and group planning meetings to introduce 'Laudato Si in RCIA, Confirmation, Caring ministry etc.;
- Conduct a session on Laudato Si at confirmation group classes and at catechism classes;
- Develop and distribute booklets on Laudato Si to various groups within the parish- kids, youth and adult parishioners;
- Input in to the parish bulletin and parish website: green tips/ sharing links/ references on living 'Laudato Si';
- Set up an 'ecumenical network' with similar groups within other Christian denominations and other religious orders in Geneva and organize bi-annual meetings.

3) Conducting activities related to Social Justice (Cry of the Poor)

- Organise special activities during Lent/Easter with emphasis on 'empathy' as part of spiritual conversion and renewal;
- Organise activities/ forum linking Laudato Si and SDG goals and participate in relevant upcoming international events in Geneva;
- Establish Links with Turkana sister parish, through the relevant ministry, and support charity work;
- Organise a session on 'displacement, migration and the refugee crisis' linked to the teaching of Laudato Si.

4) Conducting activities related to Caring for our 'Common Home' (Cry of the Earth)

- Provide volunteers, organization or other resources that ensure special events like Advent and Kermesse are 'green', minimize waste and consciously prevent or minimize 'consumerism';
- Physically assist in the greening the parish building and grounds linked to parish continued fundraising to repay our debts;
- Introduce waste segregation practices within the parish and gradually expand the concept and practice among the youth, kids, etc
- Provide the volunteers, organization or other resources that ensure flower planting and maintenance are optimal.

5) Advocacy

- Support and recommend relevant causes and policies related to Laudato Si (e.g., implementation of climate change COP agreement; implementation of SDG goals etc).

6) Review activities

- Review planned activities on a regular basis and use results to focus future activities.