

## **Discussing Laudato Si' In Your Congregation – A Guide**

### Introduction:

The materials contained in this resource were developed by members of St. Bridget Catholic Church and First Congregational, UCC in River Falls. They conducted a two-evening gathering in the fall of 2015. For each gathering they highlighted one quotation and a key question. They also handed out a summary of Laudato Si' so that those who had not read the entire Encyclical were able to participate in the conversation and those who had read the entire document could remember key points.

A few months later, First Congregational, River Falls adapted the summary used in this original event for use in their congregation's adult forum. In the adult forum they distributed the document to everyone, but also cut up the various quotes and distributed them to pairs of participants to discuss. After the pairs discussed their quotes, they rejoined and discussed as the larger group.

Included below are the following materials:

- Agendas from the two ecumenical evening gatherings
- The summary of Laudato Si's main points
- The adaptation of this summary used for River Falls' adult forum with discussion questions

These materials are shared freely by Rebecca Ferguson from First Congregational, River Falls in the hopes that they might be helpful to congregation in the Wisconsin Conference. Rebecca can be reached at [RebeccaAFerguson@hotmail.com](mailto:RebeccaAFerguson@hotmail.com)



**Second Conversation about  
*Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*  
St. Bridget Catholic Church & First Congregational United Church of Christ**

**Agenda for November 3, 2015**

*Facilitators: Tom Westerhaus, Rebecca Ferguson, Dave Ostendorf*

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***What are the implications of this Encyclical for us, our congregations, and our community? What does this Encyclical challenge us to do?***

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6:00 pm to 6:45 pm – *Gathering. Dinner at small tables.*

*Discussion Topic: What are we already doing – as individuals, in our homes, in River Falls?*

6:45 pm to 7:00 pm. – *Sharing from Small Group Discussions*

*Discussion Reports: What have you heard at your tables that could be grown?*

7:00 pm to 8:00 pm. – *Large Group Discussion in circle.*

*What might we do together? or How might we be together in this?*

*How can we be/come energy generators for ideas?*

*What prevents us from doing more?*

*Who else should we be talking with? Who else would care? How do we invite in the next generations?*

8:00 pm to 8:15 pm – *Closing*

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**Our Key Text from the Encyclical**

The majority of people living on our planet profess to be believers. This should spur religions to dialogue among themselves for the sake of protecting nature, defending the poor, and building networks of respect and fraternity. . . . The gravity of the ecological crisis demands that we all look to the common good, embarking on a path of dialogue which demands patience, self-discipline and generosity, always keeping in mind that “realities are greater than ideas.”<sup>143</sup>

(Quotation is from the first and last sentences of paragraph 201 of Chapter Five.

The final phrase is taken from the Pope’s own *Evangelii Gaudium* of 2013)

# Summary Revised – Used for Ecumenical Discussion

## Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home

Encyclical Letter of the Holy Father Francis 2015

### Introductory Materials

St. Francis “shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace.” (10) “Francis helps us see that an integral ecology . . . take[s] us to the heart of what it is to be human.” (11) “Rather than a problem to be solved, the world is a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise.” (12)

Questions: What does it mean to you to think of the world as a “joyful mystery”? What for you is at the “heart of what it is to be human”?

Pope Francis refers to the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew who “asks us to replace consumption with sacrifice, greed with generosity, wastefulness with a spirit of sharing, an asceticism which ‘entails learning to give, and not simply to give up.’” (9)

Questions: What makes you feel like giving up? Where in your own life have you found ways to choose “learning to give?”

### Chapter One: What is Happening to Our Common Home

In this chapter, Pope Francis discusses the problems with the “rapidification” of life and work, and “the throwaway culture.”

Question: In what ways have you and your family been affected by these two social phenomena? What have you been able to do to limit their effects?

The Pope also discusses the damage caused to the earth by “great concentration of greenhouse gases,” “intensive use of fossil fuels,” “deforestation,” “the depletion of natural resources,” “loss of biodiversity,” and climate change, whose “worst impact will be felt by developing countries . . . [and] many of the poor.”

Question: Why is the impact of climate change disproportionately felt by the poor?

Pope Francis italicizes this: “Yet *access to safe drinkable water is a basic and universal human right, since it is essential to human survival and, as such, is a condition for the exercise of other human rights.* Our world has a grave social debt toward the poor who lack access to drinking water, because *they are denied the right to a life consistent with their inalienable dignity.*” (30)

Question: How can we support the poor’s right to water (and food and security)?

“Today, however, we have to realize 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.*” (49)

### Chapter Two: The Gospel of Creation

“The German bishops have taught that, where other creatures are concerned, ‘we can speak of the priority of *being* over that of *being useful*.” (69)

Question: How does that make sense to you in your life?

“Everything is interconnected, and that genuine care for our own lives and our relationships with nature is inseparable from fraternity, justice and faithfulness to others.” and “Disregard for the duty to cultivate and maintain a proper relationship with my neighbor, for whose care and custody I am responsible, ruins my relationship with my own self, with others, with God and with the earth.” (70)

Question: How have you understood this in your life and world?

### **Chapter Three: The Human Roots of the Ecological Crisis**

Pope Francis believes that we must “focus on the dominant technocratic paradigm. . . . [which] exalts the concept of a subject who, using logical and rational procedures, progressively approaches and gains control over an external object.” (101 and 106)

“Technological products are not neutral. . . . Decisions which may seem purely instrumental are in reality decisions about the kind of society we want to build.” (107)

Question: How do you know this, as a “subject” and as an “object”?

“There can be no renewal of our relationship with nature without a renewal of humanity itself. There can be no ecology with an adequate anthropology. . . . Human beings cannot be expected to feel responsibility for the world unless, at the same time, their unique capacities of knowledge, will, freedom and responsibility are recognized and valued.” (118)

Question: What needs renewing in your life and community?

### **Chapter Four: Integral Ecology**

“Everything is closely interrelated, and today’s problems call for a vision capable of taking into account every aspect of the global crisis.” (117)

“Doomsday predictions can no longer be met with irony or disdain. We may well be leaving to coming generations debris, desolation and filth. . . . We need to reflect on our accountability before those who will have to endure the dire consequences.” (161)

Question: Who are the particular people(s) to whom you and all of us are accountable?

### **Chapter Five: Lines of Approach and Action**

“Interdependence obliges us to think of *one world with a common plan*.” (164)

Question: What will have to change to make this happen?

“The same mindset which stands in the way of making radical decisions to reverse the trend of global warming also stands in the way of achieving the goal of eliminating poverty.” (175)

Question: How would you describe that mindset?

“Thus we forget that ‘time is greater than space,’<sup>130</sup> that we are always more effective when we generate processes rather than holding on to positions of power.” (178)

Question: Can you recognize this in your life and community?

“Let us keep in mind the principle of subsidiarity, which grants freedom to develop the capabilities present at every level of society, while also demanding a greater sense of responsibility for the common good from those who wield greater power.” (196)

Question: How does this principle inform – or not inform – our decisions?

## **Chapter Six: Ecological Education and Spirituality**

Pope Francis speaks about “compulsive consumerism.”

Question: What does this phrase mean to you? Do you see it in your neighbors? In yourself?

“There is a nobility in the duty to care for creation through little daily actions, and it is wonderful how education can bring about real changes in lifestyle.” (211)

Question: Do you recognize this in your own life?

Pope Francis says that some Christians “need an ‘ecological conversion,’ whereby the effects of their encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them. Living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience.” (217)

Question: Do you agree?

*“All it takes is one good person to restore hope!” (71)*

# Adapted Document Used by First Congregational's Adult Forum

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Question: In what ways have you and your family been affected by these two social phenomena? What have you been able to do to limit their effects?

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