

The Hope within Us

A Report on Climate Change by the Roman Catholic-United Church Dialogue in Canada

2018

Introduction

Since October 2012, the Roman Catholic-United Church Dialogue in Canada has met eight times to explore our churches' responses to the ecological crisis, with particular attention to climate change. During our years together, we have observed the 40th anniversary of this dialogue as well as a number of anniversaries related to the Second Vatican Council. The dialogue gathers at the request of The United Church of Canada's Theology and Inter-Church Inter-faith Committee and the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops' Commission for Christian Unity, Religious Relations with the Jews, and Interfaith Dialogue. The dialogue seeks to increase understanding and appreciation between the Catholic Church in Canada and The United Church of Canada. It explores pastoral, theological, and ethical issues, including those about which we may differ. Participants in the dialogue expect to learn from and to be challenged by one another; they commit themselves to countering misinformation, stereotypes, and prejudices that may influence the members of our churches.

In May 2012, the dialogue, in collaboration with representatives of our sponsoring bodies, discerned as its next topic of discussion the theology of creation, ecology, and the environment—including climate change. Several questions helped us to frame our discussion: What is our theology of creation, of Earth¹ and our place in it, and of the environment and its future? What, in light of our present situation, are the key issues for the churches, today and tomorrow? What, in particular, should our two churches do together and with others?

We entered into our discussions, cognizant that we were not alone in our reflections on this important topic. As churches, we are in dialogue with a wider community of concerned people, both religious and secular. Climate change has focused the attention of the scientific community, civil society, ecumenical and interreligious groups, Indigenous peoples, youth, and many others in Canada and around the world. The

¹ Because the treatment of Earth as an object may have contributed to exploitation, this report uses "Earth" instead of "the earth" in order to encourage reflection on Earth as a subject or an integrated organism with whom we can be in relationship. The Bible and Christian tradition often treats Earth, or parts of Earth, as subjects capable of acting and communicating. For instance, God calls Skies and Earth as witnesses (Deut. 30:19, see also Ps. 96:11). Also, St. Francis of Assisi is well known for treating parts of Earth as subjects, as in *The Cantic of the Sun*, in which he refers to Earth and its creatures in relational terms. Thus, it is the position of this dialogue group that there is wisdom in thinking of Earth as a subject, thereby helping to change hearts and minds to address climate change and the environmental crisis.

dialogue members are acutely aware that our churches can provide only a limited response to this crisis. Yet, as people of faith, our churches are called to give an account of the hope that is within us.

In initial discussions, the dialogue received input from resource people to help us ground our work in the science around climate change and in the history of our churches' response to ecological issues. At subsequent meetings, the group engaged in a deeper exploration of the theological dimensions shaping our response to climate change and ecological justice, including reflection on key church statements. Our conversations were profoundly shaped by Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home* and The United Church of Canada's faith statement *A Song of Faith*.² Other key resources include statements on ecological justice from each denomination (see bibliography).

When we began our discussions in 2012, it was immediately clear that among the issues of ecology, environment, and creation, the issue of climate change provided a useful focus for our dialogue to explore areas of ethical consensus and common mission. Unlike some of the topics explored by this dialogue over the past 40 years, this topic promised to be one where we would find little if any disagreement on basic principles or pastoral action. We discovered one another's distinct approaches to this issue as a gift. We heard numerous stories of local churches engaging in creative forms of environmental action. Those engaged in advocacy and action in the church and broader civil society spoke of the importance of bringing a spiritual dimension to work on climate change and ecological justice. We discovered that the hope within us for a restored relationship with creation is rooted deeply in our Christian faith and practice.

There has been an ongoing commitment in this group to an engaged theology relevant to those in our local communities. The dialogue explored liturgical resources on care for creation and concluded that a worship resource prepared by the group could be a gift of ecumenical witness. Thus, the dialogue has prepared an Earth Hour Vigil, which is offered to our churches, ecumenical partners, and wider networks to promote Earth Hour as a celebration and commitment to compassionate action for creation's well-being.

The dialogue celebrated the beauty and goodness of creation, lamented the degradation of the web of life, and now calls for action based on the hope within us. This report offers reflections on what we have shared, with the prayer that our people unite in common witness and action for the sake of God's beloved creation. The profound impact of climate change, particularly upon vulnerable peoples and ecosystems, calls for an equally profound response from people of faith. In this report, we call our churches to a spiritual conversion that gives priority to those on the margins, to those who are most vulnerable in our world.

Within Canadian society over the past few decades, there has been increasing concern to protect the environment. Nevertheless, given the sharply conflicting interests among citizens and governments on environmental issues, we are far from reconciling our relationship with all creation. So it is morally imperative that our churches continually remind Canadians that decisions beneficial for the environment are beneficial for all. Each of our churches will face a challenge: How do we express to society the hope that comes from the Good News? But the dialogue partners trust that God's Spirit will find ways to remind all people that the church brings from the Creator the hope of new life, of unity and of peace. In *Sharing the Good News Today*, a previous Roman Catholic-United Church dialogue group concurred, "the Church...offers to humanity the hope that harmony and fellowship among all peoples is a real possibility."³ We reiterate their conviction that

² Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'* (Encyclical on Care for Our Common Home, May 24, 2015), w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html; hereafter referred to as LS. *A Song of Faith: A Statement of Faith of The United Church of Canada* (2006), www.united-church.ca/community-faith/welcome-united-church-canada/song-faith; hereafter SF, page numbers in citations refer to the PDF available on the webpage.

³ *Sharing the Good News Today. Report of the Roman Catholic-United Church Dialogue on Evangelism/Evangelization* (October 1995), p. 7.

“as those invited to take up their stewardship of life as partners, not owners, of the created world, Christians can work with others to restore sustainable relationships throughout the created order” (p. 24). Also, with St. Francis of Assisi, patron of ecologists, our dialogue group affirms that we are called to actively promote a greater reverence for creation and to teach that Earth itself is holy.

At the dialogue’s March 2013 meeting, Canadian climate scientist John Stone presented on the causes and impacts of climate change and the particular contribution of Canada to this global issue. Dr. Stone forcefully demonstrated the urgency of the crisis before us. The Canadian government initiated discussions on the crisis as early as 1988, but little effective action has taken place, and Canada continues as one of the world’s highest per capita emitters of carbon dioxide.⁴ Targets for decreasing emissions have not been met, and indeed emissions have been increasing. Controversies around fossil fuel production challenge Canadian society—including our churches. While climate change will impact all of us, Dr. Stone emphasized that there are heightened dangers for people in the north, pointing out that Inuit cultures and survival are already threatened by climate change.

During our discussions on this topic, dialogue members were attentive to the responses of Canadian governments and civil society to climate change questions. We heard reports from people who had attended the UN climate meetings (Conference of the Parties), COP 21 in Paris and COP 19 in Warsaw. We heard of experiences of personal and communal action and advocacy, and the importance of Canada’s role in these global discussions. Thus, the dialogue’s conviction was reaffirmed that Canadian churches have a particular role to play in engaging our members in dialogue, prayer, and action around climate change.

Churches can encourage social, scientific, and theological analysis of this issue as it is experienced in Canadian and global contexts, and we can offer resources that help Christians to bear witness in their lives—as individuals and as communities—to the need for transformation in our relationship to creation. As a dialogue, we explore here the spiritual resources of our common tradition for addressing climate change.

Trinity and Creation

The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they reveal knowledge.
They have no speech, they use no words;
no sound is heard from them.
Yet their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.
(Ps. 19:1–4, NIV)

⁴ For Canada as one of the leading per capita greenhouse gas emitters see Paul Boothe and Félix-A. Boudreault, *By the Numbers: Canadian GHG Emissions* (Lawrence National Centre for Policy and Management, 2016), www.ivey.uwo.ca/news/news-ivey/2016/1/by-the-numbers-canadian-ghg-emissions/ citing cait.wri.org.

Scripture tells us that creation is alive with the presence of God. We members of the Roman Catholic–United Church Dialogue hold in common that to speak of creation is to make a truth claim about reality, a claim that is not in conflict with scientific conclusions or other ways of knowing, but complementary to them. We claim that the divine presence permeates all creation, holds all together in a dynamic relationship and calls us beyond our human-centred perspective into a consciousness that affirms and respects all life and all creation.

So God creates the universe
and with it the possibility of being and relating.
God tends the universe,
mending the broken and reconciling the estranged
God enlivens the universe,
guiding all things toward harmony with their Source (SF 3).

Yet humanity has profoundly sundered this sacred unity by our choices and actions. The acceleration of our technology, the rapacious ethic of progress, and the greed of our economic and political systems are today wreaking havoc upon the environment and humanity. We are in an era of climate change, which threatens the very existence of our human family and the beauty of Earth. Species become extinct daily, and the poorest of the human family suffer intolerable anguish. In this matter, our faith communities are learning to respect traditional Indigenous knowledge *and* the wisdom of scientific evidence as resources to guide us in the right decisions we are called to make at this time. As Pope Francis writes:

The climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all. At the global level, it is a complex system linked to many of the essentials for human life. A very solid scientific consensus indicates that we are presently witnessing a disturbing warming of the climatic system (LS 23).

We are part of an interdependent universe and Earth. What we do and what we choose have effects beyond the circle of just our human family. Through disregard for Earth, we have disrupted the integrity of creation. So often we have made decisions solely for immediate benefit, not keeping the good of all creation in our vision. Our choices matter.

Made in the image of God,
we yearn for the fulfilment that is life in God.
Yet we choose to turn away from God.
We surrender ourselves to sin...
Becoming bound and complacent
in a web of false desires and wrong choices,
we bring harm to ourselves and others (SF 4).

As God challenged our ancestors in the faith through the words of scripture, so we are challenged today: “I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life, so that you and your descendants may live” (Deut. 30:19). However, we have experienced the tragic sundering of the relationship between humans and creation in our time, which violates the sacred unity and harmony found in creation. We have desecrated God’s Word in creation and forgotten the revelation written there.

In early Christian and medieval theology, it was common to refer to the two books of revelation God has given us: the book of sacred scripture and the book of nature. For it was said “if we learn to read the book

of nature aright, we will hear God's Word and be led to knowledge about God's wisdom, power and love."⁵ St. Antony the Great (AD 251–356), a Desert Father, related how the scriptures were also written in the creation around him: "My book, O Philosopher, is the nature of created things, and anytime I want to read the word of God, the book is before me."⁶ St. Francis, faithful to scripture, invites us to see nature as a magnificent book in which God speaks to us and grants us a glimpse of infinite divine beauty and goodness (LS 12; cf. Wis. 13:5). In a similar vein, John Calvin writes

In every part of the world, in heaven and on Earth, he has written and as it were engraven the glory of his power, goodness, wisdom, and eternity. For all creatures, from the firmament even to the centre of the Earth, could be witnesses and messengers of his glory to all men.⁷

From the first chapter of Genesis, we have traditionally understood that humans are created in the image of God to have dominion over other creatures. How might we understand *dominion* today? The God of these passages is a relational God who shares the work of creating with others. The Creator appoints the sun and moon to rule over day and night (Gen. 1:6), asks the waters to bring forth fish and birds (Gen. 1:20) and Earth to bring forth animals (Gen. 1:22). When God asks the human to name the animals, God is sharing with the human what has until that point in the story been God's prerogative.⁸ God has been the one who named; now God asks humans to take part in naming. The God of these passages is concerned with providing food for other creatures (Gen. 1:30) and blesses fish and birds and commands them to multiply (Gen. 1:22). Humans made in the image of this God, therefore, should exercise dominion in ways that work with other creatures to promote blessing and flourishing for all species. Further clarity is brought in the context of Genesis 2:15, where the human is put in the garden "to till and to keep it," which could be translated as "to serve and protect." Then, in the first covenant of the Bible, Noah, as representative of humans, was invited into a three-way covenant with humans, all living things, and the Creator (Gen. 9:8-15). It is an inclusive covenant that continually calls us to live in ways that will serve and protect the integrity of all God's creation.

Creation accounts in scripture affirm that human life is grounded in these three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships with God, with our neighbour, and with Earth itself. Early church theologians saw this interrelationship of the Trinity through the dynamic life of creation itself. In St. Bonaventure's Trinitarian theology, every creature is a self-expression of God, and the inner structure of every creature and all creation can be said to reflect the Trinitarian footprint—therein we also find the revelation of God's eternal presence and wisdom.⁹ Everything is connected. Our Creator has formed us for relationality, for we live in a universe that exists in a wondrous web of interconnected and interdependent beings, bringing life and witness to the manifold wonder of God's love. It is a mode of self-giving modelled in the Trinitarian *key* of Christianity. As the United Church teaches:

⁵ Elizabeth Johnson, "The Cosmos: An Astonishing Image of God," *Origins* 26, no. 13 (Sept. 12, 1996): 207. See also Max Wilder, *The Theologian and His Universe: Theology and Cosmology from the Middle Ages to the Present* (New York: Seabury, 1982).

⁶ Elizabeth Theokritoff, "The Book of the Word: Reading God's Creation" in *Caring for Creation* (Waco, TX: Institute for Faith and Learning, 2012), 20.

⁷ John Calvin, *Opera Selecta* 9.793.

⁸ Terence Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), 345–346.

⁹ Denis Edwards, *Jesus the Wisdom of God: An Ecological Theology, Ecology and Justice Series* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1995), 109–110. See also Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, translated by Jose de Vinck, vol. II, *The Works of Bonaventure: Cardinal, Seraphic Doctor and Saint* (Paterson, NJ: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1963), 101.

With the Church through the ages,
we speak of God as one and triune...
the One on whom our hearts rely,
the fully shared life at the heart of the universe...
Holy Mystery that is Wholly Love (SF 3).

Or, as Pope Francis reminds us:

The universe as a whole, in all its manifold relationships, shows forth the inexhaustible riches of God. Saint Thomas Aquinas wisely noted that multiplicity and variety come from the One who willed that “what was wanting to one in the representation of the divine goodness might be supplied by another”, inasmuch as God’s goodness “could not be represented fittingly by any one creature.”¹⁰

We can open our souls to the intricate wonder and revelation of God’s presence in our hearts, each other, and our Earth. We are all united one to the other in God’s wondrous and sacred love. Each creature and every rainforest, each star and every bird song can be “a symbol and a sacrament of God’s presence and Trinitarian life.”¹¹

Everything is interconnected, and this invites us to develop a spirituality of that global solidarity which flows from the mystery of the Trinity (LS 240).

Sin and Reconciliation

[I]n Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself (2 Cor. 5:19).

The creation stories in the Bible tell how, having created humanity—“male and female”—in the image and likeness of the divine, the Creator judged all that was created as “very good” (cf. Gen. 1:27, 31). All creation reflected some aspect of the eternal love, beauty, and goodness of God. Harmoniously united as companions in a common creatureliness, we took our rightful place as creatures among creatures in our witness and praise of the Creator. In its 1995 report on evangelism/evangelization, the Roman Catholic-United Church Dialogue noted that all people are not only called to honour the image of God in one another but also “to live in a relationship of respect with creation” (*Sharing the Good News Today*, 24).

We echo their observation that “we owe a particular debt to Canada’s aboriginal peoples for their witness to the spiritual meaning of our interdependence with all other creatures” (*Sharing the Good News Today*, 24). Entrusting Earth to humans to care for, serve, and nurture with love and wisdom, the Creator rested from work and made that day holy (cf. Gen. 2:2-3). However, we creatures within the created order, as individuals and communities, have often failed to live up to that trust. We have abused our unique power, responsibility, and accountability. Today, as ecological crisis and loss of reverence for the integrity of all creation threaten our beautiful world, the concept of sin acquires a new significance. Both Roman Catholic and United Church traditions agree that “sin is fundamentally a breaking of relationship: with God, with one

¹⁰ *Laudato Si'*, 86, quoting Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 47, art. 1.

¹¹ Edwards, *Jesus the Wisdom of God*, 110.

another, and with creation.”¹² Using similar language to define sin, Pope Francis says that human resistance to our real nature and true vocation has ruptured these three vital and interconnected relationships (LS 66). Echoing the words of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, Pope Francis expressed the thoughts of many concerned about the present state of the environment:

For human beings... to destroy the biological diversity of God’s creation; for human beings to degrade the integrity of the earth by causing changes in its climate, by stripping the earth of its natural forests or destroying its wetlands; for human beings to contaminate the earth’s waters, its land, its sea, and its life—these are sins.... To commit a crime against the natural world is a sin against ourselves and our world (LS 66).

Those who think deeply about environmental philosophy and ethics use the concept of sin, if not the word, to diagnose the root causes of ecological problems. Ecofeminists hold that the oppression of women and Mother Earth are interrelated and caused by patriarchy. Social ecologists hold that ecological exploitation is interrelated with human injustice and hierarchical relationships of gender, race, class, and ethnicity. Deep ecologists hold that the treatment of other species as valuable only as they are useful to humans is the problem and instead assert that all species have intrinsic value in the global ecosystem. Many ecofeminists, social ecologists, and deep ecologists are convinced that anthropocentrism—particularly the belief that all life is intended for the benefit of humans—is the main culprit.

While recognizing the truth in each of these claims, our church communities agree that a theological understanding of sin provides valuable insights. Concurring that “sin is a reality in our world” and that “sin and reconciliation are at the heart of the Christian message and mission,” the Roman Catholic-United Church Dialogue has affirmed that “we cannot talk about who we are as human beings and who God is in relation to us without reference to these realities” (*Sin, Reconciliation, and Ecclesial Identity*, 3). Striving to understand how sin and sinfulness are understood in scriptures, both of our churches engage the biblical creation accounts, not as historical or scientific documents, but as embodying profound reflections on our nature as humans in relationship with God and all creation. Acknowledging our traditions’ differences of emphasis in expressing these reflections, we offer one interpretation of our foundational narratives to help us find our place in creation.

The biblical creation stories teach us that, though we are finite and mortal beings, we are continually tempted to deny our nature. As creatures, we live within biological and ecological limits but chafe against them. Rejecting our vocation to tend and nurture Earth, we deny our nature, forget our limits, and misuse our God-given abilities, thus exploiting and bringing woe to Earth. In short, we rebel against our rightful relationship with the Creator.

The disruption of sin infects our relationships with God, our neighbours, and the rest of the created order. When we humans are not at peace with ourselves and God, Earth is not at peace. “Therefore the land mourns and all who dwell in it languish, together with the wild animals and the birds of the air, and even the fish of the sea are perishing” (Hos. 4:3). Not only affecting our relationships, this disruption affects our sense of ourselves and of our place in the created order and leads to both an inflated sense of our abilities (pride) and, paradoxically, a loss of sense of our responsibility (apathy). Though the Christian tradition has often emphasized pride, the United Church, in its 1977 *Task Force on the Environment* report, highlighted *apathy* as a significant form that sin takes in relation to ecological issues. This *apathy*

¹² *Sin, Reconciliation, and Ecclesial Identity. Report of the Roman Catholic-United Church Dialogue* (June 2004), 4.

arises out of a fateful combination in us of our guilty complicity in the rape of nature, our greedy dependence upon the rapid use of the planet's resources, our impotence before the size and scope of the changes needed in the social and economic order to reduce its gargantuan appetites, our inability to 'image' how a simpler style of life could enhance rather than attack our humanity, our fear that it would make us prey to other political groups in the world who threaten our place in the sun. All of us are aware of such apathy both in its personal and social manifestations.¹³

God Is Love

Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love (1 John 4:8).

Our Creator wills that no part of creation be left captive to sin and death. In the book of Exodus, God leads a people out of captivity into the possibility of a new way of life. In Jesus' incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection, our triune God acts in an unprecedented way to reconcile the relationships broken by sin. Both of our faith traditions teach that, while the rest of us resist our mortality and limitations, Christ Jesus freely emptied himself and fully embraced our creatureliness. By freely submitting to the crucifixion, Jesus the sinless one reveals the divine solidarity with even the most despised and abused. On the cross, he confronts the power of sin in order to liberate us from its captivity (cf. Gal. 3:13). By raising Jesus gloriously from the dead, God judges and destroys our sin in Jesus' own body. Believing in Jesus' divinity and immersed in God's life in Jesus, we become Christ's instruments for bringing salvation to all creation, which "has been groaning in labour pains until now" (cf. Rom. 8:19-23).

God's mission of transformation and restoration results in new forms of relationships and new kinds of communities. Thus both of our faith traditions lift up the importance of the church as the bearer of the gospel—God's Good News of liberation and salvation for the entire created order. In responding to this Good News, we are called to gather in faith communities of mutual love and service. Living in peace and unity, we can help one another become who we really are—God's people and Christ's body. It is true that our faith communities often fall short of their calling, and our life together is often tainted by the sin we strive to leave behind. Rather than point fingers, however, we are at our best when we join hands. As those who are being transformed by Christ as we are learning to embrace our creatureliness, we engage in an ongoing dialogue. In respect and love, we challenge one another and the whole world to set aside the ways of death and embrace the kingdom Jesus offers. Dialogues must be passionate because so much is at stake. They must be respectful and non-violent because the shape of our relationships themselves bear the possibility of God's new creation.

¹³ The United Church of Canada, *Record of Proceedings of the 27th General Council 1977* (Don Mills: Canec, 1977), 492.

Human Response: Ritual and Prayer

For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them
(Matt. 18:20).

Just as public vigils in response to acts of terror serve as a potent form of resistance, so sacred ritual and other prayer support movements for ecological transformation. These practices help us to shift from focusing on problems to participating in God's mending of the world. They are the intermediate step between ideal visions and concrete social practices.¹⁴ To take one example, Sabbath observance encourages resistance to consumer capitalism and environmental exploitation.¹⁵ So too, any sacred rituals, by imagining the world differently, challenge the perception that current practices are natural and inevitable. Prayers of thanksgiving and praise acknowledge a sense of the natural world as the good creation of God rather than just economic resource or dead mechanism. Prayers of confession say aloud that our relations with the rest of creation are not what God intends. Intercessory prayers articulate what we hope and long for, imagining alternatives to current reality. Personal prayers align the desires of our hearts with the will of God and our grief with those things that break God's heart.¹⁶ All forms of prayer draw on the divine power of God to imagine, enact, and shape alternative possibilities. While we cannot predict how God responds to our prayers, Jesus assures us that God will not disappoint those who persistently pray for justice. Such prayers help open the door of our unjust hearts in response to God's persistent knocking (Luke 18:7-8).

With prayer, everything is possible—even a world in which all things dwell together harmoniously (Isa. 11:6-9). As our gracious God has promised: "if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land" (2 Chron. 7:14). Connecting us in love to all things, Jesus also teaches us to align ourselves with God's will in this beautiful troubled world, through contemplation and action: "Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on Earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10).

Rediscovering a Sense of Place in Creation

We are called to be the Church;
to celebrate God's presence,
to live with respect in Creation,
to love and serve others,
to seek justice and resist evil,
to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,
our judge and our hope.¹⁷

¹⁴ See Tom F. Driver, *Liberating Rites: Understanding the Transformative Power of Ritual* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998). For this summary of Driver's work, we have drawn extensively on the doctoral project report of David A. Holmes, "Sabbath Practice as a Resistance to Consumerism: A Lenten Experiment in Congregational Sabbath Practice" (Columbia Theological Seminary, 2008), 10-14.

¹⁵ "In our own contemporary context of the rat race of anxiety, the celebration of Sabbath is an act of both resistance and alternative. It is resistance because it is a visible insistence that our lives are not defined by the production and consumption of commodity goods... The alternative on offer is the awareness and practice of the claim that we are situated on the receiving end of the gifts of God." Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No in the Culture of Now* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), pp. xiii-xiv.

¹⁶ cf. Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops Social Affairs Commission, "You Love All that Exists... All Things Are Yours, God, Lover of Life": *A Pastoral Letter on the Christian Ecological Imperative* (Ottawa: CCCB, 2003), 4-5.

¹⁷ The United Church of Canada, *A New Creed*, rev. 1995.

Catholic moral theology and Christian ethics have often been cast in markedly anthropocentric terms, as though humans are not part of the natural world but are even over or against the world. Regarding human relationships, there has been limited recognition of humanity's fundamental integration with the rest of creation. Indeed, humanity and nature have been viewed as distinct in an effort to explain the creation of humans in the image of God with the special characteristics of reason and freedom of will. Furthermore, a lingering fear of pantheism has prohibited a free and unbiased assessment of God's image revealed through all creation.

Yet in *A Song of Faith and Laudato Si'*, as in earlier writings of Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI, together with other recent proclamations within the majority of the Christian churches, we find a clear articulation of the place of humans in creation along with a call towards responsibility for the care of creation. Distinctions are necessary for life in God's diverse creation and are not distinctions of superiority or inferiority. Our false assumptions of separation and superiority have greatly contributed to the commodification of nature and to consequent environmental destruction. The offence is grievous, for all of creation is interconnected and interdependent. And the whole of creation reflects God.

While more recently re-articulated in our churches, this vision of creation's interconnectivity is not something novel. Such understandings are rooted in the richness and wisdom of Indigenous spiritualities and both of our churches have drawn our attention to the importance of that wisdom for our age. We also find such wisdom, albeit ambiguous at times, deeply rooted in centuries of Christian Tradition. In the early church, notably in the writings of Saints Irenaeus and Basil, emphasis on the immanence of God in creation is marked. The Celtic tradition emphasized that all visible things can be called a theophany.

We find this approach echoed in the medieval era, notably in the writings of St. Hildegard of Bingen:

All that the earth issues forth is connected and bound to God... The earth is at the same time mother. She is mother of all, for contained in her are the seeds of all. The earth of humankind contains all moistness, all verdancy, all germinating power. It is in so many ways fruitful. All the other parts of creation come from it. Yet, it forms not only the basic raw material of humankind, but also the substance of the incarnation of the word of God.¹⁸

Also, as we have already noted, St. Thomas Aquinas held that God has created numerous beings such that God's goodness might be communicated and represented by them all because divine goodness cannot be adequately represented by any single creature alone.¹⁹

There is a common thread in Martin Luther, St. Ignatius of Loyola, John Calvin, and other 16th-century Reformers that, in the words of Luther, "God is substantially present everywhere in and through all creation, in all their parts and places, so that the world is full of God and He fills it but without being encompassed and surrounded by it."²⁰ Calvin refers to all creatures as "witnesses and messengers of [God's] glory" and urges us not to pass over them fleetingly, but to contemplate them carefully and repeatedly. "For the little singing birds sang of God, the animals acclaimed him, the elements feared and the mountains resounded with him, the river and the springs threw glances toward him, the grasses and the flowers smiled."²¹

¹⁸ "Letters," cited in *A Cloud of Witnesses: The Deep Ecological Legacy of Christianity*, ed. Frederick W. Krueger (Santa Rosa, CA: The Religious Campaign for Forest Conservation, 2002), 207.

¹⁹ See note 10, above.

²⁰ Martin Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke* 23/134.34-136.36.

²¹ Calvin, *Opera Selecta* 9.793, 795.

A Song of Faith proclaims the tradition eloquently for today:

Each part of creation reveals unique aspects of God the Creator,
who is both in creation and beyond it.
All parts of creation, animate and inanimate, are related.
All creation is good. We sing of the Creator,
who made humans to live and move
and have their being in God.
In and with God,
we can direct our lives toward right relationship
with each other and with God.
We can discover our place as one strand in the web of life (SF 3-4).

Despite this clear vision in the Christian tradition, Pope Francis offers this critique of human misunderstanding:

Modernity has been marked by an excessive anthropocentrism which today, under another guise, continues to stand in the way of shared understanding and of any effort to strengthen social bonds. The time has come to pay renewed attention to reality and the limits it imposes; this in turn is the condition for a more sound and fruitful development of individuals and society. An inadequate presentation of Christian anthropology gave rise to a wrong understanding of the relationship between human beings and the world (LS 116).

Today, a renewed understanding of our place in creation calls us now to “responsibility” in our care for Earth. Such responsibility is grounded in the intimate relationship between the sacred and the material articulated in the incarnation and the sacraments.

God in All Things

And the Word became flesh and lived among us (John 1:14).

In both of our churches, the call to respect creation parallels affirmation of incarnation, and the link between the two is significant. As United Church theologian William Kervin has said, “Our mandate for environmental concern is rooted in God’s radical revelation in the flesh, which in turn is grounded in God’s affirmation of the goodness of Creation.”²² Similarly, Pope Francis writes, “For Christians, all the creatures of the material universe find their true meaning in the Incarnate Word, for the Son of God has incorporated in his person part of the material world, planting in it a seed of definitive transformation” (LS 235).

Drawing on the biblical creation story (Gen. 2:7), which speaks of humanity (*ha adam*) emerging from the dust of the Earth (*ha adamah*), Pope Francis notes that, though we have forgotten this fact, our bodies are made up of Earth’s elements (LS 2). When A Song of Faith professes the embodiment of the Holy One in Jesus of Nazareth (SF 6) it is also an embodiment in Earth. Both of our traditions are thus able to affirm the significance of the incarnation for our understanding of creation. That the Word become flesh in Jesus is a thorough identification of the Holy Word with the whole Earth, not just with humans or animals. As the

²² William S. Kervin, “To Live with Respect in Creation: Worship and the Environment,” in *Gathered for Worship: A Sourcebook for Worship Committees, Leaders, and Teams* (Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 2010), 82.

gospel according to John suggests, God's gift in Christ was an expression of his love for the whole *cosmos* (John 3:16).

Creation in its individual parts and as a whole reveals divine love. Both of our traditions are able to affirm that creation mediates the Creator and therefore has sacramental significance. Creation is Christ-revealing. As Kervin insists: "There is no other way for us to know of God's presence and action than in and through God's created order."²³ As Catholic theologians Michael and Kenneth Himes explain, the essence of a sacrament is its capacity to reveal the self-giving love of God the creator.

The discovery that every creature, including oneself, is a sacrament of the love of God that causes all things to be provides the deepest foundation for reverencing creation. The recognition of the other as a creature and, therefore, that which exists because it is loved by God cannot occur where the other is regarded as "it." By its nature a sacrament requires that it be appreciated for what it is and not as a tool to an end.²⁴

The liturgies of the Eastern churches emphasize the incarnation as developing an existing relationship between God and creation. Natural images are used to describe Christ. This imaging has great relevance for our understanding of the incarnation and for creation in general. Orthodox liturgical theologian Elizabeth Theokritoff writes:

Humanity misused a tree and polluted the world: God cleanses his world by the tree of the Cross. The misuse culminates in the instrument of torture and execution, the quintessential tree of death: God's use of the tree reveals it as a tree of life. This has implications for trees in general.²⁵

Theokritoff thus observes that the tree continues to fulfil its created purpose of producing food, providing shelter, purifying water and enriching soil, and these functions have a spiritual counterpart that is life-giving in a wider but inclusive context.²⁶

As Pope Francis has said, "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, without impinging on its autonomy" (LS 99). Similarly, creation is a locus of signs of the transcendent and immanent Creating Spirit. Pope Francis writes, "The universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely. Hence there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, on a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person's face" (LS 233). This understanding fosters our spiritual capacity to discover God-revealed-in-all-things. It is an understanding that directs us to a sense of the sacramental in all creation. A Song of Faith proclaims: "Each part of creation reveals unique aspects of God the Creator, who is both in creation and beyond it" (SF 3).

In the sacraments of the church, too, we come to understand the intimate relationship between God and creation. A Song of Faith states that the sacraments of the church are intended "to point to the presence

²³ Kervin, 82.

²⁴ Michael J. Himes and Kenneth R. Himes, O.F.M., "The Sacrament of Creation: Toward an Environmental Theology," *Commonweal* (January 26, 1990): 42-49.

²⁵ Elizabeth Theokritoff, "Creation and Salvation in Orthodox Worship," *Ecotheology* 10 (2001): 103.

²⁶ Theokritoff, 104.

of the holy in the world” and that in them “the ordinary things of life—water, bread, wine—point beyond themselves to God and God’s love, teaching us to be alert to the sacred in the midst of life” (SF 8).

Likewise, Pope Francis states that just as “the Son of God has incorporated in his person part of the material world,” so too “the Sacraments are a privileged way in which nature is taken up by God to become a means mediating supernatural life (LS 235).

Integral Ecology

Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture, but you must tread down with your feet the rest of your pasture? When you drink of clear water, must you foul the rest with your feet? And must my sheep eat what you have trodden with your feet, and drink what you have fouled with your feet?
(Ezek. 34:18-19)

Pope Paul VI in his encyclical *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971) wrote that the human person “is suddenly becoming aware that by an ill-considered exploitation of nature he risks destroying it and becoming in his turn the victim of this degradation” (21). Forty years later, a Pontifical Academy of the Sciences working group warned: “Human-caused changes in the composition of the air and air quality result in more than 2 million premature deaths worldwide every year and threaten water and food security—especially among those ‘bottom 3 billion’ people.”²⁷

If one of the problems facing our contemporary world is the temptation to violate creation’s intended unity, then the Roman Catholic concepts of integral ecology, human ecology, and integral human development may be helpful. As Pope Benedict XVI wrote: “The way humanity treats the environment influences the way it treats itself, and vice versa... Every violation of solidarity and civic friendship harms the environment, just as environmental deterioration, in turn, upsets relations in society... The book of nature is one and indivisible” (*Caritas in Veritate*, 2009, no. 51). Pope Benedict XVI developed the concept of human ecology to illuminate the connection between sanctity of life and environmental ecology.²⁸

Pope Francis connects the notion of human ecology with the understanding of integral human development:

Since everything is closely interrelated, and today’s problems call for a vision capable of taking into account every aspect of the global crisis, I suggest that we now consider some elements of an integral ecology, one which clearly respects its human and social dimensions (LS 137).

The term *integral ecology* is not in widespread use in the United Church, but the concept is widespread in its teaching: ecosystems, families, and societies are integrated, so environmental, social, economic, moral,

²⁷ *Fate of Mountain Glaciers in the Anthropocene. A Report by the Working Group Commissioned by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences* (May 11, 2011), 4. Available at www.pas.va.

²⁸ “If there is a lack of respect for the right to life and to a natural death, if human conception, gestation and birth are made artificial, if human embryos are sacrificed to research, the conscience of society ends up losing the concept of human ecology and, along with it, that of environmental ecology. It is contradictory to insist that future generations respect the natural environment when our educational systems and laws do not help them to respect themselves” (CV 51). It should be noted that, while sharing the conceptual framework of integral ecology and respect for the sacredness of life, the dialogue partners differ in some of the ethical conclusions that they draw from this framework.

and spiritual issues mutually impact one another. The United Church's Task Force on the Environment taught that

In order to love each other,
we have to love the garden;
in order to love the garden,
we have to love each other.²⁹

Human beings are not disembodied spirits but spirited flesh, and thus inescapably formed by the ecosystems of which we are a part. Thus healthy ecosystems are unlikely to exist where families and societies are unhealthy. Generally speaking, social problems lead to environmental problems and vice versa:

- Indigenous communities and peoples of colour are disproportionately vulnerable to pollution because of systematic political and economic marginalization.³⁰
- Desertification, drought, famine, and other environmental problems can lead to social and ethnic conflicts, civil wars, and failing states.³¹
- Poverty, corruption, totalitarian governance, restrictions on civil society, and other forms of social injustice can lead to environmental degradation, which then breeds further social problems. When people are empowered to care for the ecosystems that they inhabit, they are likely to do so. When they are not free, their ecosystems suffer as well.³²

For these and other reasons, it is important to think of development in holistic or integrated ways. We often tend to think of development in strictly economic terms as the growth of gross domestic product (GDP). Efforts to correlate GDP with indicators of genuine progress show that economic growth does contribute to well-being for people who need to meet basic needs, but once those needs are met, further economic growth can lead to poor outcomes when the quality of life in community is diminished.³³

And when growth in GDP means growing emissions of greenhouse gases, growing consumption of non-renewable resources, and growing production of waste, economic growth may mean that ecosystems and the lives of those living most intimately with them are not improving at all. In such situations, there is a further disconnect between the economy, the well-being of people, and the natural communities they inhabit. In Canada, for example, growing economic prosperity is reportedly accompanied by frantic lifestyles, isolation from neighbours, and fragile family life.³⁴

While neo-liberal economic thought promotes a view of economics as a value-free system, both of our traditions have concluded that real development cannot be separated from ethical reflection about what

²⁹ Task Force on the Environment Report, *Record of Proceedings of the 27th General Council 1977*, 496.

³⁰ See, for example, "Appeal to the Leaders and Representatives of Indigenous Peoples and Faith Communities," Report of the participants in the conference Future of Life in the Arctic—The Impact of Climate Change: Indigenous and Religious Perspectives (Storforsen, Sweden, 2015), available at www.councilofchurches.ca/news/arctic-future; or Andil Gosine and Cheryl Teelucksingh, *Environmental Justice and Racism in Canada: An Introduction* (Toronto: Emond Montgomery, 2008).

³¹ See, for example, Ecumenical Water Network, Statement of the Conference "Churches for Water in Africa" (Entebbe, Uganda, May 21-25, 2007), available at www.oikoumene.org.

³² See WCC Central Committee, "Statement on eco-justice and ecological debt" (Geneva, September 2, 2009), <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/2009/report-on-public-issues/statement-on-eco-justice-and-ecological-debt>.

³³ John Helliwell, Richard Layard, and Jeffrey Sachs, *World Happiness Report 2017* (New York: Sustainable Development Solutions Network, 2017), worldhappiness.report/ed/2017.

³⁴ 2016 *Canadian Index of Wellbeing National Report* (November 22, 2016), uwaterloo.ca/canadian-index-wellbeing.

the good life means for people in their natural environments. Justice, fairness, compassion, and ecological sensitivity must be foundational values for our economic systems. We must view humanity's money-economy as one part of the Great Economy of the natural systems that produce all real wealth. What we need is a holistic vision of what it means for human life to flourish in community with all life, thus a fundamental reconsideration of what development, success, and the good life mean.

As the United Church teaches,

To be both people-oriented and ecologically sound, all development strategies must be founded on a just economic order, with priority for the world's poor. Lifestyles of high material consumption must yield to the provision of greater sufficiency for all... The carrying capacity of the Earth, regionally and globally, must become a criterion in accessing economic development.³⁵

Similarly, Pope Francis writes: "Human ecology is inseparable from the notion of the common good, a central and unifying principle of social ethics" (LS 156; cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 1965, no. 26). He further notes that the common good must be particularly attentive to the well-being of the world's poor (LS 158). Referencing Romans 8:22, Francis insists that the earth and the poor are so closely linked that "the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she 'groans in travail'" (LS 2).

Because of their intimate relationships with the lands that they have inhabited for thousands of years, Indigenous peoples have a special place in any consideration of what integral development means. As Pope Francis writes:

In this sense it is imperative to show special care for indigenous communities and their cultural traditions. They are not merely one minority among others but should be the principal dialogue partners, especially when large projects affecting their land are proposed (LS 146).

Some Indigenous members of the United Church would agree:

The plants and animals that represent our stories, families, clans, and houses are the sacred beings and forces at the foundation of our spirituality and traditions from time immemorial for as long as they continue to exist. This is how we understand the bond between Heaven and Earth, ourselves and our Creator. Without air, food, and water together as one in our bodies, we can have no life, no culture, no language, and no religion. To diminish these in any way, is also to diminish our bond with the sacred and the divine.³⁶

Pope Francis points to the importance of dialogue as the key strategy in moving beyond development strategies that are too narrow. Ever-expanding circles of dialogue among religious and scientific communities, decision-makers, cultural leaders, peoples of different faiths, Indigenous communities, and those of different social, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds are all vitally important (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 2013, no. 238-258).

³⁵ "One Earth Community," *Record of Proceedings of the 34th General Council 1992* (Toronto: The United Church of Canada, 1992), 127.

³⁶ BC Native Ministries Council, Background to Proposal ANCC1: Northern Gateway Pipeline. *Record of Proceedings of the 41st General Council 2012* (Toronto: The United Church of Canada, 2012), 386.

Dialogue members gained insight into this commitment to dialogue at our April 2015 meeting, when Judith Marshall reported on her experience as a Canadian representative to the October 2014 World Meeting of Popular Movements. This gathering at the invitation of Pope Francis invited 150 delegates to bring to the Vatican their experience and analysis of poverty, exclusion, and inequality.

Through similar dialogue, faith communities have come to a deeper appreciation of the insight that human flourishing requires respect for the integrity of Earth and all of its multi-varied entities. In turn, Earth's well-being depends on human communities overcoming narrow viewpoints through the often challenging practices of dialogue and community-building across the boundaries of race, class, culture, worldview, and creed.

Eschatology and Hope

Divine creation does not cease
until all things have found wholeness, union, and integration
with the common ground of all being (SF 9).

Facing the facts of climate change can sometimes lead to feelings of despair. It is uncertain whether the global community will be able to act quickly and decisively enough to survive catastrophic climate change. Yet failing to act because of denial, despair, cynicism, and hopelessness will make climatic conditions worse. The church has time-honoured resources to address despair and paralysis. One of these is the structure that biblical laments,³⁷ such as the Psalms, can provide for moving us from despair to hope. In the lament, the individual or community address to God their feelings of grief and anger and gradually find reasons to trust and hope again. The trajectory of lament often moves to confidence and praise of God, even when the worshipper is still in the midst of crisis.

Another resource is our vision of *shalom*. On a popular level, Christians may think caring for Earth is not important because Christianity is about the salvation of humans and going to heaven, but this is not the hope of the Bible: God will redeem Earth and all its creatures. The Book of Isaiah's vision of the future is an end to suffering, injustice, and violence, not just among humans but also among all creatures (Isa. 11:6; 65:25). The Gospels also understand God as redeeming all creation. When Jesus goes into the wilderness, Isaiah's vision of peace among all creatures is inaugurated as Jesus dwells "with the wild beasts" in the wilderness (Mark 1:13). When Jesus instructs his disciples how to pray, he tells them to ask not that they go to heaven but that God's "will be done, on Earth as it is in heaven" (Matt 6:9-10). Jesus himself does God's will on Earth by feeding the hungry, healing the sick, *and* stilling the sea (Mark 4:39). His parables assume that God clothes the lilies of the field (Matt. 6:28), and cares for sparrows as individuals, even though they are of little value to humans (Matt. 10:29); moreover, he teaches that, even on the Sabbath, humans should show compassion for the suffering of other species, for example by lifting a sheep out of a pit (Matt. 12:11).

In Jesus "God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things" (Col. 1:20). Speaking of Colossians 1:19-20, *Laudato Si'* says:

³⁷ Nancy C. Lee, "Lament in the Bible and in Music and Poetry across Cultures Today," *Teaching the Bible* (Society of Biblical Literature, February 2010), www.sbl-site.org/assets/pdfs/TB7_LamentMusic_NL.pdf.

The creatures of this world no longer appear to us under merely natural guise because the risen One is mysteriously holding them to himself and directing them towards fullness as their end. The very flowers of the field and the birds which his human eyes contemplated and admired are now imbued with his radiant presence (LS 100).

Redemption does not depend on humans, but humans have a central role to play. In the early church, St. Jerome and St. Augustine criticized Christian millennialism that led to the neglect of Christian responsibilities. The problem persists today, as some Christians understand the symptoms of climate change as signs of the end of the world and, therefore, not something they have a responsibility to address. This is not the eschatology of either the Catholic or the United Church. Our churches understand climate change not as a sign of the approaching end of Earth but as a call to conversion and action.

This view is supported by an interpretation of the Book of Revelation to John that is very different from the way it is sometimes read. Revelation, as we understand it, sees God as redeeming the Earth, and the end-time coming not for destroying Earth but “for destroying those who destroy the Earth” (Rev 11:18). John foresees the culmination of history as heaven coming down to renew Earth and God living with humans:

And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride... And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying “See, the dwelling of God is among mortals. God will dwell with them as their God; they will be God’s people, and God’s very self will be with them (Rev. 21:2-3).³⁸

Moreover, while this is an action of God, humans contribute to this city: “People will bring into it the glory and the honour of the nations” (Rev. 21:26). Revelation contrasts the New Jerusalem with Babylon, symbolic of the Roman Empire and its exploitation of people and Earth. Christians are called to conversion, called to come out of Babylon and enter the New Jerusalem.³⁹

The imagery of the New Jerusalem alludes to the goodness of the Garden of Eden. The “river of the water of life” flows through the middle of the city and “On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations” (Rev. 22:2). The Christian hope, then, is not in returning to the Garden of Eden but in entering a city where humans and trees flourish: a helpful image for reflections on the ethical ambiguities of working for the healing and flourishing of all creation in a world where the human population has surpassed 7 billion, many living in urban areas.

Members of the dialogue see signs of hope in growing environmental consciousness and the awareness of climate science. But we are also deeply conscious of the tragic reality that many species are already going extinct, many ecosystems have already been disrupted, and many communities are already suffering. We are uncertain whether human effort will be sufficient to keep emissions below the level that will trigger catastrophic climate change. That threat may be one more nail in the coffin of the optimism about human potential and achievement that has characterized the modern world. We are relearning what our traditions

³⁸ Translation provided by Barbara R. Rossing, “For the Healing of the World: Reading Revelation Ecologically,” in *From Every People and Nation: Revelation in Intercultural Perspective*, ed. by David Rhoads (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), p. 171.

³⁹ More on this interpretation of the Book of Revelation can be found in Barbara R. Rossing, “Rapture in Reverse: Reading Revelation Ecologically, for the Love of Creation” in *From Every People and Nation: Revelation in Intercultural Perspective*, ed. by David Rhoads (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), pp. 165-182, and *The Rapture Exposed: The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation* (New York: Basic Books, 2004).

have taught for centuries, that human effort is limited by our failings and our finitude, our sin and our mortality. The hope within us does not cancel our awareness of our perilous circumstances. We reclaim as our reality the foundational story of our faith: we live between Good Friday and Easter, between crucifixion and resurrection.

So we hold to two poles of a single paradoxical truth. First, Christians have a responsibility to act faithfully even when we see our actions as small and insignificant. Second, our ground for hope is not in ourselves, but in that which comes when we lose hope in our own powers and put our hope in the One through whom all things were made and in whom all things will find their fulfillment. It is a hope that knows resurrection lies beyond death and the tomb. We experience hope not as a secure possession or achievement but as a mysterious gift that we receive more fully as we act upon it.

Though expressed in different ways, our two churches have similar visions of the future and the human role in working toward that future. As *Gaudium et Spes* says:

We do not know the time for the consummation of the earth and of humanity, nor do we know how all things will be transformed... but we are taught that God is preparing a new dwelling place and a new earth where justice will abide... the expectation of a new earth must not weaken but rather stimulate our concern for cultivating this one. For here grows the body of a new human family, a body which even now is able to give some kind of foreshadowing of the new age (GS 39).

And as A Song of Faith says:

Carrying a vision of creation healed and restored,
we welcome all in the name of Christ.
Invited to the table where none shall go hungry,
we gather as Christ's guests and friends.
...
[We] embrace the present,
embodying hope, loving our enemies,
caring for the earth,
choosing life (SF 8-9).

Ecumenical Conclusions

Throughout this phase of dialogue, we have repeatedly asked ourselves what our theological reflections on creation, with their practical implications for the environment, can contribute toward the goal of Christian unity. As our focus narrowed to a consideration of the climate change crisis, the ecumenical question became even more acute. It was clear from the beginning that the United and Roman Catholic churches share a broad consensus on the scientific aspects of the problem and on the need for a fundamental change in the way that humans live in relation to the environment. When our discussion looked more closely at the theological foundations upon which the churches build a creation-centred ethic, it was discovered that

each church has unique concerns and emphases that complement each other and that can thereby be gifts to enrich the ecumenical theological understanding between the churches.

Historically, Protestants have emphasized biblical revelation as a primary source of theological reflection, but there has been discomfort, especially among the Reformed traditions, of the Roman Catholic natural law tradition. However, the early church teaching that there are two books of revelation, scripture and nature, seemed to the dialogue members to be particularly helpful in the context of developing an ecotheology that takes into account the witness of creation. Similarly, dialogue members noted that there are elements in the Reformed tradition that speak of scripture as a special revelation within the broader context of God's general revelation. For both traditions, that God is revealed in creation is an often neglected corollary to the understanding of God's self-revelation as an integral aspect of God's mission.

A similar discovery occurred when the dialogue explored Roman Catholic spirituality and mysticism. The riches of these traditions, encountered in the writings of medieval spiritual masters such as St. Francis of Assisi and Hildegard von Bingen, appear to connect with a focus on the experiential dimensions of faith found in the Wesleyan roots of the United Church. In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis builds on St. Francis by offering a spiritually enriching reflection on faith and practice.

Ecotheologians argue that the Christian doctrine of the creation of humans in the image of God may lead to a sense of superiority over, and separation from, creation that legitimates exploitation of animals and the environment. Deep ecologists redress this ethical imbalance by regarding humanity as just one strand in creation, with no greater worth than other strands. While some United Church members consider the deep ecologist position to be an important corrective to past anthropocentrism, they agree that a theology of human distinctiveness can be important to addressing climate change and the environmental crisis. Recent Roman Catholic teaching emphasizes that the uniqueness of the human does not separate the human person from an integral relationship with all of creation and thus does not lead to superiority over but rather respect for creation and responsible behaviour within it.

Members of the dialogue agreed that humans are made in the image of God with a distinct role as God's representatives, but they insist that any understanding of this as a licence for humans to exploit creation is a distortion of the Christian tradition. Human distinctiveness does not set us apart from the order of creation, but gives us a particular role as God's representatives expressing God's sacrificial love for the world and taking part in God's redemption of all creation. In this way, the Christian doctrines of the incarnation, Christology, and redemption come together in an ecological perspective that understands humanity as situated within the order of creation.

During the process of the dialogue, the members have been mutually enriched and have come to appreciate the considerable resources within each other's communities for care of Earth. The publication of *Laudato Si'* in the middle of the dialogue provided a rich ecological reflection. The dialogue also embraced the deep ecological insights of *A Song of Faith*. Members also agreed that our shared understanding of science, revelation, spirituality, and creation theology supported a call to urgent and concrete action to address climate change.

Call to Action

[Jesus] said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade” (Mark 4:30-32)

In light of our responsibility to Earth and its inhabitants, the Roman Catholic and United Church dialogue partners turn our attention to our current lifestyles and the changes we must make to ensure a better future for ourselves and generations to come. Inspired by Jesus’ vision of the reign of God, we know that human cooperation with the role of nature can result in abundance for all.⁴⁰ With *A Song of Faith*, we sing of God’s good news lived out even in the face of violence—creation’s mending. With *Laudato Si’*, we embrace the urgent challenge to protect the commons⁴¹ and to bring the whole human family together because we know that things can change.

Humanity is not alien to this planet. We human beings came from Earth’s dust. And if we have forgotten how to live as partners with the wider Earth and all of its biotic communities, this need not be permanent. But our learning must involve reimagining together, in the context of Canada, what it is to be human and Christian. Herein the dialogue partners find hope for all ready to arise. Without doubt, the environmental challenges we face are severe; therefore, our spiritual challenges must involve resisting the temptation to abandon hope. Working together, refusing despair, we embrace both the struggle and the joy of transformation.

With fierce love and courage, the dialogue partners resolve to encourage our communities to face the challenges ahead and recover our proper relationship with Earth. Such love and courage must be manifested in specific goals: to adopt an attitude of reverence to Earth, to reduce our carbon footprint, to conserve energy, to preserve threatened species. Such goals must lead to concrete actions, but these are difficult to prescribe since each community must honour its unique challenges and particular wisdom. Nevertheless, we offer here some broad suggestions for education and best practices, which local churches might choose to implement in ways that suit their context.

1. Consider making the local church a place of theological and environmental education to create an intergenerational group of ecology disciples.

Lead by incorporating ecological themes into homilies and by forming classes to study *A Song of Faith* and/or *Laudato Si’*. Help congregants reimagine the faith by organizing retreats to connect with the natural world as a sacramental place to become more deeply conscious of the Creator in whom “we live and move and have our being.”

⁴⁰ VJ. John, “Kingdom of God and Ecology: A Parabolic Perspective,” *Bangalore Theological Forum* 34, no. 1 (June 2002): 93-123.

⁴¹ The idea of “the commons” is based in agrarian societies where villages would preserve as common land a place for all to graze their sheep. Such practices find their way into the legal foundations of many societies, e.g. English common law. Similarly, in Indigenous societies, practices of communal sharing promote the common good, e.g. potlatch. In economic systems based on capital, land acquires its value based on its potential use or sale. Other aspects of the commonwealth such as air, water, fisheries, forests, and minerals, are valued not for their contribution to the common good but for their utility. That which is common to all is of no value. In capitalism, value is not found in plenitude but in scarcity. The “tragedy of the commons” is an economic theory that challenges over-exploitation of natural resources and critiques the triumph of self-interest over the common good.

Encourage the necessary break from the deeply ingrained ways of thinking and behaving that hurt human and non-human neighbours. For the Canadian context, re-examine complicity with colonialism, wasteful use of energy and resources, and harmful processes in mining, extraction, industry, and agriculture. Such attentiveness may lead to conflicted conversations or provoke deep sorrow over what has been lost—sometimes permanently. Prepare to deal in a deeply pastoral way with the necessary upheavals of soul and spirit as congregants move towards reimagining a more faithful way of living.

Invite local Christian communities to pray together focusing on ecological themes. A helpful example is the Earth Hour Vigil offered by this dialogue (found in Appendix III).

2. Support ecologically minded discipleship by making the church a hub of best practices and daily rituals.

This can be accomplished in many ways. For example,

- a. aim to understand the land itself and learn to live by its rules, perhaps by transforming manicured lawns or undeveloped land into community gardens.
- b. assess the church buildings' ecological footprint and aim to make them low-carbon.
- c. measure the ecological impact of the church's financial investments and adjust to support the emerging renewable-energy economy.
- d. observe how the congregation carries out its ritual life and celebrations, and consider choosing locally sourced foods, observing abstinence from meat on Fridays, or fasting on a regular basis.
- e. partner with local Indigenous people to explore projects of common concern, such as watershed preservation.
- f. respectfully engage with elected officials by inviting them into a conversation on issues regarding climate change. Pray for political leaders at all levels, and support them in the work of writing and passing pertinent legislation.
- g. support emerging clean-energy economies through initiatives such as the Global Green Fund.
- h. participate in Canadian projects, such as the Réseau des Églises Verte/Green Churches Network (eglisesvertes.ca; greenchurches.ca), Faith & the Common Good/La foi et le bien commun (faithcommongood.org), or the ecological justice work of KAIROS (kairoscanada.org). Such projects effect change while remaining sensitive to Canadian problems in specific Canadian contexts.

3. Celebrate—regularly and joyously—the transformative power of ecologically minded discipleship.

Acknowledge, and even reward, those who model helpful ways to live simply. Share stories about developing best practices, and applaud disciples taking creative approaches to conservation or recycling. Encourage children and schools to green their environment.

Observe the Season of Creation celebrated from the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation on September 1 to the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi on October 4 (in the United Church: the second Sunday of September through the second Sunday of October). For resources, see seasonofcreation.org, catholicclimatemovement.global, and www.united-church.ca/worship-theme/environment.

Above all, enjoy being part of a worldwide movement among ordinary citizens who choose ecologically minded discipleship as a means to preserve what is God-given and holy. Celebrate what is possible today, and plan for more difficult goals tomorrow.

4. Be alert to the evidence that God is using us, in subtle and startling ways, as agents in the work of renewing the suffering Earth.

Good ecological practice must be discerned locally, informed by traditional and non-traditional wisdom. However, the broad strokes that the dialogue partners offer here reflect our shared desire that our churches become places where ecologically minded discipleship is both learned and modelled. Together, the faithful can learn to care for creation; to discover and embrace a more sustainable way of life, and to heal and extend justice, especially in places where people are suffering from ecological devastation.

The dialogue partners witness to the world that faith communities can and must assume their proper role in God's healing of the planet. The situation is dire, but hope is unfolding. Christians and non-Christians are striving to realize this hope, aided by God's abundant grace and a desire to cooperate, heal, and protect. Articulated here are just a few possible expressions of our hope-in-action. They are founded on a vision of goodness—not just for humans but also for all the Earth, with all of its biotic communities.

Triune Lord, wondrous community of infinite love,
teach us to contemplate you in the beauty of the universe,
for all things speak of you.
Awaken our praise and thankfulness for every being that you have made.
Give us the grace to feel profoundly joined to everything that is.

God of love, show us our place in this world
as channels of your love for all the creatures of this earth,
for not one of them is forgotten in your sight.
Enlighten those who possess power and money
that they may avoid the sin of indifference,
that they may love the common good,
advance the weak, and care for this world in which we live.
The poor and the earth are crying out.
O Lord, seize us with your power and light,
help us to protect all life to prepare for a better future,
for the coming of your Kingdom of justice, peace, love and beauty.
Praise be to you!

Amen.

(Pope Francis, "A Christian Prayer in Union with Creation," LS 246)

Dialogue Members

The United Church of Canada

- Dr. Gail Allan, staff
- Morgan Bell (2017)
- Allan Buckingham (2012–2013)
- Rev. Foster Freed (2013–2015)
- Rev. Dr. Donna Kerrigan (2012–2017)
- David Lee (co-chair, 2012–2013)
- Maxine McVey, DM (2017)
- Rev. Ross Smillie (2013–2017)
- Mardi Tindal (2013–2017)
- Dr. Arthur Walker-Jones (co-chair, 2013–2017)

Roman Catholic

- Jonas Abromaitis, staff (2012–2013)
- Rev. Dr. John Cole (2012–2017)
- Dr. Matthew Eaton, recording secretary (2014–2016)
- Kyle Ferguson, staff (2013–2017)
- Sr. Dr. Linda Gregg, CSJ (2012–2017)
- Nicholas Jesson (2012–2017)
- Greg Kennedy, recording secretary (2013–2014)
- Bishop David Monroe, co-chair (2012–2015)
- Archbishop Brendan O'Brien, co-chair (2016–2017)
- Lisa Radice, secretary (2016–2017)
- Sr. Dr. Mary Rowell, CSJ (2012–2017)

Appendix I: Study Guide for *The Hope within Us*

The Roman Catholic-United Church Dialogue began our conversations with several questions that helped us to frame our discussion: What is our theology of creation, of Earth and our place in it, and of the environment and its future? What, in light of our present situation, are the key issues for the churches, today and tomorrow? What, in particular, should our two churches do together and with others?

You might choose to use these questions as a basis for your reflection on this report. Alternatively, the following questions relating to the different sections of the report may guide you in your reading and discussion. Each question is prefaced by a key quote from the relevant report section(s).

Introduction

Churches can encourage social, scientific, and theological analysis of this issue as it is experienced in Canadian and global contexts, and we can offer resources that help Christians to bear witness in their lives—as individuals and as communities—to the need for transformation in our relationship to creation.

Share experiences that bring you to this study. What questions do you have about our theology of creation, of Earth and our place in it, and of the environment and its future?

Trinity and Creation/Sin and Reconciliation

Creation accounts in scripture affirm that human life is grounded in these three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships, with God, with our neighbour, and with Earth itself.... Our Creator has formed us for relationality....

The disruption of sin infects our relationships with God, our neighbours, and the rest of the created order.

Where do you find this Trinitarian relationality in your context? Where do you see it broken or violated? How would you describe “the disruption of sin” in relation to climate change or other aspects of environmental destruction?

God Is Love/Human Response: Ritual and Prayer

In responding to this Good News, we are called to gather in faith communities of mutual love and service.

Connecting us in love to all things, Jesus also teaches us to align ourselves with God’s will in this beautiful troubled world through contemplation and action.

How would you describe the role of faith communities in relation to the challenges of climate change? When have you experienced the power of prayer as part of the work of social transformation? Share a prayer you would offer in relation to care for creation.

Rediscovering a Sense of Place in Creation

Today, a renewed understanding of our place in creation calls us to “responsibility” in our care for Earth.

What insights do these teachings from Christian tradition offer for the relationship and responsibility of humanity in creation?

God in All Things

Both of our traditions are able to affirm that creation mediates the Creator and therefore has sacramental significance.

What are the implications of an understanding of the sacramental significance of creation for sacramental practice in our churches?

Integral Ecology

Ecosystems, families, and societies are integrated, so environmental, social, economic, moral, and spiritual issues mutually impact one another.

What are some examples or evidence of the concept of integral ecology in your experience or context?

Eschatology and Hope

We experience hope not as a secure possession or achievement but as a mysterious gift that we receive more fully as we act upon it.

What sources and resources for hope do you call on to ground your action for healing and transformation? How do we express to society the hope that comes from the Good News?

Ecumenical Conclusions

During the process of the dialogue, the members have been mutually enriched and have come to appreciate the considerable resources within each other's communities for care of Earth.

What should our two churches do together and with others? What possibilities for ecumenical learning and action in relation to climate change and care for creation can you identify in your community?

Call to Action

Love and courage must be manifested in specific goals: to adopt an attitude of reverence to Earth, to reduce our carbon footprint, to conserve energy, to preserve threatened species.

As you review the suggestions in the Call to Action section, what actions are already part of your community's practice? What is one new commitment you might make in light of this study? What steps will you take? How might you partner across denominations and with other communities?

Appendix II: Selected Bibliography

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture citations are to the *New Revised Standard Version: Anglicized Edition*. National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America, 1995.

Bechtel, Trevor, Matthew Eaton, and Timothy Harvie, eds. *Encountering Earth: Thinking Theologically With a More-Than-Human World*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018.

Benedict XVI. *Caritas in Veritate* (Encyclical Letter, 2009).

Boothe, Paul, and Félix-A. Boudreault. *By the Numbers: Canadian GHG Emissions*. Lawrence National Centre for Policy and Management, 2016, www.ivey.uwo.ca/cmsmedia/2112500/4462-ghg-emissions-report-v03f.pdf.

Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, Episcopal Commission for Justice and Peace. *Building a New Culture: Central Themes in Recent Church Teaching on the Environment*. Ottawa: CCCB, 2013.

_____. *Living Out Laudato Si': A Commentary and Practical Resource for Canadian Catholics*. Ottawa: CCCB, 2017.

_____. *Our Relationship with the Environment: The Need for Conversion*. Ottawa: CCCB, 2008.

_____. "You Love All That Exists... All Things Are Yours, God, Lover of Life": A Pastoral Letter on the Christian Ecological Imperative. Ottawa: CCCB, 2003.

Christiansen, Drew, and Walter Grazier, eds. *And God Saw That It was Good: Catholic Theology and the Environment*. Washington: U.S. Catholic Conference, 1996.

Davis, Ellen F. *Land as Kin: Renewing the Imagination*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2016.

Driver, Tom F. *Liberating Rites: Understanding the Transformative Power of Ritual*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998.

Edwards, Denis. *Jesus the Wisdom of God: An Ecological Theology*. Ecology and Justice Series. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995.

Fate of Mountain Glaciers in the Anthropocene. A Report by the Working Group Commissioned by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, 2011, www.pas.va.

Francis. *Evangelii Gaudium* (Apostolic Exhortation, 2013), w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html.

_____. *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home* (Encyclical Letter, 2015), w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

Fretheim, Terence. *God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2005.

Hallman, David G. *Ecotheology: Voices from North and South*. New York: Orbis Books, 1994.

- _____. *A Place in Creation: Ecological Visions in Science, Religion, and Economics*. Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 1993.
- _____. *Spiritual Values for Earth Community*. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2011.
- Himes, Michael J., and Kenneth R. Himes. "The Sacrament of Creation: Toward an Environmental Theology." *Commonweal* (January 26, 1990), available at www.commonwealmagazine.org/catholicism-environment.
- Holmes, David A. "Sabbath Practice as a Resistance to Consumerism" (D. Min. report). Columbia Theological Seminary, 2008.
- Holy Bible, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.
- Jenkins, Willis. *Ecologies of Grace: Environmental Ethics and Christian Theology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- John, V.J. "Kingdom of God and Ecology: A Parabolic Perspective." *Bangalore Theological Forum* 34, no. 1 (June 2002): 93-123.
- Johnson, Elizabeth. "The Cosmos: An Astonishing Image of God." *Origins* 26, no. 13 (September 12, 1996): 206-212.
- Kervin, William S. "To Live with Respect in Creation: Worship and the Environment." *Gathered for Worship: A Sourcebook for Worship Committees, Leaders, and Teams*. Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 2010, 82-84.
- Kreuger, Frederick W., ed. *A Cloud of Witnesses: The Deep Ecological Legacy of Christianity*. Santa Rosa, CA: The Religious Campaign for Forest Conservation, 2002.
- Lee, Nancy C. "Lament in the Bible and in Music and Poetry across Cultures Today," *Teaching the Bible* (Society of Biblical Literature, February 2010), www.sbl-site.org/assets/pdfs/TB7_LamentMusic_NL.pdf.
- McFague, Sallie. *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World, and Global Warming*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008.
- McKibben, Bill. *The Comforting Whirlwind: God, Job, and the Scale of Creation*. Cambridge, MA: Cowley, 2005.
- Robb, Carol S. *Wind, Sun, Soil, Spirit: Biblical Ethics and Climate Change*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010.
- Rossing, Barbara R. *The Rapture Exposed: The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation*. New York: Basic Books, 2004.
- _____. "Rapture in Reverse: Reading Revelation Ecologically, for the Love of Creation." In *From Every People and Nation: Revelation in Intercultural Perspective*, edited by David Rhoads. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005.

Second Vatican Council. *Gaudium et Spes: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*. 1965.

Theokritoff, Elizabeth. "The Book of the Word: Reading God's Creation." In *Caring for Creation*, edited by Bob Kruschwitz, 20-27. Waco, TX: Institute for Faith and Learning, Baylor University, 2012. Available online at www.baylor.edu/ifl/index.php?id=937625.

_____. "Creation and Salvation in Orthodox Worship." *Ecotheology* 10 (January 2001): 97-108.

The United Church of Canada. "ANCC1—Northern Gateway Pipeline." In *Record of Proceedings of the 41st General Council 2012*. Toronto: The United Church of Canada, 2012, 385-387.

_____. *Caring for Creation as People of Faith*. www.youtube.com/watch?v=R-ej39fq2mg.

_____. "One Earth Community." In *Record of Proceedings of the 34th General Council 1992*. Toronto: The United Church of Canada, 1992, 127-129.

_____. *A Song of Faith: A Statement of Faith of The United Church of Canada 2006*. www.united-church.ca/community-faith/welcome-united-church-canada/song-faith.

_____. "Task Force on the Environment." In *Record of Proceedings of the 27th General Council 1977*. Don Mills, ON: Canec, 1977, 492-499.

Wilder, Max. *The Theologian and His Universe: Theology and Cosmology from the Middle Ages to the Present*. New York: Seabury, 1982.

Appendix III: Earth Hour Vigil

Introduction

The following suggestions are intended to help congregations, parishes, and other groups observe, in prayer and worship, international Earth Hour on the fourth or fifth Saturday of March. The purpose of Earth Hour is to call attention to the beauty and fragility of our living planet. The point of worship is to call people together in thanksgiving and prayer to God, united in a living faith. We hope that these Earth Hour prayers help the faithful to celebrate creation while committing to compassionate action for its well-being. You can find out more about Earth Hour, marked from 8:30–9:30 p.m. local time, at www.earthhour.org.

If you'd prefer to adapt the following to another time and place, we encourage you to do that.

Provided here are suggestions that congregations, parishes, and other groups are welcome to use and adapt. Particulars of space, participants, culture, and creativity should help shape the celebration. In some cases, we offer our own variations for selection. What should be chosen is whatever best serves the group in its prayer. If you are republishing or redistributing the materials, please acknowledge if adaptations have been made.

This vigil is composed with an eye to avoiding the need to print and distribute materials or aids. Since Earth Hour directly questions our patterns of consumption and invites us into simpler living, we wanted to practise breaking patterns in this celebration. Appropriate hymns, found in whatever hymnals are at hand, are thus recommended at the start and close of these prayers, when the space is lit.

Four readers need to be coached on the importance of unrushed, clear reading. Two need to be prepared to read scripture and prayers, and the other two will read passages from Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'* encyclical and The United Church of Canada's Song of Faith. We suggest that scripture and other readings be printed out clearly for each reader according to their parts, to be read by candlelight. You will also need a team for candlelighting, and someone with a confident voice to teach and lead singing.

Participants enter the worship space, which is fully, even excessively, lit by artificial lights, at 8:00 p.m. At 8:15 p.m., a leader welcomes the congregation with these or similar words:

Welcome

Leader: Welcome to our Earth Hour Vigil service. This is our opportunity to join as Christians and with others in the ancient practice of evening prayers—and in the new practice of pausing together to recognize Earth Hour. We join tonight with people of faith and goodwill around the world in marking Earth Hour, a grassroots movement uniting people to protect the planet, organized by the World Wildlife Fund. Engaging a massive mainstream community on a broad range of environmental issues, Earth Hour started as a lights-off event in Australia in 2007. It now involves more than 7,000 cities and towns around the world. Earth Hour is not just a one-hour event but a much larger movement.

This is an ideal time to join our hearts and minds in unrushed prayer, reflection, and intention for action.

Throughout this hour you will hear words read from The United Church of Canada's Song of Faith and from Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'* in addition to the scripture. We will lead you in prayerful words and into times of prayerful silence.

(Scripture readings are provided in the NRSV translation. Please feel free to use other translations or paraphrases suitable to your context.)

Leader: We will sing the refrain from "My Soul Cries Out (Canticle of the Turning)" throughout the service.

(This hymn is written by Rory Cooney and set to STAR OF THE COUNTY DOWN OR KINGSFOLD, a traditional Irish melody. It is found in numerous hymn books representing a variety of traditions, as you see from the following list offered at hymnary.org:

The United Church of Canada's More Voices 120
Evangelical Lutheran Worship 723
Gather (3rd ed.) 622
Gather Comprehensive 556
Gather Comprehensive, Second Edition 527
Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal 100
Hymns for a Pilgrim People: A Congregational Hymnal 88
Hymns of Promise: A Large Print Songbook 75
Lift Up Your Hearts: Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs 69
Psalms for All Seasons: A Complete Psalter for Worship 75B
Worship (4th ed.) 624

You can listen to the full song to help learn the refrain at www.youtube.com/watch?v=F9QeTmRCpW4.)

Leader: Let us practise it now:

My heart shall sing of the day you bring...

(An option to consider with youthful gatherings: Before the first hymn, invite participants to set their phone alarms with this invitation: "You may be accustomed to being asked to turn off your cell phone at a moment such as this. Instead, we invite you now to pull out your cell phone if you wish. In a moment we're going to invite you to set your alarm for X minutes, which we expect to be the time when we'll be ending our first hymn and having the lights dim. When the alarms sound, we'll invite you to then turn off your phone, marking the transition from high-energy use in our busy world to a quiet hour of prayer and reflection. For those who would like to do this, we invite you now, on the count of three, to set your alarm to ring in X minutes."

Note: You will have needed to time the first hymn to know what length of time to set the alarm.)

Leader: Now let us begin our service by singing a familiar hymn.

(We invite you to select and announce a hymn appropriate to your context. Some possibilities: "How Great Thou Art," three verses, not original third, changing "works" to "worlds" and "mighty" to "rolling"; "All Creatures of Our God and King" or "For the Music of Creation" (Voices United 535); "To Show by Touch and Word" (VU 427), possibly with a more familiar tune—Lodwick 12 12 88; "For the Beauty of the Earth" (VU 226, CBW); "This Is God's Wondrous World" (VU 296), "Called by Earth and Sky" (More Voices 135).

8:30 p.m.: Lights are dimmed and turned off, phones are turned off, and candles are lit at the lecterns and scattered as needed for safety.)

Prayer

(Encourage all readers to offer the spoken words clearly and at an unrushed pace.)

Leader: At several points in this prayer, we invite you to join us in repeating the words: “We give thanks for your Spirit breathing through the web of life.” Let’s say it together now, as we begin:

All: We give thanks for your Spirit breathing through the web of life.

Reader 1: We are in awe of your creation.

Reader 2: We are in awe of your creation.

Reader 1: We breathe in with amazement at the beauty of it all.

Reader 2: We breathe out with gratitude for all that you provide.

All: We give thanks for your Spirit breathing through the web of life.

Reader 1: We give thanks for air, the flow of life.

Reader 2: We give thanks for water, the flow of life.

Reader 1: We give thanks for land and all those who have lived here before us.

Reader 2: We give thanks for land, and all plants, creatures, all my relations who live here with us now.

All: We give thanks for your Spirit breathing through the web of life.

Reader 1: We give thanks for your life-giving love, of which we are part,

Reader 2: your life-giving love, which we see in the rising of bulbs and buds,

Reader 1: your life-giving love, which we see in the rising of people who love you and your creation.

All: We give thanks for your Spirit breathing through the web of life.

Reflection and Meditation

Leader: In silence let us remember and give thanks for God’s Spirit breathing through the web of life.

(We suggest allowing five minutes for silence.)

Singing

(Song leader begins singing the refrain of “My Soul Cries Out (Canticle of the Turning)” and invites all voices to join in the second time:)

My heart shall sing of the day you bring...

Leader: (*Introduction to scripture*) While it may be true that humanity's sacred stories don't speak about the intricacies of climate change and other aspects of today's ecological crisis, they do illuminate matters of right and wrong. They are an archive of human dreams, a narrative of inspiration, God's call to rise to the occasion. We will now hear voices of scripture, along with the voices of our churches today, as found in *Laudato Si'* from Pope Francis, and in *A Song of Faith* from The United Church of Canada.

Reader 1: Listen to words of scripture from Deuteronomy 30:15–19 (NRSV) (*you might also use The Green Bible edition of the NRSV, which highlights all earth-friendly verses in green*):

See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the Lord your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live....

Reader 2: Matthew 22:37–39:

He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Reader 3: Words from *A Song of Faith*:

Each part of creation reveals unique aspects of God the Creator,
who is both in creation and beyond it.
All parts of creation, animate and inanimate, are related...

In and with God,
we can direct our lives toward right relationship
with each other and with God.
We can discover our place as one strand in the web of life.
We can grow in wisdom and compassion.
We can recognize all people as kin.
We can accept our mortality and finitude, not as a curse,
but as a challenge to make our lives and choices matter.

(*Silent pause*)

Reader 4: Words from *Laudato Si'*:

"Praise be to you, my Lord." In the words of this beautiful canticle, Saint Francis of Assisi reminds us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us. "Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with coloured flowers and herbs."
(LS 1)

Reflection and Meditation

Leader: In silence let us remember and hold in love the diversity of all creation with whom we share our home.

(Five minutes of silent reflection)

Prayer

Leader: We invite you to join us in repeating the words: “We long for your healing, your justice, your peace.” Let’s say it together now:

All: We long for your healing, your justice, your peace.

Reader 1: We are suffering and broken.

Reader 2: We are suffering and broken.

Reader 1: We have broken your web of life.

Reader 2: We have turned our back on you.

All: We long for your healing, your justice, your peace.

Reader 1: Air is hard to breathe, for us and for other creatures.

Reader 2: Water is too often polluted and defiled.

Reader 1: Land is weeping over lost forests,

Reader 2: lost songs of birds and other creatures, lost human songs too.

All: We long for your healing, your justice, your peace.

Reader 1: We are burdened by sin.

Reader 2: We ask for the gift of forgiveness.

Reader 1: Guide us toward reconciliation,

Reader 2: so that life may flow through us again, repairing the web of life.

All: We long for your healing, your justice, your peace.

Leader: In a moment of silence let us release the burden of sin and open ourselves to God’s forgiveness and reconciliation.

(Silence)

Singing

(Song leader begins singing the refrain of “My Soul Cries Out (Canticle of the Turning),” and all join in as comfortable:)

My heart shall sing of the day you bring...

Reader 1: John 1:1–5:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

Reader 2: Romans 8:18–23a:

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves....

Reader 3: Words from the encyclical regarding our common home:

[Our] sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will.... We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth (cf. Gen 2:7); our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters. (LS 2)

(Silent pause)

Reader 4: Words from A Song of Faith:

The church has not always lived up to its vision.
It requires the Spirit to orient it,
 helping it to live an emerging faith while honouring tradition,
 challenging it to live by grace rather than entitlement,
for we are called to be a blessing to the earth

Reflection and Meditation

Leader: In silence let us remember our calling to respond to the longing of creation and live as children of our Creator God...

(Five minutes of silent reflection)

Singing

(Song leader begins singing the refrain of “My Soul Cries Out (Canticle of the Turning),” and all join in as comfortable:)

My heart shall sing of the day you bring...

Reader 1: John 15:1:

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower.”

Reader 2: Colossians 1:15–20:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

Reader 3: Words from *Laudato Si'*:

The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change. The Creator does not abandon us; he never forsakes his loving plan or repents of having created us. Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home. (LS 13)

(Silent pause)

Reader 4: Words from A Song of Faith:

Divine creation does not cease
until all things have found wholeness, union, and integration
with the common ground of all being.
As children of the Timeless One,
our time-bound lives will find completion
in the all-embracing Creator.
In the meantime, we embrace the present,
embodying hope, loving our enemies,
caring for the earth,
choosing life.

Reflection and Meditation

Leader: In silence let us reflect on how we will join with Creator God and the Earth community, including one another in this community, in the work of healing.

(Five minutes of silence)

Invitation

Leader: We now invite you to share for five minutes with one or two others about what you will remember and carry into commitment from this hour together. We are inviting you to speak one after the other without comment or correction but rather deep listening and bearing witness to the other's commitment, ending with a simple thank you to one another. *(The five minutes could be lengthened or shortened a bit, depending on where you find yourself within the hour.)*

Prayer (no later than 9:20 p.m.)

Leader: We invite you to join us in repeating the words: “All creation gives you praise.” Let’s say it together now:

All: All creation gives you praise.

Reader 1: We are encouraged by this time of reconnecting.

Reader 2: We are grateful to be called,

Reader 1: called to participate in your reweaving of the web of life.

All: All creation gives you praise.

Reader 2: We will breathe deeply of your peace and justice.

Reader 1: We will move in the flow of your healing.

Reader 2: Our hearts will sing,

Reader 1: and we will give reason for the land to sing again too!

All: All creation gives you praise.

Reader 2: Our hearts will sing of the day you bring.

Reader 1: We will let the fires of your justice burn.

Reader 2: We will wipe away our tears,

Reader 1: and give reason for other creatures to wipe away their tears.

All: All creation gives you praise.

Leader: We invite you to sing together the refrain of “My Soul Cries Out (Canticle of the Turning),” one more time.

(Lights will gradually come up while singing it once, twice, or three times until the room is lit.)

My heart shall sing of the day you bring...

Blessing

Leader: And now, ready to live in the hope that God does indeed reconcile all things on earth and in heaven,

May the peace of God which passes all understanding

both settle and stir our hearts

to participate in the healing of creation,

in Christ Jesus.

AMEN

Leader: We invite you to go out from this hour in song. *(Offer any appropriate words of direction or closing, and invite the singing of “We Are Marching in the Light of God” or another song of your choosing.)*

The Hope within Us: A Report on Climate Change by the Roman Catholic–United Church Dialogue in Canada. © 2018 Roman Catholic–United Church Dialogue, administered by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops and The United Church of Canada.



Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial ShareAlike (by-nc-sa) Licence. To view a copy of this licence, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.5/ca>. Any copy must include the copyright notice and the Creative Commons licence.

All biblical quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the *New Revised Standard Version Bible: Anglicized Edition*, copyright © 1989, 1995 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.