



CSJP Land Ethic Principles

In 2020, the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace formally approved our [Land Ethic](#). This ethic articulates our ongoing commitment to learning sustainable ways of nurturing the relationship between Earth and humanity—a journey our Congregation has been pursuing for many years.

To bring these principles to life, the Laudato Si' Land Ethic committee has assembled this document as a practical guide to further illustrate our commitment to being a Laudato Si' Action Platform community.

Within these pages, we explore the sacred nature of Earth, examine how human activity and unchecked consumption threaten its well-being, and propose pathways toward ecological conversion. While we face urgent environmental challenges, transformation remains possible through a fundamental shift in humanity's relationship with creation. By cultivating gratitude for the Creator's gifts and developing a more intimate, reverent connection with the land, we can move from exploitation toward stewardship and healing.

The Land Ethic Laudato Si' Committee

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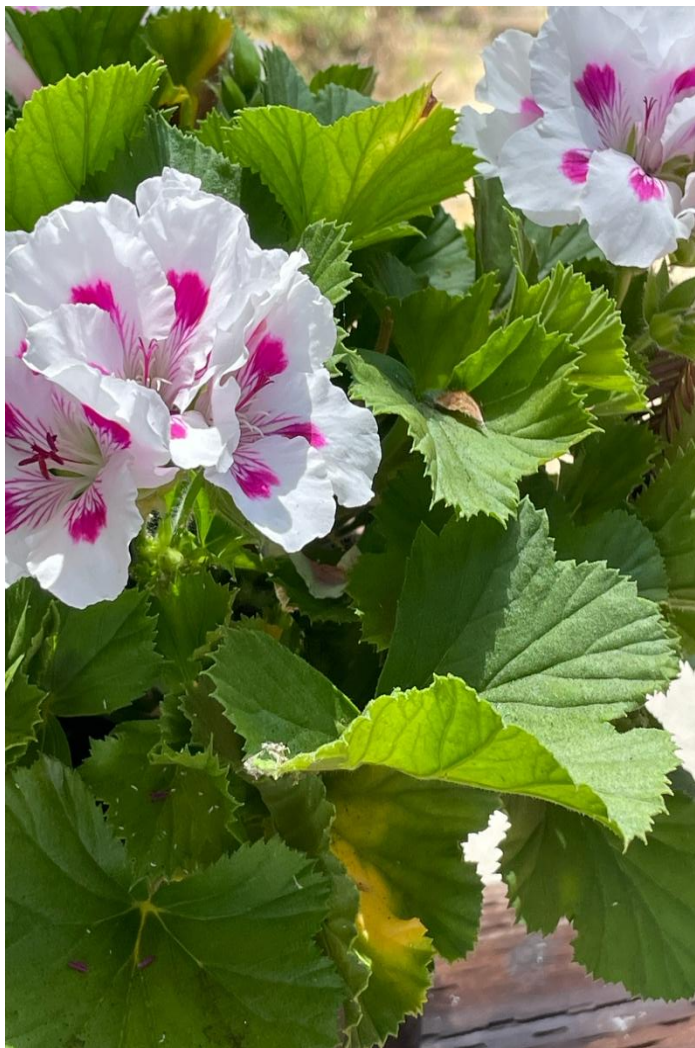
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The CSJP Land Ethic

On that day I will also make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, the birds of the sky and the creeping things of the ground. And I will abolish the bow, the sword and war from the land. And will make them lie down in safety.

– *Hosea 2:20*

Our Land Ethic, as an expression of the CSJP charism, in terms of our desired relationship with the Land, calls us to a Covenant of Peace with Earth. This Land Ethic articulates a process of learning sustainable ways of Earth/human relationship that has been on-going in the Congregation for many years. Through the Land Ethic, we commit ourselves to continue and deepen this relationship. Our Land Ethic gives expression to our desire to enlarge the boundaries of community to include soil, rocks, air, water, plants and animals.



CSJP LAND ETHIC PRINCIPLES

1. EARTH IS SACRED

Faithful to the joyful proclamation of the book of Genesis (1:31), “God looked over everything made; it was so good, so very good,” we believe: “Earth is a revelation of God and the sustainer of all life. We recognize that the exploitation of Earth’s air, water, soil, and species is a sacrilege.”

– *Acts of the 21st General Chapter*, 18.

We affirm the sacredness of creation, and we resolve to live in relationship with the land. We are called to contemplative action for the flourishing of Earth, to living mindfully in the present moment. The sacredness of creation also inspires the ways in which we care for our bodies.

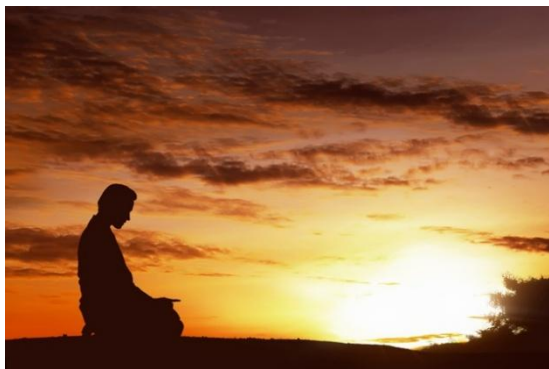
– *Land Ethic*

SOME FACTS (Universal Recognition of Earth's Sacredness)

Hindus believe that the supreme being, Brahman, created the world, which makes it sacred, and that people must care for the world. In Hinduism, there is the principle of *ahimsa* which means non-harm to other living creatures. This is why many Hindus are vegetarian or vegan, which has less of an impact on the environment than raising animals and killing them for meat.

Many Sikhs believe that God created the world and is present in it, which motivates them to care for the planet. They believe that caring for the planet and doing their best to avoid damaging it are an important part of the duty of *Sewa*, the selfless devotion to service by which they live their lives.

Christians, Jews, and Muslims believe that God made human beings stewards of Earth, in charge of caring for the created world. Christians and Jews believe that in the Book of Genesis, God instructed Adam and Eve to be his stewards and gave them authority over the other creatures that God created. They believe that humans have a huge responsibility and do not have the right to treat the planet however they would like.



In the Quran, one of the meanings of the term *khalifah*, or steward, points to the duty of a Muslim to act as a guardian of God's creation. This divine responsibility entrusts believers with the care of Earth and all its inhabitants, establishing a fundamental standard for ethical living within Islamic tradition.

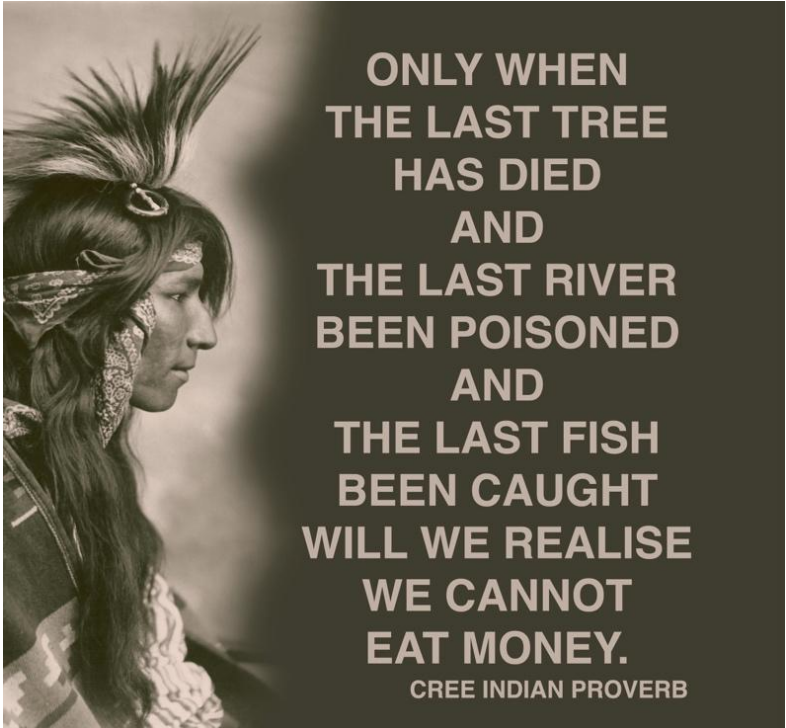
Many Buddhists see the natural world as a source of inspiration. Some emphasize the belief that everything is interconnected and encourage people to view humanity as part of nature, not separate from it. Although there is little in ancient Buddhist scripture about caring for the environment, as people lived more simply and the world was not facing the environmental crises it does today, modern-day Buddhists take environmental responsibility very seriously.

In Celtic wisdom, Earth is remembered as sacred. Every tree and bush, every flower and creature, every hill and mountain is on fire with the divine. The life within all life is holy. What humans do to the body of Earth is what they do to God.



John Muir (1838-1914), a modern prophet of ecological consciousness and action, was born in Scotland and moved with his family as a child to Wisconsin in 1849. He wrote that "No synonym for God is so perfect as Beauty." Every lifeform and every rock formation is throbbing and pulsing with the divine. The winds, the waters, the springs are all words of God, and Earth is like a divine manuscript. The universe would be incomplete without humanity,

but it would also be incomplete without any one of Earth's other species.



In looking at the principle, Earth is Sacred, and our affirmation of the sacredness of creation, it is important that we do our part in taking care of Earth. Most religious beliefs and cultures all agree that God gave and entrusted us with this beautiful Earth and all its creatures. We are part of Earth, and it is our sacred duty to care for it. By caring for Earth, we are also taking care of ourselves and future generations. There are major consequences to not doing so as we are now seeing with climate change, melting glaciers, droughts, and raging forest fires, to name a few. We must continue to make changes in the way we live if we are to save our planet before it's too late.

How Do We Change and What Are We Actually Doing?

Change is never easy, but even the smallest things can make a difference. In order to change, we need to look at what we are personally doing that is deemed harmful to Earth.

An easy way to start is to search online for a list of ecologically harmful daily practices or products. Then, based on what you have learned, create a list of the things that you do or products that you use. Next, search for less harmful alternatives to your actions or products. This will enable you to make a

conscientious effort to change these things little by little. Keep in mind that every change, no matter how small, can make a difference in the long run.

Spread the word to family members and friends to raise awareness and get them to implement changes that will help make a difference in saving the planet.

Listen to the justified anger of young people, annoyed with Earth's condition now. Encourage their efforts to make a positive change in the world.

Experience the Divine and your interconnectedness with our Sacred Earth. Allowing your senses to refamiliarize themselves with nature can reawaken your bond with the world. Here are some examples:

- Watch a sunrise or sunset.
- Feel the sun on your face.
- Gaze at the surrounding beauty and wonder.
- Listen to the sound of the wind blowing through the trees, the rushing water, or the birds chirping.
- Spend some time with nature by taking a walk through the woods.

A photograph of a forest with tall, thin trees. Sunlight is streaming through the canopy from the right side, creating a warm, golden glow and long, soft rays of light that filter through the dark foliage. The scene is captured in a slightly low-angle perspective, looking up at the trees.

Imagine a machine that uses solar energy to remove carbon from the air and turns it into a beautiful, strong and sustainable building material.

Oh wait...that's what trees are.



2. Land Has Its Own Intrinsic Value

Ecosystems ... have an intrinsic value independent of their usefulness. Each organism, as a creature of God, is good and admirable in itself.

– *Laudato Si'*, 140.

For too long we have thought of land as a commodity whose value is determined by its usefulness to humans. Our decision-making now must put the sustainability of ecosystems before financial profit.

– *Land Ethic*

Critical Facts

People have lost their respect for Earth. Money drives most transactions concerning Earth with no regard as to how the planet as well as all living beings are affected.

Brief Reflection on the Principle

In documents by Native Americans, land and water are treated as living beings - as a person. Earth and sea are treated with the same respect any living being deserves.

In an interview, Oren Lyons said “Where our white brother will talk about water and trees and animals and fish as resources, we talk about them as relatives. That’s a whole different perspective. If you think that they’re relatives and you understand that, then you’re going to treat them differently.

(Oren Lyons is a member of the Onondaga and Seneca Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy. As an activist for Indigenous and environmental justice, he works with communities across the globe. As a Faithkeeper, he upholds the history and traditions of the Turtle Clan.)

How Do We Change What We Are Actually Doing to Mother Earth?

It is “simply” a matter of changing the attitudes and philosophies: our own, all human beings, corporate businesses, governments, and any other entity living on the planet.

In the following paragraphs are readings taken from sources who believe that we humans need to treat our Mother Earth much differently:

Look too at the great trees of the forest; look at the wildflowers and the grass in the fields; look even at your crops. God's spirit is within all plants as well. The presence of God's spirit in all living things is what makes them beautiful; and if we look with God's eyes, nothing on earth is ugly.

— ***Letters of Pelagius***, Robert van de Weyer, 71.

*If the sages ask thee why this charm is wasted
on the earth and sky, tell
them, dear, that if eyes
were made for seeing
then beauty is its own
excuse for being.*

Emerson

– "The Rhodora," Ralph Waldo Emerson

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The Honorable Harvest... offers inspiration and a model for what we *should* take. It's not so much a list of "do not's" as a list of "do's." Do eat food that is honorably harvested, and celebrate every mouthful. Do use technologies that minimize harm. Do take what is given. This philosophy guides not only our taking of food, but also any taking of the gifts of Mother Earth - air, water, and the literal body of earth: the rocks and soil and fossil fuels.

Taking coal buried deep in the earth, for which we must inflict irreparable damage, violates every precept of the code. By no stretch of the imagination

is the coal “given” to us. We have to wound the land and water to gouge it from Mother Earth...



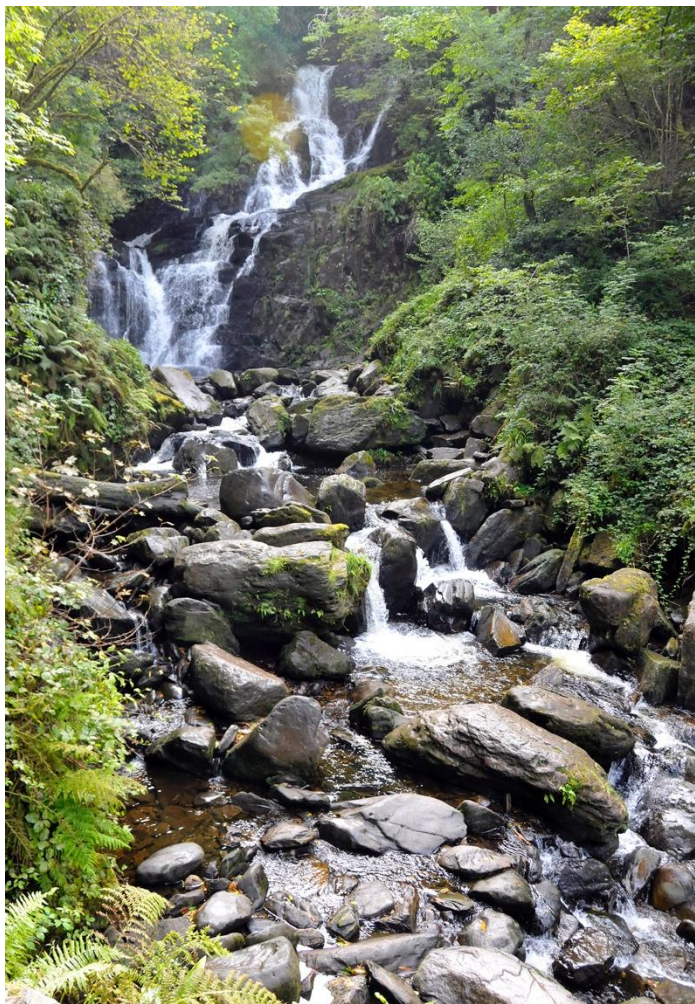
It doesn't mean that we can't consume the energy we need, but it does mean that we honorably take only what is given. The wind blows every day, every day the sun shines, every day the waves roll against the shore, and the earth is warm below us. We can understand these renewable sources of energy as given to us, since they are the sources that have powered life on the planet for as long as there has been a planet. We need not destroy the earth to make use of them. Solar, wind, geo-thermal, and tidal energy—the so-called “clean energy” harvests—when they are wisely used seem to me to be

consistent with the ancient rules of the Honorable Harvest.

Recent research has shown that the smell of humus exerts a physiological effect on humans. Breathing in the scent of Mother Earth stimulates the release of the hormone oxytocin, the same chemical that promotes bonding between mother and child, between lovers.

— From *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*, Robin Wall Kimmerer, 186-7, 236







3. Earth Is Endangered by Human Activity

This 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. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and all forms of life.

– *Laudato Si'*, 2

Ecological sustainability is one of the most urgent religious and moral challenges of our time. This challenge calls us to conversion of heart and change in behavior as individuals and community. These changes may involve significant risk and personal cost to us.

– *Land Ethic*



Some Critical Facts:

Given our current situation – wars, climate change, poverty and homelessness, gun violence, and societal divisiveness, we are challenged to come up with plans to change the world's trajectory from one of domination over people and nature to one of relations, people working together, kinship, love, and beauty. TO LIFE ITSELF.

Extreme events, including wildfires, floods and hurricanes, have become a frightening new normal. Hotter temperatures, air pollution and violent storms are leading to immediate, life threatening dangers for children, including respiratory issues, malnutrition, and higher risk of infectious diseases.



Brief Reflection

There are ever increasing times of feeling overwhelmed by all these catastrophic events, one after another. Where and how can we change things? What is possible? Is there any hope? Anxiety, despair, and fear can take over.

I can think of myself, bound by my skin, as a separate being that consumes all that surrounds me to survive and thrive, or I can think of myself as an integral part of all around me, doing my bit to help all survive and thrive. Both worldviews are equally true ways of thinking. But if we think the first way, we'll destroy everything around us, including one another; if we think of the second way harmony rises. Rather than being occupiers and owners, we can adopt a worldview that shares and gives back and sees humans as part of a living fabric of earth and sea, flora and fauna. This worldview creates an intimate relationship with fellow humans and nature.

– Allen Trusty

How Can We Change Things? What Are We Doing?

Here are some examples of how we can change our hearts and the behaviors that plunder Mother Earth:

A Washington State teen, [Maanit Goel](#), is president of the Washington Youth Ocean and River Conservation Alliance, which leads multiple conservation initiatives. He rallied more than 100 youth and community activists on the state capitol steps in Olympia to support breaching four Snake River dams.

He said, “A constant value that was instilled in me at a young age is that my role here is to help uplift the communities around me. So I was just looking for any opportunities to plug in.” Goel’s main strategy for getting people’s attention is asking them to be creative and to care.”

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Zero Waste Websites and Buy Nothing movements offer multiple ways to become sustainable.



[Mimi's Zero Waste Market](#) is a plastic-free small business in Seattle that sells reusable containers, bulk foods, personal care items, household products, and more. Knowing you can make an impact as a consumer is what helped inspire Mimi Williams to open a store dedicated to cutting waste; Being introduced to shopping in a way that makes it possible to reuse what you have, refill, and buy only as much as you need – with little to no packaging.

Sharing with a (re)purpose: Local [Buy Nothing](#) groups cut waste while growing community.

Buy Nothing is a free, hyperlocal gift economy that encourages neighbors to gift or lend items they no longer need, instead of sending them to the landfill, and to ask for what they want to receive, instead of purchasing it.

“Something fun about Buy Nothing is picking something up from the group, enjoying it for a while and then passing it back on in the group.”

There are 128,000 communities and more than 7 million participants across the globe. Micro-neighborhood groups flourish on Facebook and on the Buy Nothing app.

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Some links to environmentally conscious groups:

- [Earthday.org](#) works with more than 150,000 partners in 192 countries to protect the planet.
- [Free the Ocean](#) removes plastic from the ocean with your help.
- [Life Is Good](#) sustainably produces clothing and donates 10% of their profit to supporting needy children.



4. Care of Creation, Justice for the Poor and Peace Are Inseparably Connected

In her own time, Margaret Anna Cusack (Mother Clare) made the connection between the devastation of earth and the victims of famine... Recognizing the interdependence of all life, we count among those who are poor all Earth's creatures whose lives are threatened or diminished.

– *Acts of the 21st General Chapter*, 18

We have a tradition of a special love for people made poor by unjust systems. We now expand that tradition to embrace the poor of all ecosystems. Therefore we make decisions based on their impact for the whole community of life, especially the weakest and most marginalized. The consequences of environmental degradation cause instability among people and fuel violent conflicts. Care of creation is an essential element of peacemaking.

– *Land Ethic*

Some Facts

The least peaceful countries in 2023 according to the Global Peace Index are Afghanistan, Yemen, Syria, South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo.

Among the poorest countries in 2023 are South Sudan, Somalia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Central African Republic, Yemen, the South Pacific Islands. The poorest country in North America is Haiti. The poorest country in Europe is Ukraine.

Afghanistan, Lebanon and Syria are not even ranked because there are no reliable economic figures due to years of ongoing conflict, but obviously they are extremely poor.

Countries most affected by climate change: Chad, Niger, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Haiti, Kenya, Malawi, Pakistan, Somalia, Syria, Democratic Republic of Congo, Yemen, South Sudan.



The world's poorest countries suffer from civil wars and ethnic and sectarian civil strife. Their bad situation was made worse by Covid-19, soaring inflation, and loss of food due to the war in Ukraine.

These statistics make plain the link between war and poverty but also the ecological impact on poor and war-torn countries.

In areas of conflict, land is degraded, water is polluted, and people are unable to work the land due to mine fields and other defensive measures. At COP27, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, the president of Ukraine, said there would be no climate success if war goes on.



Image: Wilfried Pohnke/Pixabay

Of course, the great injustice of climate change is that it affects the poorest countries and areas that have contributed little to the damage being done.

They are suffering drought, desertification, and unbearable high temperatures, which will inevitably lead to conflicts over dwindling resources.

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In his recent Peace Day Messages, Pope Francis has spoken about the effects of continuous conflict. In 2017, he wrote:

While the last century knew the devastation of 2 deadly world wars, the threat of nuclear war and a great number of other conflicts, today sadly we find ourselves engaged in a horrifying world war fought piecemeal... we know that this piecemeal violence, of different kinds and levels, causes great suffering: wars in different countries and continents, terrorism, organised crime and unforeseen acts of violence, the abuses suffered by migrants and victims of human trafficking and the devastation of the environment.



In his 2019 Peace Sunday Message, Pope Francis wrote:

There is a need to reaffirm that peace is based on respect for each person whatever his or her background, on respect for the law and the common good, on respect for the environment entrusted to our care and for the richness of the moral tradition inherited from past generations.

Peace... entails a conversion of heart and soul; it is both interior and communal; and it has three inseparable aspects:

- *peace with oneself, rejecting inflexibility, anger and impatience;*

- *peace with others: family members, friends, strangers, the poor and the suffering, being unafraid to encounter them and listen to what they have to say;*
- *peace with all creation, rediscovering the grandeur of God's gift and our individual and shared responsibility as inhabitants of this world, citizens and builders of the future.*

Reflection

Care of Creation is paramount. Everything follows on from how we treat Creation. If we are not in a right and just relationship with the Earth, none of our other relationships will be right and just either.

Injustice towards the land inevitably leads to exploitation causing further harm. Invariably poor people suffer the effects of this harm, which can lead to conflict. Conflict means that the land can no longer be cared for. Thus, a vicious circle is formed.

What Can We Do?

The search for peace in society and in the world cannot be separated from the quest for inner peace in the heart. If you wish for a more peaceful world, the first step is to become a more peaceful person yourself. One way to do this is to join with other people of peace. As our Constitutions state:

We value the ministry of presence as an important dimension of the gospel of peace. In the hope of continuing our tradition of gracious hospitality, we welcome others to our communities and also try to be present to people in their own situations. (18)

Examine your lifestyle and purchasing habits (e.g. fast fashion) as purchasing is always a moral not



simply an economic act.

Be aware of who makes the clothes you buy. What conditions do they work in.

Can they support a family on those wages?



5. Intergenerational Justice

The ancient forests have been hewn down with little profit to the spoiler and to the injury in many ways of the native... The country which was in 'God's keeping' then has but little improved since it came into the keeping of man.

– *The History of Ireland, Acts of the 21st General Chapter*, Margaret Anna Cusack, 18

We commit ourselves to intergenerational justice – to include in our decision making the needs of future human generations and the future integrity of Earth. This guides us in challenging structures and practices which are detrimental to Earth and in promoting sustainability.

– *Land Ethic*



Intergenerational solidarity is not optional, but rather a basic question of justice, since the world we have received also belongs to those who will follow us.

– Laudato Si', 159



Image: Ali Jadallah – Anadolu Agency, May 12, 2021

Some Facts

- 90% of diseases resulting from the climate crisis are likely to affect children under the age of five.
- The climate crisis is forcing families to migrate. By 2050, **there could be 143 million more migrants** due to the climate crisis.
- The UN warns that many families will have to choose between starvation and migration.

We are in the sixth extinction event in the life of Earth, the first one caused by human action. We are losing thousands of species every month, which denies the blessings of the biodiversity lost to the next generation. The quality and diversity of life on Earth have diminished since we were born.

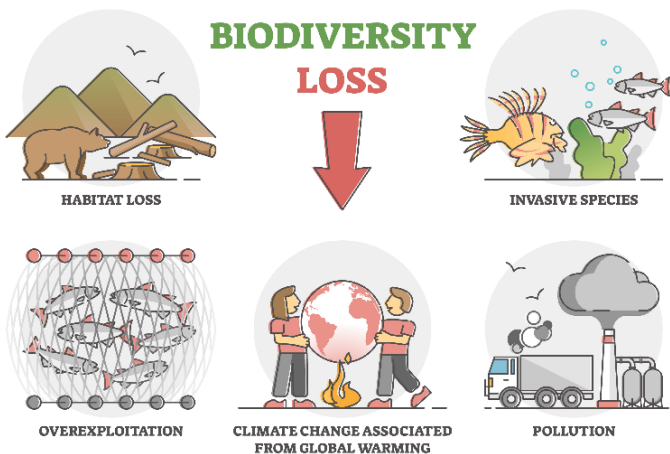
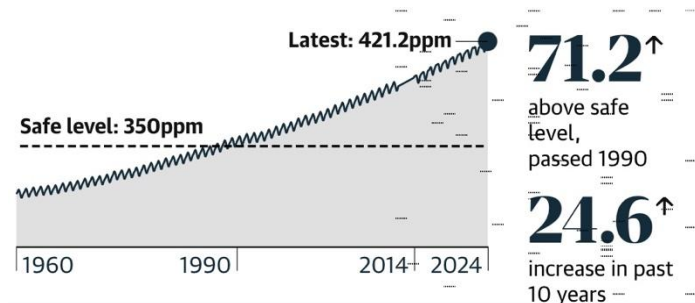


Image: <http://www.worldatlas.com/science/how-many-species-are-on-earth.html>

The global warming caused by excessive amounts of carbon in the atmosphere is still increasing despite promises made in 2015 to reduce greenhouse gasses (GHG). In fact, fossil fuel conglomerates are still pushing for approval of new projects.

Assuming we go past the 1.5-degree Celsius benchmark set in the Paris Agreement in 2015, we will be leaving a legacy of ever-increasing, destructive storms and the possibility that global warming will be irreversible and continue to the point of making human life, as we know it on this planet, impossible.

As of 2024, we have six years to reverse and significantly reduce our carbon emissions.



For generations, we have sought, through our hard work, to ensure that our children will have a better life than ours. However, we have failed with this generation. What we need to communicate to the following generations is the truth about the current conditions and the knowledge of how to repair Earth or at least slow its destruction to make continued human life on our planet possible. And it would be great if we gave them a head start in that direction.

Global warming began two hundred years ago, but it was our generation that was first exposed to truth tellers like Rachel Carson (*Silent Spring*) who in the early-1960s published the evidence that change was happening, observations confirmed by science.

As we came to a realization that our lifestyles were causing climate disruption, we shrugged and thought someone else would find a solution; we held onto our lifestyles that continued to exacerbate the problem.

Pope Francis identifies our “rampant individualism” (*Laudato Si'*, 162) as a reason why we find it so difficult to reduce our abuse of Earth’s resources. We, as westerners, have come to value our independence to the detriment of Earth. We need to relearn the truth that we, who share our common home, are interdependent.

The more intense the ecological problems become, the easier it is to see that the independence we seek is a mirage. The longer it takes us to become aware, the more suffering will be endured by those who follow us.

A young woman, Raquel, born on Sept 11, 2001, contrasted her upbringing in a Native American culture with western thinking.

I think my rights stem from my obligations, versus a colonial mind-set where your rights free you from obligations. You know, that being a human on this Earth means that I have obligations. It also means I have rights, but one comes first. If I can fulfill my obligations and my responsibilities, from there my rights come, my rights of freedom and my rights of finding happiness... I should want, as a human being, to be obligated to my [extended] family and to be obligated to my loved ones.¹

Raquel's thinking aligns with Catholic Social Teaching which teaches that rights come with responsibilities.

We would benefit from learning how to think about the impact of our actions from our Indigenous neighbors who consider how decisions made in the present will affect the future of following generations (Seventh Generation Principle). Paying more attention to what Earth is saying, as the Indigenous

¹ *We Are the Middle of Forever: Indigenous Voices from Turtle Island on the Changing Earth*, Eds., Dahr Jamail and Stan Rushworth. NY: New Press (2022) p.59

have done for centuries, will help us to understand our proper role and place in Earth's society.

Many young people already understand the threats we pass on to them and have become active in promoting movement in the global community to listen to and begin healing Earth. We want to do all that we can to encourage their work for our common home.

We are rediscovering the scientific and spiritual truths of our descent from the stars and our coming from Earth itself. We are not masters of the universe but one people who ought to be in communion with all of Earth and its creatures.



Image: Cagri Sarigoz, [Creative Commons. license/by-sa/2.0/](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/)

*From the hands of our God we received a garden,
we cannot leave a desert for our children.*

– Pope Francis

Actions We Can Take:

Bring our own lifestyles to sustainable limits.

Support United Nations resolutions recognizing a human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

Encourage young people to learn about environmental issues and the solutions for a healthy future environment.

For further reading, intergenerational justice is addressed in *Laudato Si'*, paragraphs 159-162.



Haitian schoolchildren in Milot take saplings up the mountain to plant them.

Through all these efforts, and through our on-going commitment to contribute to the well-being of the entire Earth community, we find courage to accept the grace of the present moment with all of its struggles, fears and doubts.

— Sr. Ann Rutan, CSJP

