**Ways to adapt Pope Francis’ encyclical on creation to everyday life** Living Laudato Si'[Barry Hudock](https://www.osv.com/OSVNewsweekly/Story/TabId/2672/PID/13567/authorid/669/AuthorName/BarryHudock/Default.aspx)[OSV Newsweekly](https://www.osv.com/OSVNewsweekly.aspx) 8/23/2015



On June 18, 2015, the Vatican introduced the Church and the world to Pope Francis’ new encyclical, *“Laudato Si’* (“Praise be to You”): On Care for Our Common Home.” And it was hard not to notice. The release was covered by almost every news outlet, commented upon by scientists and politicians, and hailed by many from both inside and outside the Church as an historic contribution to human society.

Addressed to “every person on the planet,” [*Laudato Si’*](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html) warns of the dangerous changes the earth’s climate and ecosystems are undergoing. It considers the economic causes of the problem, decries that problem’s particularly disastrous impact on the world’s poor, and offers a profound theological, moral and spiritual vision of the integral relationship between God, humanity and the created world.

These are big and important topics. But for the moment, we want to focus on what it might mean for a Catholic to authentically live the teaching of *Laudato Si’*. What impact might this document have on the daily life of someone who wishes to take seriously what the pope is saying?

We’ve chosen to consider that question from four important directions. What might it mean to live *Laudato Si’* in one’s family life? What does the encyclical offer to the spiritual lives of Catholics? What is this concept of consumerism that is so prominent in the pope’s teaching, and what does it mean to each of us? And finally, what does the encyclical mean in the life of a typical American Catholic parish?

This In Focus aims to accurately reflect the encyclical’s contents in very concrete and practical ways. As is often the case when it comes to living the Gospel, the challenge before us is great.

*Barry Hudock is the author of* [*“Struggle, Condemnation, Vindication: John Courtney Murray’s Journey toward Vatican II”*](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0814683223/ref%3Das_li_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=0814683223&linkCode=as2&tag=oursunvis-20&linkId=7HUQ25PWYFN2FE43%22%3EStruggle,%20Condemnation,%20Vindication:%20John%20Courtney%20Murray%27s%20Journey%20toward%20Vatican%20II) *(Liturgical Press, $19.95).*

**IN YOUR FAMILY**

*“In the family we first learn how to show love and respect for life; we are taught the proper use of things, order and cleanliness, respect for the local ecosystem and care for all creatures.”* — No. 213

**Where we learn what it means to have a common home**

It is no accident that the subtitle for Pope Francis’s recent encyclical, “On Care for Our Common Home,” refers to the earth with an image that suggests family life. Certainly, the main idea of the phrase is to remind us that all people on earth make up a single human family. But it seems likely that in choosing the subtitle, Pope Francis, who has made care for the family a major aspect of his ministry, also is signaling that everyday family life is an important factor in living out the vision he offers.

After all, it is in our early family experience that most of us develop our attitudes toward God, other people and the created world. These attitudes condition our receptivity to the Church’s ecological message and our ability to live it with integrity.

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The pope himself speaks in the encyclical of the family as the most important setting for ecological education. And he cautions parents to beware of “impulsive and wasteful consumption, which then affects their children who find it increasingly difficult to acquire a home of their own and build a family” (No. 162).

To Holly Taylor Coolman, who teaches theology at Providence College, it couldn’t be any other way.

“Family,” she pointed out in a recent interview with Our Sunday Visitor, “is where we learn what it means to have a common home and to live together in it. Laudato Si’ is about connectedness and interdependence, realities that we learn first in the context of family.”

Coolman believes that these broad values can be learned and lived through practical, concrete practices and ways of living.

“Families are the perfect place to foster the deeper attitudes that (Laudato Si’) calls for: gratitude for everything we have as gift and tender concern for those around us. Siblings are an invaluable gift in this project, but parents can model care for others, especially the most vulnerable, in many ways: in the way spouses treat one another, their neighbors, and anyone who is struggling in their own community,” Coolman said.

With the pope’s presence at the World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia quickly approaching this September, and a major Synod of Bishops set to discuss the topic of family life in Rome the following month, we’re likely to be hearing more about how Christians can respond to the new document’s challenging call in the context of family life.

FAMILY PRACTICES

*Theology professor Holly Taylor Coolman suggests several things families can do to more fully live what Pope Francis is teaching in Laudato Si’. She mentions:*

➤ A thanksgiving prayer before meals
➤ Passing food to others before taking one’s own share
➤ Family celebrations that focus more on togetherness than expensive presents
➤ Cooking at home with locally grown food
➤ Careful use of electricity and gasoline in the home and family travel
➤ Expressing trust in God’s care in the midst of family trials
➤ Looking for ways to serve the needy together

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

**1.** Why is the family the first place where environmental concerns must be taught and lived? What is your family doing in this regard?

**2.** “The continued acceleration of changes affecting humanity and the planet is coupled today with a more intensified pace of life and work which might be called ‘rapidification,’” Pope Francis says. In what ways has your life and family been negatively affected by “rapidification”?

**3.** Pope Francis writes, “Everything is interconnected, and that genuine care for our own lives and our relationships with nature is inseparable from fraternity, justice and faithfulness to others.” What evidence do you see of this in your own life and family?

**IN YOUR SPIRITUAL LIFE**

*“Christian spirituality proposes a growth marked by moderation and the capacity to be happy with little. It is a return to that simplicity which allows us to stop and appreciate the small things ...”* — No. 222

**Develop an appreciation by viewing the world, creation as a gift from God**

*Laudato Si’* is certainly a document on morality, and some read it as a political statement. But embedded in the encyclical’s teaching, readers can also find a rich spirituality, a call to a renewed relationship with God — one that profoundly impacts one’s relationship with other people and with the created world.

“A spirituality which forgets God as all-powerful and Creator is not acceptable,” Pope Francis writes in the document. “That is how we end up worshipping earthly powers, or ourselves usurping the place of God, even to the point of claiming an unlimited right to trample his creation underfoot. The best way to restore men and women to their rightful place, putting an end to their claim to absolute dominion over the earth, is to speak once more of the figure of a Father who creates and who alone owns the world” (No. 75).

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The word “spirituality” appears 17 times in the encyclical, and “God” is cited almost 200 times. Indeed, Pope Francis devotes an entire chapter (the sixth) to the topics of education and spirituality. And he concludes his document with not one but two prayers — one offered for “all who believe in a God who is the all-powerful Creator” (No. 246) and another specifically for Christians.

That’s a lot to get a handle on, but theology professor and spiritual director Susan Windley-Daoust sees “at least two major themes at work” in the spiritual vision of the document: “We must live in a holy wonder, and we must remember we are called to be in relationship to God within his creation. The wonder is evoked when we learn to receive the world as a gift of God, to receive and appreciate it as a source of life and wonder,” she told OSV. Windley-Daoust teaches at Saint Mary’s University in Minnesota and is also author of a book on St. John Paul II’s Theology of the Body.

The dual themes she mentions are clear in the encyclical’s closing prayers. In the second, for example, the pope prays: “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.”

How can a Catholic integrate the pope’s wisdom more fully into his or her prayer life?

READ AND REFLECT

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Pope Francis on Aug. 6, in a letter to the heads of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity, announced the establishment of a World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, which will be celebrated annually Sept. 1.

In order to better prepare for the new day of prayer, read Pope Francis’ new encyclical, *Laudato Si’*, (and, of course, this In Focus). Our Sunday Visitor has published the encyclical, along with questions for discussion, examples of which can be found throughout this In Focus. To order your copy of [*Laudato Si’*](https://www.osv.com/Shop/Product?ProductCode=T1753), visit [OSV.com/ourhome](http://www.osv.com/ourhome).

“I would say the first thing to do is to try to change the way you see nature,” Windley-Daoust says.

“We’re so busy. Do we enjoy ‘our common home,’ as [the pope] calls it? This can be as simple as to sit by a window and watch the sunset. Go on a walk in the woods. Look up, look at clouds if you have nothing else accessible to you! And remember that looking at a human being, seeing and appreciating the depth of that person, honors God’s creation as well.”

Besides pointing us to the created world and to other people, Pope Francis emphasizes the important place of the sacraments in a spirituality that embraces creation. He calls them “a privileged way in which nature is taken up by God to become a means of mediating supernatural life.” Water, oil and other created goods are “incorporated in our act of praise.”

The pope reserves especially strong words for the Eucharist in *Laudato Si’.*

“It is in the Eucharist that all that has been created finds its greatest exaltation,” he writes. “[I]t is the living center of the universe, the overflowing core of love and of inexhaustible life. Joined to the incarnate Son, present in the Eucharist, the whole cosmos gives thanks to God. Indeed the Eucharist is itself an act of cosmic love. ... The Eucharist joins heaven and earth; it embraces and penetrates all creation” (No. 236).

Windley-Daoust suggests that another sacrament to help us embrace the encyclical’s spiritual message might be confession, for the document should prick our conscience. “This encyclical should truly serve as an examen for people in the developed world. It’s not a comfortable document. It states ecological realities which are hard to hear,” she says.

With such an array of nourishment for the soul, *Laudato Si’* is a rich resource for any Christian’s spiritual growth.

GROWING IN PRAYER

*Pope Francis wants to awaken us to recognize God’s goodness, manifest in the created world. To open our eyes to God’s presence and grow deeper in prayer, we could:*

➤ Take five minutes to notice something beautiful in the world
➤ Plant a seed and let it remind you to marvel at creation and God’s providence
➤ Name five blessings before you go to sleep
➤ Pick a different country to pray for each day
➤ Create a space for silence
➤ Leave a holy card as a reminder to see Christ in the people you meet
➤ Go on a prayer walk and silently thank God for everything that you see

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

**1.** How are the sacraments, and the Eucharist in particular, concrete signs for us of God’s love and care for his creation? Why does Pope Francis call the Eucharist “a sign of cosmic love”?

**2. “**The Spirit of God has filled the universe with possibilities and therefore, from the very heart of things, something new can always emerge.” How does this give you hope for the future of both humanity and the earth?

**3.** In his opening words, Pope Francis calls the earth “a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us.” In what ways is the earth our sister? In what ways is she our mother?

**IN YOUR SPENDING**

*“Many people know that our current progress and the mere amassing of things and pleasures are not enough to give meaning and joy to the human heart, yet they feel unable to give up what the market sets before them.”* — No. 209

**When it comes to unnecessary material goods, less is more**

Many commentators have noted that the subject at the heart of Laudato Si’ is not so much climate change as it is the more fundamental problem of consumerism. Climate change, the pope seems to tell us, is one perilous consequence of a “culture of consumerism” that dominates our society.

What is consumerism? What does it mean to Catholics today, and how can we navigate the moral challenges it presents? Though Pope Francis says much about consumerism, he offers no definition. “Since the market tends to promote extreme consumerism in an effort to sell its products,” he writes, “people can easily get caught up in a whirlwind of needless buying and spending.” Consumerism “prioritizes short-term gain and private interest” (No. 184) and makes people “believe that they are free as long as they have the supposed freedom to consume” (No. 203).

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These ideas are consistent with the teaching of Francis’ predecessors, especially Pope St. John Paul II, said David Matzko McCarthy, professor of moral theology at Mount St. Mary’s University in Emmitsburg, Maryland, and author of “Sharing God’s Good Company: A Theology of the Communion of Saints” (Eerdmans, $28).

When we are in the grip of consumerism, McCarthy told OSV, “we look to possessions to fulfill us, and when we are unfulfilled, we seek more possessions.”

One snare of “compulsive consumerism,” the pope writes, is “the techno-economic paradigm” (No. 203). McCarthy explains that the Pope is warning us against seeking technological fixes to problems that technology helped create in the first place.

“We drive 100 miles in a hybrid car,” McCarthy said. “Perhaps the solution is to live closer to work and, in the process, have more time to contribute to family and community life. [The pope is saying] we should look for social solutions that have the side effect of reducing consumerism.

“For example, we could spend more time preparing meals for several people as an ordinary matter of life — not just meals for the annual feast, but regular day-to-day meals. We would be enjoying and fostering common life, and we would be reducing trash and waste.”

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The temptation to consumerism is probably especially strong for Catholics living in the United States, because the advertising and entertainment industries are more dominant here than almost anywhere else on earth. Because it is in the very cultural air we breathe, most of us can become avid participants in a consumerist way of life almost without realizing it.

“I don’t know if we can avoid consumerism, but we can try to put limits on it,” McCarthy says. Suggesting some practical directions, he notes, “We need to think about spending more face-to-face time with each other, develop common spaces and activities, and stop worrying about keeping up with fashions in technology.”

But to McCarthy, it’s about far more than what we should avoid. The heart of the pope’s message is not a condemnation but an affirmation.

“Live joyfully and make friends of God’s friends, the holy ones among us and the poor. Gather with others as much as possible. Seek the freedom of working less and having less. Any good message on consumerism will have as its foundation the grace and freedom of the Gospel — God with us in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is the message that we can give to others that will change our own lives.”

LESS IS MORE

*Laudato Si’* encourages us to live more simply and with greater awareness of the effect of our spending habits. Some ways to do this include:

➤ Collect change from purchases and donate it to charity
➤ Declutter and give away items you don’t need
➤ Make homemade gifts instead of buying presents
➤ Try cutting $5 out of your weekly budget
➤ Set aside electronic devices for one hour of family time every week
➤ Reflect on the purchases you make and what companies your money supports
➤ Put a sign next to the trash can as a reminder to reuse or recycle before throwing away

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

**1.** Pope Francis speaks about “compulsive consumerism.” What does this phrase mean to you? What is the relationship between consumerism and selfishness? Between self-centeredness and greed? Between emptiness and consumption?

**2.** Pope Francis asks us to develop an attitude of “less is more.” How can you do this in your own life?

**3.** How can we both appreciate and respect the progress that technology has afforded us and still be cautious of the evils that can accompany such technology?

**IN YOUR PARISH**

*“Social problems must be addressed by community networks and not simply by the sum of individual good deeds. ... The ecological conversion needed to bring about lasting change is also a community conversion.”* — No. 219

**Small changes in our communities can make a big difference**

Though *Laudato Si’* makes no explicit mention of Catholic parish life, the document does insist that social problems are best tackled by groups rather than individuals. Because “community conversion,” as the encyclical states, is entirely the point of a parish’s existence, it’s safe to say that parishes can play an important role in carrying out the encyclical’s vision — not to mention in making that vision better understood among its people.

To Fran Rossi Szpylczyn, an administrative assistant at Immaculate Conception parish in Glenville, New York, who also maintains a popular Catholic blog, the pope’s teaching is not new, though the emphasis he gives it is. And so many parishes are already living the message in important ways.

In her work at Immaculate Conception, for example, she pays attention to the purchase of paper goods, making sure to buy only recycled paper and avoiding waste as much as possible. She sees the teaching reflected, too, in the care that she and the rest of the parish staff bring to the parish grounds.

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“This is God’s creation,” Szpylczyn said in a recent OSV interview. “We have plants and flowers all around, and those bring hummingbirds and butterflies. It’s all important and we treat it that way.”

The parish where Szpylczyn worships, St. Edward the Confessor in Clifton Park, New York, offers a community garden where parishioners share plots of land to grow their own food or flowers. The project serves multiple purposes related to the teaching of Laudato Si’, she says, allowing members of the parish to eat more locally-grown food, save some money and get to know one another better.

Father Kenneth Haydock also sees Francis’s message as consistent with prior Church teaching. He has spent years trying to live it in his role as pastor of Holy Rosary parish in North Edmonds, Washington.

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When the parish built a new building two years ago, special care was put into designing it for energy efficiency. And the Church’s teaching about the central place of care for the poor, emphasized so strongly in the encyclical, has motivated Father Haydock to devote a significant portion of his annual parish budget to the work of its St. Vincent de Paul Society chapter — to the tune of about $100,000 a year.

Father Haydock wants to help his parishioners understand and embrace the pope’s teaching, and he’s working hard to do it. As soon as the encyclical was published, he began including a series of short articles about it in his parish bulletin and website. He also offered free copies of the document to any parishioner who asked — and has already given dozens away.

And he’s not done. Father Haydock is planning to offer a faith formation program on the new encyclical at Holy Rosary this fall, where parishioners will read, reflect on and talk about what the pope has to say. These efforts are important, he says, because too many people have developed their impressions of the encyclical from the popular media, which is often uninformed and lacks a Catholic context.

“I’ve heard people repeat what some politicians have said, about the pope needing to stay out of science or out of politics,” Father Haydock told OSV. “So I’m going to keep hammering away at it, helping people understand what the pope is saying and why he’s saying it.”

It’s a message that promises to challenge both him and his parishioners far into the future.

COMMUNITY LIFE

*Pope Francis reminds us that all of reality is interconnected. Here are some suggestions on how to better connect with your community and help our planet:*

➤ Choose air dryers over paper towels to help public buildings cut down on waste
➤ Volunteer for parish activities
➤ Foster authentic conversations
➤ Remember to smile
➤ Look for or start a community carpool
➤ Find drop-off locations for electronics and other hard to recycle items
➤ Plant a tree or flowers to help beautify your community

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

**1.** What does Pope Francis mean when he says that we must undergo an “ecological conversion”? In what ways should our encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in our relationship with the world around us?

**2.** Pope Francis says that to solve the issues facing us today, we must think of ourselves as “one world with a common plan.” Do you believe that is possible? What would have to change to have this happen?

**3.** What are some of the “common plans” that Pope Francis encourages the world to embrace? What can you do to help this become a reality?

A CHRISTIAN PRAYER IN UNION WITH CREATION

*At the closing of his encyclical, Pope Francis offers this prayer, asking “for inspiration to take up the commitment to creation set before us by the Gospel of Jesus Father.”*

They came forth
from your all-powerful hand;
they are yours, filled with
 your presence and your
 tender love. Praise be to you!

Son of God, Jesus,
through you all things were made.
You were formed in the womb
of Mary our Mother,
you became part of this earth,
and you gazed upon this world
with human eyes.
Today you are alive in every creature
in your risen glory.
Praise be to you!

Holy Spirit, by your light
you guide this world toward
the Father’s love and accompany
creation as it groans in travail.
You also dwell in our hearts
and you inspire us to do what is good.
Praise be to you!

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.