

Reading from the Margins: *A People's Introduction to Laudato Si'*



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Introduction

The purpose of this study guide to *Laudato Si'* is to create spaces for theological reflection through the lens of contemporary struggles for social justice. What distinguishes this study guide is that it reads *Laudato Si'* from a particular marginalized place as a model for reading from other marginalized places in which the cry of the poor and the cry of Earth intersect. While using this study guide as a resource you are encouraged to think about how the model suggested here of reading with a particular community might be applied in your own context. In preparing your workshop you may choose to read *Laudato Si'* with the context described in this study guide. Or you may choose to read alongside another marginalized place.

This study guide includes several components. First is background information about Baltimore and United Workers as the overarching context in which *Laudato Si'* will be read in this study guide. Notes for facilitators follow this general background information. In the facilitation section are some suggested general principles and best practices, as well as a possible format for a workshop. Next are introductions specifically to the Free Your Voice incinerator campaign and *Laudato Si'* within the tradition of Catholic social teaching. Both these sections can be photocopied and handed out as resources to the workshop participants. Following these introductions are small group handouts that can also be photocopied for participants and include questions for both small and large group discussion. Finally there are lists of suggested quotations and resources.

This study guide envisions communities and individuals of faith as an integral part of the struggle for human rights and the struggle to end the destruction of Earth. It recognizes the immense and unnecessary suffering caused by the systematic and structural exploitation of both people and Earth as a spiritual and moral crisis. It names the treatment of things, communities and Earth as disposable as a moral and spiritual failing by society. It takes seriously the need for deep responses from communities and individuals of faith to care for all people, especially the poor, and Earth, which has been entrusted to humanity as a gift. It also takes seriously the need for an “ecological conversion” of individuals, communities of faith and society.

Background

Before an introduction to the Free Your incinerator campaign as the context in which this study guide reads *Laudato Si'*, a more general introduction to Baltimore and United Workers is needed. Most Baltimore neighborhoods are marked by pollution, vacant housing, foreclosures, unemployment, poorly performing schools, fire house and recreation center closings and diminishing city services—an situation reflected in many cities across the U.S. today. In the past 40 years, city leaders, in response to changes in the economy, have and continue to look to economic development and the privatization of public goods as solutions to these problems.

Significant public resources have been, and continue to be, used to transform old industrial areas into tourist sites featuring restaurants, retail stores, and other forms of hospitality and entertainment. While this development produces some jobs, work in these sectors is low paying, without health care benefits and opportunity for upward mobility, is hostile to worker organizing and has completely ignored environmental impacts.

These failed development policies benefit primarily private developers and real estate speculators, while most city residents and communities are still struggling to meet their needs. United Workers, a human rights organization based in Baltimore led by the poor, is organizing in response to these conditions through the Fair Development Campaign. The Fair Development Campaign organizes for development and human rights that improve the well-being of all city residents and communities. The purpose of a multi-issue approach under the banner of Fair Development is that each of these issues is interconnected with others. For example, many foreclosures are due to bankruptcy related to health care costs. Significant health care costs may be the result of exposure to toxic chemicals from pollution. Fair development must address all economic, social, cultural and environmental aspects of people's lives in a coordinated way that connects up different issue-based struggles and increases communities' abilities to meet their fundamental needs. As a human rights movement, the Fair Development Campaign seeks to build deep unity across all lines of division, including race, geography, gender, language and religion.

To this end, Fair Development is guided by the following human rights principles:

- o *Universality* – Development should benefit all; displace none.
- o *Equity* – Development's benefits must be shared equitably and prioritize communities most in need.
- o *Participation* – Development decisions involving public subsidies require public participation.
- o *Transparency* – Development decisions must be open and transparent.
- o *Accountability* – Publicly aided developers must implement development that fulfills these human rights principles or be held accountable.

United Workers' Human Rights Organizing Model

The purpose of United Workers' human rights organizing model is to build a movement to end poverty and environmental injustice, led by the poor. At the center of this model is the work of developing and uniting leaders, especially from the ranks of the poor, as well as leaders from every sector of society that are committed to human rights values. Human rights values include dignity for all, respect for all and the sanctity of life. Through leadership development and human rights education, leaders engage in "reflective action." Through this method of action and reflection the power of the poor is built through organization, using campaigns as schools to develop and unite leaders. Organization and community are built through the Fair Development Campaign, projects of survival that meet people's basic needs, creating community through the arts, culture and faith, and connecting with a network of organizations also committed to building the movement to end poverty and environmental injustice.

Notes for Facilitators

It is recommended that there are at least two facilitators for a workshop on *Laudato Si'*. This allows for a variety of points of view and skill sets to be incorporated into the planning process, and potentially different styles of facilitating to be included in the workshop itself. With multiple facilitators the collective, dialogical methodology of a workshop can be incorporated in its earliest planning stages, as well as in its implementation. If this workshop is planned to consist of both large and small group discussion, including different facilitators to lead the small group discussion, in addition to those that lead the large group discussion, can diversify the leadership of this study even further.

The facilitators need not be ordained clergypersons or otherwise consecrated leaders that are representatives of religious institutions. If one facilitator is a clergyperson, it is recommended that the second facilitator be a layperson. If possible, lay leaders can play an active, if not primary, role in organizing and facilitating this workshop. The facilitators also need not be “experts” in religion or environmental issues. This study provides a starting point from which to plan and implement a successful workshop. It is also important that the demographic composition of the facilitators reflect the diversity of the participants. For example, if one facilitator is a woman, a second facilitator could be a man. Or if one facilitator is white, another facilitator could be a person of color, etc.

The Role of Facilitators and Best Practices

The primary role of the facilitators is to enable the collective process of the participants in engaging with their context and in theological reflection. Every participant is a potential leader that can be identified and developed in the movement to end poverty and environmental injustice. Each participant has a role to play and experience to contribute. To enable this process to take place, facilitators need strong skills in managing group dynamics, encouraging contributions from every participant, making transitions between each part of the workshop, and keeping the workshop on time. Facilitators need to enable participants to engage with the questions for discussion as they are presented to the participants. It is also important that facilitators be able to create a space that is warm and welcoming, especially as the issues discussed may evoke deep emotions.

Facilitators are not “experts” in religion or the environment. All the “answers” do not lie in the facilitators, although the facilitators should be able to provide basic information. It is ok to not have the answer for every question asked by the participants. When a facilitator does not know the answer to a question, rely on the resources of the group and/or plan to research the question further to report back at a later session.

Planning for a Workshop

The facilitators are primarily responsible for planning and preparing for this workshop. This process can be accomplished through asking a series of questions:

- o *Who?* – What are the demographics of the participants? What is the participants' level(s) of experience with religion and environmental issues? What are the participants' political orientation(s)? With what issues might the participants be struggling or about what might they be especially concerned?
- o *What?* – What are the goals of this workshop? How will the facilitators know when the participants have reached these goals? What will the participants understand, analyze, evaluate and/or apply as a result of this study?
- o *Where?* – In what physical space will the workshop be held? How will the chairs and/or tables be arranged (preferably in a circle)? Does the space have light, temperature, and noise levels appropriate for group learning?
- o *When?* – How long will the workshop be? What factors might affect the energy level or attention span of the participants during each session? In what ways could each session be adjusted for time if needed?
- o *How?* – How will *Laudato Si'* be read and by whom? How will the discussion(s) be structured? Will there be small and/or large group discussion? Will there be an audio/visual and/or creative presentation(s)?
- o *With what?* – What materials will be needed to carry out this workshop?

A preliminary list of materials that may be needed:

- Copies of quotations with discussion questions
- Copies of supplemental material (Intro to Incinerator Campaign, Intro to *Laudato Si'*)
- Visual aids
- Flip chart paper for small and large group note taking
- Markers for writing on flip chart paper
- Projector, computer, adapters, speakers and/or extension cords for audio/visual presentations
- Food
- Beverages
- Organizational materials, brochures, flyers, etc.

A Suggested Format

This suggested format takes a few points into consideration. One is that, given its length, the workshop participants will likely not have read *Laudato Si'* in its entirety, if at all. Assigning each small group a quotation gives each participant an opportunity to engage with a representative text in detail while also being exposed to key ideas brought into the large group discussion by other small groups. A second point of consideration for this format is the time constraint of 100 minutes it reflects. It may be necessary to adjust the timings accordingly based on the constraints of a particular workshop, meeting space, etc.

- | | |
|------------|--|
| 20 minutes | Welcome and Introductions <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Opening prayer and song? |
| 10 minutes | Introduction to the Incinerator Campaign <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Context in which the encyclical will be studied |
| 5 minutes | Introduction to <i>Laudato Si'</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- What is an encyclical? |
| 15 minutes | Small Group Discussion <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Divide participants into small groups of 4-5- Each group receives a quote to discuss with the following questions:- What is your group's quote about?- Do the ideas in your quote connect to the Free Your Voice incinerator campaign? If so, what how does these connections influence your interpretation of <i>Laudato Si'</i>? |
| 25 minutes | Large Group Discussion <ul style="list-style-type: none">- How is the quote discussed in your small group reflected (or not) in your life and the life of your community?- What would happen if the concepts in your quote were lived out in reality? |
| 20 minutes | Call to Action and Closing <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Where do we go from here?- Hand out introductions to <i>Laudato Si'</i> and incinerator campaign- Closing prayer and song? |

An Introduction to the Free Your Voice Incinerator Campaign

In Baltimore there has been a multi-generational trend of sacrificing communities and creating dumping zones. The low-income neighborhood of Curtis Bay in southeast Baltimore is heavily industrialized, including a medical waste incinerator, a coal terminal across the street from the public park, multinational chemical company facilities, and an auto terminal. Many of these sites are in violation of the federal Clean Air Act or Clean Water Act. As a result of the pollution caused by such high levels of industrialization, residents have experienced elevated rates of heart disease, respiratory disease and lung cancer. In fact Baltimore has one of the highest death rates caused by air pollution in the country.

In southeast Baltimore there is also a history of relocating nearby communities because the health-related concerns created by the industry present there. To quote an environmental history of these neighborhoods, "Literally, the houses are tucked in among gas tanks and smokestacks, bordered by brownfields and illegal dump sites on every side, which in turn are encircled by the polluted Patapsco River." Despite promises of compensation and jobs, the devastating effects of dispossession, poor health, pollution and even death are evidence that failed development, promoted by both the government and business, has by no means compensated Curtis Bay and the surrounding communities for what they have suffered and lost.

In 2010 a site in Curtis Bay was approved for the country's largest trash-burning incinerator to be built by the company Energy Answers. In addition to the devastation that the land and community in Curtis Bay is already experiencing, the incinerator would burn 4,000 tons of trash a day. It would release 240 pounds of mercury and 1,000 pounds of lead into the air every year. The incinerator would effectively make Curtis Bay a dumping ground for the trash not only from Maryland, but also from neighboring states.

In the midst of the devastation that has been inflicted on communities and the environment by profit-driven development, there is a movement led by those most directly affected. This movement is not only talking back to the powerful, but is also organizing to transform its communities. What is underway now is a community-driven process toward development alternatives that are fair and rooted in a deep respect for the land and human rights. For the past three years the students of Free Your Voice, a human rights committee of United Workers, have struggled to end the construction of a trash-burning incinerator less than a mile away from their school, Benjamin Franklin High. United Workers is a human rights organization based in Baltimore committed to building a movement to end poverty led by the poor.

This year the construction of the incinerator has been successfully delayed because of leadership from Free Your Voice. The victories of Free Your Voice and United Workers are the direct result of their organizing model, which places political education and leadership development at its core. For example, the incinerator campaign began with a year's worth of study into the plans to build it, as well as the history of Curtis Bay and the surrounding neighborhoods. As a result of Free Your Voice's organizing efforts the Baltimore City government and the Baltimore School Board, in addition to public entities in surrounding counties, have terminated their contracts with Energy Answers despite at one time being strongly supportive of the incinerator. With these initial victories, Free Your Voice will continue to struggle for the human right to community access to and control of land.

An Introduction to *Laudato Si'* and Catholic Social Teaching

Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home is an encyclical that was published in June 2015 by Pope Francis. An encyclical is a general or “circular” letter written by a pope that is addressed to the entire Roman Catholic Church worldwide. Encyclicals were originally intended for bishops and then became more universal in audience. *Laudato Si'* is a particular kind of encyclical known as a social encyclical, because it applies the social teachings of the Catholic Church to the contemporary context. Catholic social teaching is sometimes anecdotally called the “best kept secret of the church” because of its progressive stances on political, economic and social issues.

Laudato Si' stands in a tradition of social encyclicals which began with the publication of *Rerum Novarum* (“On the Condition of Labor”) in 1891 by Pope Leo XIII. In the midst of significant unrest in Europe, this encyclical effectively founded modern Catholic social teaching by addressing the plight and struggles of workers during the Industrial Revolution and condemning unfettered capitalism. Pope Pius XI published *Quadragesimo Anno* (“On the Reconstruction of the Social Order”) in 1931 for the fortieth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*. This encyclical updated many of the themes established in *Rerum Novarum* for the Great Depression, including a criticism of inequality, especially the concentration of political and economic power in fewer and fewer hands. In 1963 St. John XXIII published *Pacem in Terris* (“Peace on Earth”). Addressed to “all men of good will,” this encyclical spoke to the need for nuclear disarmament during the Cold War. The list of fundamental human rights included in this encyclical addressed the diverse range of essentials needed for human existence and expressed the minimum conditions necessary for a life with dignity. These human rights included not just civic and political rights, but also economic, social and cultural rights.

Within this historical trajectory, while *Laudato Si'* is a particularly Catholic document, it is also universal in scope. Intended not specifically for Catholics, or even to all Christians, Francis addresses “every person living on the planet” (3) as his audience—a first within the encyclical tradition. His purpose for writing is to “enter into dialogue with all people about our common home,” Earth (3).

In terms of structure, *Laudato Si'* is organized into six chapters with an introduction. It begins with an overview of the ecological crisis, and continues with an exploration of the Judeo-Christian principles that can form the basis of a commitment to the environment. Of note in this section is an interpretation of the creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2 that rejects humanity being given “dominion” over Earth (Gen 1:27) as a justification for “absolute domination over other creatures.” The command to have dominion must be read in the context of the command to “‘till and keep’ the garden of the world” in Gen 2:15 (67). Next Francis explores the root causes of the ecological crisis and argues for an “integral ecology” that appreciates the interconnectedness of Earth and humanity. Based on this assessment he makes proposals for dialogue and action on both individual and social levels. This encyclical concludes with a call for education toward a covenant between Earth and humanity and suggests guidelines for a spirituality in tune with an “ecological conversion.”

While there are many themes in this document, a few of particular interest include the “intimate relationship between the poor and the fragility of the planet,” a critique of new paradigms and forms of power derived from technology, a call to seek alternative understandings of the economy and progress, and a critique of contemporary “throwaway culture” (16). While some

both within and outside the Catholic Church have perceived Pope Francis's attention to the intersections between the free market capitalism and climate change as "political" and "radical," he has been careful to ground his arguments within the traditions of Catholic social teaching.

Another unique aspect of *Laudato Si'* is its sources and significant use of quotations. To demonstrate continuity with Catholic tradition, Pope Francis quotes heavily from his immediate predecessors Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Saint John Paul II. Also among Catholic sources, the statements of several bishops' conferences are quoted, especially those from the global South. While the majority of Pope Francis's quotations are from the Catholic tradition, they are not limited to it through the inclusion of other Christian traditions and other faiths. Additional notable sources include Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of the Eastern Orthodox Church, who is known as the "Green Patriarch, and the ninth-century Sufi poet and mystic Ali al-Khawwas.

The life and teachings of St. Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of the environment, from which Pope Francis derives his name, also play a significant role in this encyclical. The title of the encyclical "*Laudato Si'*" ("Praise Be to You") is the Italian phrase that begins St. Francis's "Canticle of the Sun," or "Canticle of Creation." It is significant that the title of the document is in Italian, not the traditional Latin in which official teachings of the Catholic Church are typically published. The encyclical as a whole was originally written in Italian, not Latin. The use of a vernacular language suggests another attempt by Pope Francis to appeal to a wide audience. The inclusion of such lyrical references to "Mother Earth" and "Sister Water" points to the importance of this document's appeal not just to the intellect, but also its attention to spirituality.

Group 1

A Quote from *Laudato Si'*

...many professionals, opinion makers, communications media and centres of power, being located in affluent urban areas, are far removed from the poor, with little direct contact with their problems. They live and reason from the comfortable position of a high level of development and a quality of life well beyond the reach of the majority of the world's population. This lack of physical contact and encounter, encouraged at times by the disintegration of our cities, can lead to a numbing of conscience and to tendentious analyses which neglect parts of reality. At times this attitude exists side by side with a "green" rhetoric. Today, however, we have to realize that a true ecological approach *a/ways* becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear *both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor*. (49)

Small Group Discussion:

1. What is this quote about?
2. Do the ideas in this quote connect to the Free Your Voice incinerator campaign? If so, what how do these connections influence your interpretation of *Laudato Si'*?

Large Group Discussion:

1. How is the quote discussed in your small group reflected (or not) in your life and/or the life of your community?
2. What would happen if the concepts in this quote were lived out in reality?

Group 2

A Quote from Laudato Si'

Whether believers or not, we are agreed today that the earth is essentially a shared inheritance, whose fruits are meant to benefit everyone. For believers, this becomes a question of fidelity to the Creator, since God created the world for everyone. Hence every ecological approach needs to incorporate a social perspective which takes into account the fundamental rights of the poor and the underprivileged. The principle of the subordination of private property to the universal destination of goods, and thus the right of everyone to their use, is a golden rule of social conduct and “the first principle of the whole ethical and social order”. The Christian tradition has never recognized the right to private property as absolute or inviolable, and has stressed the social purpose of all forms of private property. (93)

Small Group Discussion:

1. What is this quote about?
2. Do the ideas in this quote connect to the Free Your Voice incinerator campaign? If so, what how do these connections influence your interpretation of *Laudato Si'*?

Large Group Discussion:

1. How is the quote discussed in your small group reflected (or not) in your life and/or the life of your community?
2. What would happen if the concepts in this quote were lived out in reality?

Group 3

A Quote from Laudato Si'

Recognizing the reasons why a given area is polluted requires a study of the workings of society, its economy, its behaviour patterns, and the ways it grasps reality. Given the scale of change, it is no longer possible to find a specific, discrete answer for each part of the problem. It is essential to seek comprehensive solutions which consider the interactions within natural systems themselves and with social systems. We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature. (139)

Small Group Discussion:

1. What is this quote about?
2. Do the ideas in this quote connect to the Free Your Voice incinerator campaign? If so, what how do these connections influence your interpretation of *Laudato Si'*?

Large Group Discussion:

1. How is the quote discussed in your small group reflected (or not) in your life and/or the life of your community?
2. What would happen if the concepts in this quote were lived out in reality?

Group 4

A Quote from *Laudato Si'*

Politics must not be subject to the economy, nor should the economy be subject to the dictates of an efficiency-driven paradigm of technocracy. Today, in view of the common good, there is urgent need for politics and economics to enter into a frank dialogue in the service of life, especially human life. Saving banks at any cost, making the public pay the price, foregoing a firm commitment to reviewing and reforming the entire system, only reaffirms the absolute power of a financial system, a power which has no future and will only give rise to new crises after a slow, costly and only apparent recovery. The financial crisis of 2007-08 provided an opportunity to develop a new economy, more attentive to ethical principles, and new ways of regulating speculative financial practices and virtual wealth. But the response to the crisis did not include rethinking the outdated criteria which continue to rule the world. (189)

Small Group Discussion:

1. What is this quote about?
2. Do the ideas in this quote connect to the Free Your Voice incinerator campaign? If so, what how do these connections influence your interpretation of *Laudato Si'*?

Large Group Discussion:

1. How is the quote discussed in your small group reflected (or not) in your life and/or the life of your community?
2. What would happen if the concepts in this quote were lived out in reality?

Group 5

A Quote from *Laudato Si'*

Love, overflowing with small gestures of mutual care, is also civic and political, and it makes itself felt in every action that seeks to build a better world. Love for society and commitment to the common good are outstanding expressions of a charity which affects not only relationships between individuals but also “macro-relationships, social, economic and political ones”. That is why the Church set before the world the ideal of a “civilization of love”. Social love is the key to authentic development: “In order to make society more human, more worthy of the human person, love in social life – political, economic and cultural – must be given renewed value, becoming the constant and highest norm for all activity”. In this framework, along with the importance of little everyday gestures, social love moves us to devise larger strategies to halt environmental degradation and to encourage a “culture of care” which permeates all of society. (231)

Small Group Discussion:

1. What is this quote about?
2. Do the ideas in this quote connect to the Free Your Voice incinerator campaign? If so, what how do these connections influence your interpretation of *Laudato Si'*?

Large Group Discussion:

1. How is the quote discussed in your small group reflected (or not) in your life and/or the life of your community?
2. What would happen if the concepts in this quote were lived out in reality?

Selected Quotes

Role of young people in demanding change:

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. Here I want to recognize, encourage and thank all those striving in countless ways to guarantee the protection of the home which we share. Particular appreciation is owed to those who tirelessly seek to resolve the tragic effects of environmental degradation on the lives of the world's poorest. Young people demand change. They wonder how anyone can claim to be building a better future without thinking of the environmental crisis and the sufferings of the excluded. (13)

Human right to water:

Even as the quality of available water is constantly diminishing, in some places there is a growing tendency, despite its scarcity, to privatize this resource, turning it into a commodity subject to the laws of the market. Yet *access to safe drinkable water is a basic and universal human right, since it is essential to human survival and, as such, is a condition for the exercise of other human rights*. Our world has a grave social debt towards the poor who lack access to drinking water, because *they are denied the right to a life consistent with their inalienable dignity*. (30)

The importance of relationships with the poor:

...many professionals, opinion makers, communications media and centres of power, being located in affluent urban areas, are far removed from the poor, with little direct contact with their problems. They live and reason from the comfortable position of a high level of development and a quality of life well beyond the reach of the majority of the world's population. This lack of physical contact and encounter, encouraged at times by the disintegration of our cities, can lead to a numbing of conscience and to tendentious analyses which neglect parts of reality. At times this attitude exists side by side with a "green" rhetoric. Today, however, we have to realize that a true ecological approach *always* becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear *both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor*. (49)

Earth as shared inheritance, not private property:

Whether believers or not, we are agreed today that the earth is essentially a shared inheritance, whose fruits are meant to benefit everyone. For believers, this becomes a question of fidelity to the Creator, since God created the world for everyone. Hence every ecological approach needs to incorporate a social perspective which takes into account the fundamental rights of the poor and the underprivileged. The principle of the subordination of private property to the universal destination of goods, and thus the right of everyone to their use, is a golden rule of social conduct and "the first principle of the whole ethical and social order". The Christian tradition has never recognized the right to private property as absolute or inviolable, and has stressed the social purpose of all forms of private property. (93)

Need for structural analysis and structural change:

Recognizing the reasons why a given area is polluted requires a study of the workings of society, its economy, its behaviour patterns, and the ways it grasps reality. Given the scale of change, it is no longer possible to find a specific, discrete answer for each part of the problem. It is essential to seek comprehensive solutions which consider the interactions within natural systems themselves and with social systems. We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature. (139)

Housing as issue of human ecology:

Lack of housing is a grave problem in many parts of the world, both in rural areas and in large cities, since state budgets usually cover only a small portion of the demand. Not only the poor, but many other members of society as well, find it difficult to own a home. Having a home has much to do with a sense of personal dignity and the growth of families. This is a major issue for human ecology. (152)

Transportation as an issue of human dignity:

The quality of life in cities has much to do with systems of transport, which are often a source of much suffering for those who use them. Many cars, used by one or more people, circulate in cities, causing traffic congestion, raising the level of pollution, and consuming enormous quantities of non-renewable energy. This makes it necessary to build more roads and parking areas which spoil the urban landscape. Many specialists agree on the need to give priority to public transportation. Yet some measures needed will not prove easily acceptable to society unless substantial improvements are made in the systems themselves, which in many cities force people to put up with undignified conditions due to crowding, inconvenience, infrequent service and lack of safety. (153)

Human rights and the preferential option for the poor:

In the present condition of global society, where injustices abound and growing numbers of people are deprived of basic human rights and considered expendable, the principle of the common good immediately becomes, logically and inevitably, a summons to solidarity and a preferential option for the poorest of our brothers and sisters. This option entails recognizing the implications of the universal destination of the world's goods, but, as I mentioned in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, it demands before all else an appreciation of the immense dignity of the poor in the light of our deepest convictions as believers. We need only look around us to see that, today, this option is in fact an ethical imperative essential for effectively attaining the common good. (158)

Politics and economics must serve life:

Politics must not be subject to the economy, nor should the economy be subject to the dictates of an efficiency-driven paradigm of technocracy. Today, in view of the common good, there is urgent need for politics and economics to enter into a frank dialogue in the service of

life, especially human life. Saving banks at any cost, making the public pay the price, foregoing a firm commitment to reviewing and reforming the entire system, only reaffirms the absolute power of a financial system, a power which has no future and will only give rise to new crises after a slow, costly and only apparent recovery. The financial crisis of 2007-08 provided an opportunity to develop a new economy, more attentive to ethical principles, and new ways of regulating speculative financial practices and virtual wealth. But the response to the crisis did not include rethinking the outdated criteria which continue to rule the world. (189)

Ecological education:

Political institutions and various other social groups are also entrusted with helping to raise people's awareness. So too is the Church. All Christian communities have an important role to play in ecological education. It is my hope that our seminaries and houses of formation will provide an education in responsible simplicity of life, in grateful contemplation of God's world, and in concern for the needs of the poor and the protection of the environment. (214)

Need for ecological conversion:

"The external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast". For this reason, the ecological crisis is also a summons to profound interior conversion. It must be said that some committed and prayerful Christians, with the excuse of realism and pragmatism, tend to ridicule expressions of concern for the environment. Others are passive; they choose not to change their habits and thus become inconsistent. So what they all need is an "ecological conversion", whereby the effects of their encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them. Living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience. (217)

Love is political:

Love, overflowing with small gestures of mutual care, is also civic and political, and it makes itself felt in every action that seeks to build a better world. Love for society and commitment to the common good are outstanding expressions of a charity which affects not only relationships between individuals but also "macro-relationships, social, economic and political ones". That is why the Church set before the world the ideal of a "civilization of love". Social love is the key to authentic development: "In order to make society more human, more worthy of the human person, love in social life – political, economic and cultural – must be given renewed value, becoming the constant and highest norm for all activity". In this framework, along with the importance of little everyday gestures, social love moves us to devise larger strategies to halt environmental degradation and to encourage a "culture of care" which permeates all of society. (231)

Suggested Resources

United Workers and Free Your Voice:

Organizational Websites

<http://www.unitedworkers.org/>

<https://stoptheincinerator.wordpress.com/>

Presentations and Videos

“Stop the Incinerator PowerPoint”

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/15c47LA48h12KNHwGN-_JaXZQzUqwSuvlhQi7DSBap-E/edit?pli=1#slide=id.p15

“Free Your Voice”

<https://vimeo.com/74501368>

“Brooklyn and Curtis Bay residents speak out on the incinerator!”

<https://vimeo.com/104261316>

“A privately owned trash incinerator is being planned for the South Baltimore neighborhood of Curtis Bay”

<http://www.citypaper.com/videogallery/82836822/News/A-privately-owned-trash-incinerator-is-being-planned-for-the-South-Baltimore-neighborhood-of-Curtis-Bay>

Laudato Si’:

Downloadable .PDF of English Text

http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html

Commentary

“How to Read Pope Francis on the Environment”

<http://www.cfr.org/vaticanholy-see/read-pope-francis-environment/p36665>

“The Magna Carta of Integral Ecology: Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor”

<http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/content/articles/1149/1/Article-by-Leonardo-Boff-on-the-Popes-Encyclical/Page1.html>

“Ten Key Excerpts from Pope Francis’s Encyclical on the Environment”

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2015/06/18/10-key-excerpts-from-pope-franciss-encyclical-on-the-environment/>