



Laudato si'

On Care for Our Common Home

Activities with Children for a Better World

In his encyclical letter, *Laudato si': On Care for Our Common Home*, Pope Francis urges us to be aware of the environment and some of the problems faced by humans on our common home, the Earth. Numerous challenges are raised in the encyclical, and finding workable solutions can seem difficult to achieve. Yet there are many practical things that can be done to raise awareness of the problems and begin to work on solutions. Here are a few ideas that can be used in a classroom setting or with children in the home.

Water

Pope Francis talks about the lack of quality water available to the poor (paragraphs 29-31). Although most people in the United States have ready access to clean water, some regions of the country have experienced the problem of drought in recent years. The study of water is a project that could include many disciplines or cross-curricular opportunities.

- **Science:** study the process for purification of water and the modern technology that can make clean drinking water available to all. Research the new technology of tablets that can be mixed with any water, and the water will become pure to drink.
- **Social Studies:** learn about the nations and countries that struggle to have pure, fresh, drinking water for their people. Discover the root causes of these problems.
- **History:** learn about the company that provides water in your city or area. Often this is a municipal water company that was started because there was no safe water available for its citizens.
- **Field trip:** visit a local water purification system plant.
- **Religion:** based on Pope Francis' challenge to us, brainstorm actions that might be taken to address shortages of water and open access to clean and safe water. Look into ways that your class might be able to help provide safe drinking water for a village that does not have clean water now. For example, there are organizations where a group may donate funds to provide a simple water purification system.





Endangered Animals

In paragraphs 32-42 of *Laudato si'*, Pope Francis talks about the loss of biodiversity, saying, "Because of us, thousands of species will no longer give glory to God by their very existence" (33). The study of endangered animals is another project that can incorporate many disciplines.

- **Science:** research and report on various animal species that are becoming extinct. Focus on the impact this will have on the environment. Formulate responses to the question of what will happen if these animals are no longer on the planet.
 - ❖ **Create a zoo** of stuffed animals that would represent these endangered species. A visual can have a great impact when we see the large number of animal species that may soon be extinct.
 - ❖ **Invite a local zoo educational team** or veterinarian to provide a presentation on endangered species, and the impact this is having on the Earth.
- **Religion:** brainstorm practical actions that can be taken to address the problem of endangered animals. The Nature Conservancy, the Sierra Club, the Heifer Project, and the World Wildlife Fund are a few of the national organizations that provide practical ways to help save endangered species.





Recycle

Many of the problems that we face are “closely linked to a throwaway culture” (22). This is one area that people are already aware of, and many families regularly recycle. But there is still more that can be done.

- **Language Arts:** remind your class about the slogan, “reduce, reuse, recycle.” Invite them to find ways to remind your local community about the slogan and practical ways to reduce, reuse, and recycle. Many people recycle paper and other plastic products. Some municipal areas even have curbside collection, recycling of household items. Develop a list of ideas that could be distributed to the other children in your school or religious education classes, families, and parishioners.
 - ❖ **Encourage** people to recycle larger items, computers and electronic devices, metal appliances, and so on. Find and list places in your area where people can recycle. Be sure to add this to your list of ideas to share with others in the local community.
- **Science:** recycle clothes by sending them to a re-sale store or giving them to a clothing drive. Remember that “unwearable” clothing can also be recycled — the cloth and material can be turned into other items.
 - ❖ **Research and report** on what happens to products that are recycled. What are some of the “second lives” of recycled paper, plastic, metal, and cloth?
- **Field trip:** visit a recycling center or have a presentation on recycling.
- **Religion:** divide the class into small groups and have them discuss why reducing, reusing, and recycling help to address the concern about being a throwaway culture. Ask each group to report on their discussion.



Consumerism

Pope Francis gives hope to and challenges us toward a new lifestyle in chapter 6 of the encyclical. Consumerism is one aspect of the throwaway culture that we need to change if we are going to be responsible stewards of the Earth and our environment (203).

- **Social Studies:** help children become aware of the drive for consumerism and the need to always have the newest and biggest, and best.
- **Language Arts:** watch two or three commercials with the children and have them analyze what is really being said. Is the commercial simply making you aware of a new product, or does the commercial entice you to think the product is indispensable and you cannot live without it? Does the ad make unrealistic promises or divert your attention to something else?
 - ❖ **Watch a selected television show** and analyze whether or not the show is also feeding into the belief that you must always have the biggest and newest of everything.
- **Religion:** the concept of consumerism can be difficult for children to understand; remember to keep a balance. The purpose of becoming aware of consumerism is to help children see the tension between the drive to always have more and our call to live as disciples of Jesus. Reflect on Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount using the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12). Stress the importance of the blessings that we have and why they are key to building the Kingdom of God. Emphasize how it is what we do, not what we have, that makes us blessed in the eyes of God.



Build a World to Give Our Children

Pope Francis poses a powerful question: “What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?” (160). This may be a question for parents and adults, but one is never too young to consider the world of the future.

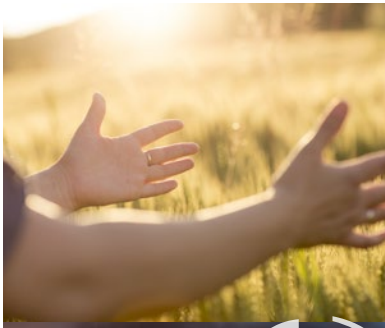
- **Language Arts and Religion:** encourage the children to imagine a future world, perhaps with the help of a science fiction book or movie that depicts the future. Invite the class or children to describe a realistic Christian view of what the future world could look like, and help them to create this world using the guidelines of Catholic Social Teaching.
- **Social Studies and Religion:** brainstorm a list of what is needed to create a healthy and sustainable future world. Lists could be created in categories of various needs — housing, food, education, clothing, health care, and so on. Include other areas, such as quality of life, Church, prayer, faith, and socialization.
- **Language Arts:** have the class write a story that describes what the future world of their children will look like. Various small groups could write a different chapter using each of the needs from the brainstorm list. Create their story of what the world will be like that they want to give to their children.
 - ❖ **Write and perform** a skit depicting life in the future. It can also be fun to make a video of the skits performed by the children.
- **Visual Arts:** draw a large mural of the future world. Be sure to include visible signs that we are living as children of God.



Dignity of All Human People

In chapter 2, Pope Francis reminds us that creation is for everyone. “The rich and the poor have equal dignity” (94).

- **Role-model:** speak to children and all people with great respect and dignity. Help the children be aware of the subtle ways that people can treat others without dignity. Ask the class to problem-solve two or three ways to address an attack on their dignity, or on that of others.
- **Social Studies:** make a list of the many people each of us encounters throughout a day or a week. Who are these people? What do they do? What do you consider their state or position in society?
 - ❖ **List** some of the ethnic groups and nationalities present in the world today. Does what we say about other people throughout the world show that we respect them?
- **Religion:** emphasize that all people deserve to be treated with dignity because they are human beings created in the image and likeness of God. No matter what their job or position in life, all people deserve to be treated with dignity.
 - ❖ **Challenge children** to say three nice things to people with whom they may not normally converse. Do they speak kindly to the driver on their school bus, the store clerks when they are out shopping, the janitors or cleaning people in their school or parish?
 - ❖ **Create a poster or mural** with pictures of people from every country, continent, and nation of the world. List the positive attributes and ways each nationality contributes to the world.
 - ❖ **Remind the children** again that all people in the world are created in the image of God, and that each and every one of us deserves to be treated with dignity because we are God’s children.



Gratitude

The encyclical *Laudato si'* calls us to always be thankful to a good and gracious God who gave us this wonderful Earth and universe.

- **Religion and Language Arts:** create an attitude of gratitude book.
 - ❖ **Invite the children** to look for the small, daily ways in which God blesses our lives. It is easy to be thankful for the big things; be thankful for God's gifts, whether big or small.
 - ❖ **Write in the book** three things that you are thankful for each day.
 - ❖ **Constantly give thanks and praise** to God. Use a Scripture verse at the end of the book that gives thanks and praise to God. You may want to choose from one of the following or invite the children to find one of their own.

**Give thanks to the LORD, who is good,
whose love endures forever. (1 Chronicles 16:34)**

**I will sing to the LORD all my life;
I will sing praise to my God while I live. (Psalm 104:33)**

**For I will proclaim the name of the LORD,
praise the greatness of our God! (Deuteronomy 32:3)**

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

*Excerpt from A Christian Prayer in Union with Creation,
Laudato si'*



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