

LENT 2024: NURTURING OUR FAMILY FAITH IN NATURE

A Resource for Families and Family Parish Groups



Trocaire
TOGETHER FOR A JUST WORLD

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ABOUT TRÓCAIRE

Trócaire was created as a response to the widening gap between rich and poor and our collective duty to reduce it. Trócaire is rooted in the principles of Catholic social teaching, which are based on the belief that God has a plan for creation, a plan to build his kingdom of peace, love and justice. In the words of Trócaire's founding document, in which the bishops of Ireland gave the organisation a strong and clear mandate, 'We know that we cannot claim to love God if we do not love our fellow men and women.'

Trócaire has worked through local partner organisations since its foundation. Partnership is at the heart of how Trócaire works. We work with local faith- and non-faith-based organisations who share our values and who are working on any,

or all, of our core programme areas of women's empowerment, resource rights and humanitarian preparedness and response. These organisations understand the needs of their communities and are best placed to work with communities to deliver sustainable long-term change.

In the founding document the bishops of Ireland asked Trócaire to educate the people of Ireland on development issues. Now as we listen to the earth's cry, as asked of us by Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'* and *Laudate Deum* and by the communities with whom we work, our hope is for all God's creation to 'let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream' (Amos 5:24).

WHAT IS THIS RESOURCE?

This resource is to help families and family Mass groups to explore some of the issues in Pope Francis' letter on caring for our common home. In 2015 Pope Francis wrote a letter to 'every person living on this planet'. He called this letter *Laudato Si'*, which means 'Praised Be'. In it he offers us an opportunity to reflect on what is happening to our world, to listen to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor. He invites us to see how God is present throughout all of creation. Pope Francis calls on each of us to think about how the environmental crisis is affecting the poorest of our sisters and brothers across the world.

In 2023 Pope Francis wrote another document called *Laudate Deum* ('Praise God'). He felt he

needed to write to all 'people of good will' once more because so little progress has been made in addressing the climate and biodiversity crises. He urges world leaders in particular to make the urgent changes that are needed to safeguard our common home. He calls for new forms of clean energy and the cooperation of everyone to bring about lasting change.

This resource uses reflections from both documents, *Laudato Si'* and *Laudate Deum*, as well as scripture and images to explore the issues in depth. We wish to thank the writers of *Hello, Sister Bee*, who allowed us to use some of their work.*

HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

In this resource we invite you to gather as a family to look closer at climate justice, *Laudato Si'*, *Laudate Deum* and our faith. There are four sessions, which can be done in a family home or in a parish with families in small groups. We will look at some images, teachings and discover how we can move our faith into action.

A family can be many different things to different people. We invite you to create your parish family. We invite you to think about the groups you are

in; for example, family, parish, classroom, friends, grandparents and grandchildren, youth group, altar servers' group, Sunday school. This material is suitable for all those groups and more.

Sessions should last about 60 minutes. Feel free to pick and choose sections within these sessions for the age group you are working with. You do not have to follow every session exactly as it is laid out.

*You can buy a copy of *Hello, Sister Bee* from the Knock bookshop: <https://www.knockshrine.ie/product/hello-sister-bee-laudato-si-retold-for-children/>

SESSION ONE: RETURN TO NATURE

Step One

Look at the photo of this beautiful place. Ask everyone in your group to share what they think of when they look at it. Then ask everyone to think of a place in the natural world where they like to go, preferably somewhere local to them.

Discuss some of the following questions:

- Where is the place you have chosen?



- Why do you like it?
- What is it about this place that is special to you?
- What do you experience when you are there? What do you smell, see, touch, feel or hear?
- How do you feel when you are there?
- When do you go there?
- Is the place well looked after?

Step Two: What Does Our Faith Say?

Does our faith have anything to say about the place we have just reflected upon? Ask the group to write their thoughts on sticky notes and put them on the wall. Everyone sees and hears things in different ways so it is good to see other people's opinions.

Scripture God Made the World

Long ago, at the beginning of time, God said, 'Let there be Light,' and bright light shone in the



darkness. God said, 'Let there be land and sea,' and land filled with mountains appeared, surrounded by deep water. God said, 'Let there be trees and plants, sun, moon and stars,' and the plants produced fruit in the sunshine and were cool under the moon and stars.



God said, 'Let there be fish and winged creatures,' and the sea teemed with fish and the sky was filled with birds and butterflies.

God said, 'Let there be all kinds of animals,' and tigers padded and antelopes galloped over the land.

God said, 'Let there be people to look after my beautiful world,' and there were, male and female.

God saw that his world was good, and God rested.

(Taken from *The Christening Bible Stories* by Lizzie Ribbons)

Laudato Si'

When we can see God reflected in all that exists, our hearts are moved to praise the Lord for all his creatures and to worship him in union with them. (LS, 87)

Laudate Deum

'Praise God for all his creatures.' This was the message that Saint Francis of Assisi proclaimed by his life, his canticles and all his actions. In this way, he accepted the invitation of the biblical Psalms and reflected the sensitivity of Jesus before the creatures of his Father: 'Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these' (Mt 6:28-29). 'Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten in God's sight' (Lk 12:6). How can we not admire this tenderness of Jesus for all the beings that accompany us along the way! (LD, 1)

Step Three: Making Connections



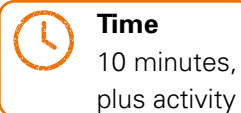
Start a discussion drawing on your favourite place. Use these questions to help:

- How do you experience God in this place?
- How might God play or rest there?

- Can you make any links between the reflections and your favourite place?
- Do you think God cares about your favourite space?
- Do you ever talk to God about nature or in nature?

Step Four: Action

Prayer Hymn of Saint Francis of Assisi



Praised be you, my Lord, with all your creatures, especially Sir Brother Sun, who is the day and through whom you give us light.

And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendour;

and bears a likeness of you, Most High.

Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars,

in heaven you formed them clear and precious and beautiful.

Praised be you, my Lord, through Brother Wind, and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather through whom you give sustenance to your creatures.

Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Water, who is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.

Praised be you, my Lord, through Brother Fire, through whom you light the night, and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong. (*Laudato Si'*, 64)

Family Action

Go to a park, garden or a favourite place of someone in your group. Find a symbol of God's creation that speaks to you. Reflect on what this means with your group. If you are unable to go outside during the session, set aside time to do this during the week.

Look at the detail of the symbol you have chosen. Is there a word or phrase that comes to mind as you reflect on it? Share that word or phrase with your group.

SESSION TWO: A UNIVERSAL FAMILY

Step One

In our world today, it is not fair that some people should have everything and others should have nothing. Pope Francis calls us to remember that we are all connected and invites us to live wisely, think deeply and love generously (*Laudato Si'*, 47). We do this when communities come together to care for creation and for those most affected by climate injustice.



Time
10 minutes

As a family, talk about your neighbours. Do you know them? When is the last time you spoke to your neighbour? Could you imagine that different people all around the world are your neighbour and could become your friend?

Do you ever think of nature or mother earth as your neighbour? Someone you need to protect and spend time with?

Step Two: What Does Our Faith Say?

Scripture

The Story of the Good Samaritan

'How can I show God that I love him?' a man asked Jesus.

'Love God and love other people as much as you love yourself,' Jesus replied. 'Listen: there was a man who'd been walking along a lonely road when he was attacked and robbed. The man lay by the side of the road, hurting all over. He couldn't even open his eyes. Then the man heard footsteps coming nearer ... and then going away, on the other side of the road. Later the man heard more footsteps coming nearer ... and then going away, on the other side of the road. Then the man heard clippetty-clop, clippetty-clop, a man on a donkey from another country,



Time
20 minutes



a stranger, a Samaritan! But the stranger did not walk away. He cleaned the man's wounds, helped him onto his donkey and took him to an inn to get better. Although he had been a stranger, the Samaritan had looked after the wounded man – he really cared about him.' (Taken from *The Christening Bible Stories* by Lizzie Ribbons)

Laudato Si'

Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth. (LS, 92)

A Daisy in the Field

It's a beautiful day. Mum and Dad bring the children to visit their grandparents who live in the country. The two children always love to visit their grandparents, who cuddle them and play wonderful games with them.

'It's springtime now and the flowers are in bud,' said Grandma as they stroll toward the vegetable garden, walking on the fresh, soft grass.

'It feels like we are walking on carpet,' says Clara.

'Exactly,' answers grandmother.

The two children happily run along the rows of vegetables. Soon they hear their grandma calling: 'Come here, I can see a daisy!'

The children run quickly and arrive out of breath. 'How beautiful!' they exclaim together.

'I'll take it,' said Thomas.

'No, I'll talk it,' protests Clara.

'Listen children,' says Grandma, 'what do you say if we leave the daisy where it is? If Grandad

passes by, he too will be happy to see it. Flowers should remain where they are planted, close to their friends. They have so many friends who come to find them, especially bees.'

'Did Saint Francis also call flowers brothers and sisters?'

'He certainly did,' answered Grandma.

'In that case, goodbye, Sister Daisy!' said the two children as they ran on the soft grass. (Taken from *Hello, Sister Bee* by Luigi Ferrareso and Fabrizio Zubani)

Laudate Deum

What happens in one part of the world has repercussions on the entire planet. This allows me to reiterate two convictions that I repeat over and over again: 'Everything is connected' and 'No one is saved alone'. (LD, 19)

Step Three: Making Connections



Choose one of the following activities to do with your group.

- 1) Think of a tree in your neighbourhood. Did you know that a mature tree has approximately fifty thousand leaves? Each of those leaves give off water vapour on a daily basis. Where does this water vapour go? It might go into a river or stream; it might end up in your morning shower or in your cup of tea; it might be in your glass of water. It may even be used in a baptism. Your body is made of 70 per cent water. The earth is also 70 per cent water. We are deeply connected to all of creation.
- 2) Draw one huge tree in chalk on the concrete in a car park or large area outside, or in marker on a large sheet of paper inside. Give everyone the same colour chalk (or marker).

Ask everyone to add their human connections – people connected to family, to fun, friends, sports, church – as leaves to the tree (up to twenty each). Then give everyone chalk (or a marker) in a different colour and ask them to add animals, birds or insects to which they are connected. Allow people to talk about pets, about growing up on farms, about their favourite species. It all reveals and engages us. Give everyone chalk (or a marker) in a third colour to add plants, flowers, trees or places they feel connected to or inspired by.

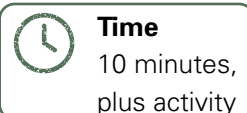


Sit around your creation and reread the quotes about connection. Ask the following questions:

- Who is my neighbour in God's world?
- Who am I asked to love and respect?

Step Four: Action Prayer: A Prayer for Our Earth

O God of the poor,
help us to rescue the abandoned and
forgotten of this earth,
so precious in your eyes.
Bring healing to our lives,
that we may protect the earth and not prey on it,
that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction.
(*Laudato Si'*, 246)



Family Action

Take an energy walk around your area. Look at what your neighbours and communities are doing to address the climate crisis. Can you notice solar panels or wind turbines in your community? Is there anything else you can see?

SESSION THREE: WE WERE MADE FOR LOVE

Step One

Discuss these questions in your group:



Time
10 minutes

- What did you learn from the last two sessions?
- What inspired or challenged you?
- What do you feel connected to now? How do you feel about that?

We are going to look at our circle of influence. You can use the template on page 9 or draw three big circles on a blank page.

When an issue is very difficult it can be hard to know what to do, especially when we are trying to do the right thing. Using the template on page 9, complete your circle of influence. You can do this as a group or individually.

Step Two: What Does Our Faith Say?



Time
20 minutes

Scripture

The Holy Spirit Helps

God helped Peter and John and his other friends to be bold and brave.

Peter spoke to all the crowds of people.

'Jesus is God's Son,' said Peter. 'He loves you and died for you. He is Lord of all the world. He is King of the whole earth. Stop doing bad things. Tell him you are sorry. He will forgive you.'

A lot of people listened to Peter. They learned about God together. They prayed to God and praised him together. They had meals together. They cared and shared together.

God helped them heal people who were ill, just as Jesus had done. Jesus' friends weren't afraid



any more. They knew that God was always with them, although he was invisible, like the wind. (Taken from *The Christening Bible Stories* by Lizzie Ribbons)

Laudato Si'

Saint Thérèse of Lisieux invites us to practise the little way of love, not to miss out on a kind word, a smile or any small gesture which sows peace and friendship ... simple daily gestures which break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness. (LS, 230)

Love, overflowing with small gestures of mutual care ... makes itself felt in every action that seeks to build a better world. (LS, 231)

Laudate Deum

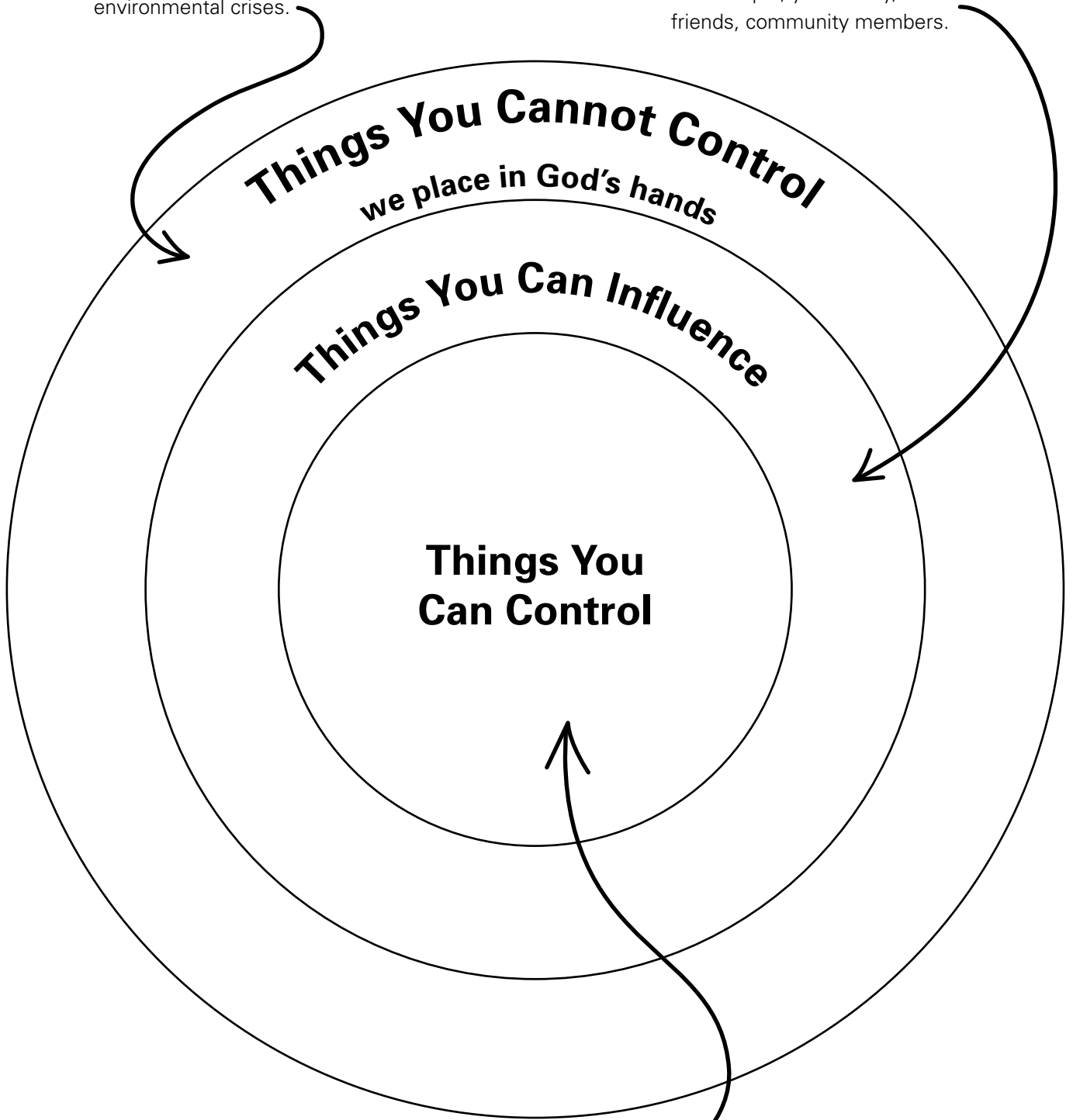
'The very flowers of the field and the birds which [Jesus'] human eyes contemplated and admired are now imbued with his radiant presence' ... The world sings of an infinite Love: how can we fail to care for it? (LD, 65)

Circle of Concern

In this circle, write all of the things you are worried about in relation to the environmental crises.

Circle of Influence

In this circle, write all of the networks of people you know; for example, your family, friends, community members.



Circle of Control

In this circle, write the things over which you have control; what can you realistically do or achieve based on the information in the previous two circles?



Step Three: Making Connections



Time
20 minutes

What would our daily lives look like if we lived like we believe that everything is connected and we wanted to care for all things with love?

Let's use actions instead of words! As a group, come up with examples of how to be kind to and respectful of our brothers and sisters in creation.

Then in pairs, take 10 minutes to choose one example and create a role play based on it. Decide on a title for your role play – for example, 'We Care for Our Common Home when We xxxx' – and on one quote or symbol from the last sessions that ties in with the role play.

Step Four: Action



Time
10 minutes,
plus activity

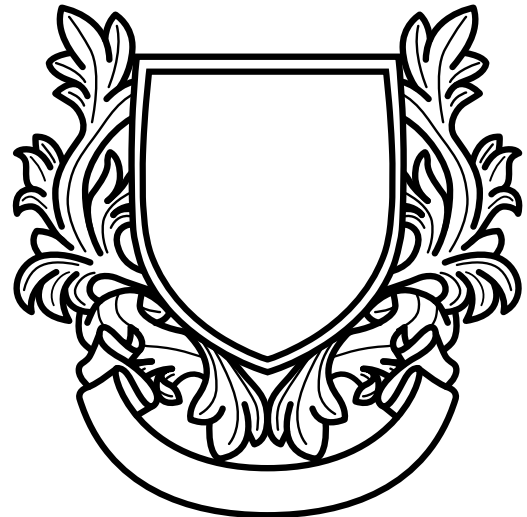
Prayer

Living God,
have mercy on us,
for the times we forget
that we belong to each other.
You call us to be still,
to hear the whisper of our Sister Wind,
to feel the radiance of our Brother Sun,
to be nourished by our Mother Earth.
Renew us in your healing love.
Inspire us to water the earth,
and nurture one another,
so, all may flourish. (Rachel McCarthy/
CAFOD)

Family Action

Write your own family motto. Use what we have explored in this session to inspire you; keep acts of daily love at the heart of your motto. Design your own family crest, linking in with your circle of influence.

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis asks us to return to the practice of prayer before meals: 'I ask all believers to return to this beautiful and meaningful custom. That moment of blessing, however brief, reminds us of our dependence on God for life; it strengthens our feeling of gratitude for the gifts of creation; it acknowledges those who by their labours provide us with these goods; and it reaffirms our solidarity with those in greatest need' (LS, 227). Here is a prayer before meals that you could use in your daily family life:



Loving God, we ask you to bless this food which comes to us through the work of many people, from the sowing of seeds in the earth to our table here today. Help us to always care for Your beautiful creation. Amen.


SESSION FOUR: FAITH IN CLIMATE ACTION



Dublin climate strikes, September 2019.
Photo credit: Garry Walsh, Trócaire

Step One

Let's start with a game.


Time
10 minutes

Take a minute to individually write down all of the actions we do in our parish, community, homes and workplaces to help with the environment. Then as a group let's meditate on these words.

Share the following reflection with the group:

When you were first created, you were just a single cell, a mere pinpoint of life, barely visible to the naked eye but packed full of the potential for everything you would ever become, every action, choice

and relationship. You are just a drop in the ocean, but without you the ocean will not become the ocean. You are just a grain of sand, but you are a grain of sand that tips the scales. You are just a drop of dew that soaks into the earth and is gone by noon, but that drop of dew brings life to the seed that grows in the earth. You are only one, but the power of one is greater than you dare to dream. One is not nothing. One makes a difference. Your choices can tip the scales of humanity a little bit toward goodness and truth, if that is your desire.

Step Two: What Does Our Faith Say?

 **Time**
20 minutes

Scripture

Paul Writes Thank-You Letters

Paul wrote letters to Christians in some of the places he had visited. He wrote to tell them that he often thought about them and asked God to look after them. He wrote to thank them for making him welcome.

He wrote to tell them that God loved them so much that he had sent Jesus to help them.

He wrote to remind them that all people – even Paul himself – were in need of God’s forgiveness. No one was perfect.

He wrote to remind them to love God, not just today but every day.

He wrote to remind them to be kind to each other, and to share what they had with other people. (Taken from *The Christening Bible Stories* by Lizzie Ribbons)

Laudato Si’

What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up? (LS, 160)

Butterflies Danced Here

After lunch, Dad, Mum, Clare and Thomas went for a walk. ‘Today I’ll show you where I used to play ball with my friends,’ said Dad.

‘And where my friends and I used to chase after the many beautiful butterflies,’ added Mum.

After walking for a while, the parents stopped and said, ‘Here we are! We’ve arrived.’

‘Arrived where?’ asked Thomas. ‘This is an apartment block where my friend John lives.’

‘Yes,’ answered their father, ‘but when we were growing up this was a great big plot of land. We played football here, without a referee and



without a proper field. There were no changing rooms, either. There was only a ball and lots of happy children.’

And Mum added: ‘And we used to play on the other side of the field, where there is now a coffee shop and a newspaper stand. The game we liked best was to chase butterflies and to look for the most beautiful ones, the ones with striking colours.’

‘And then?’ asked the two children.

‘One afternoon,’ recalled Dad, ‘we arrived here for our usual ball game, and we saw that the field had been closed off. Johnny threw the ball inside the fence and ran off.’

‘The same thing happened to us,’ said Mum. ‘We came to look for butterflies, and they had flown away.’

The two children listened in silence. Then Clara cried out excitedly: ‘Look, Mum, a butterfly. It is certainly one of yours. Look, Mum and Dad, there’s an old, ripped ball in that hole. Is it yours?’

Their father and mother did not say anything because they were thinking of the past. They held hands and kept walking along.

Then Thomas broke the silence and said, ‘At least they could have left you a patch of land to play ball.’

And Clara added, ‘I like butterflies, but now we can find them only when we visit our grandparents.’ Then she greeted the butterfly fluttering between the buildings: ‘Hello, Sister Butterfly.’ (Taken from *Hello, Sister Bee* by Luigi Ferrarese and Fabrizio Zubani)

Laudate Deum

Efforts by households to reduce pollution and waste, and to consume with prudence, are creating a new culture. The mere fact that personal, family and community habits are changing is contributing to greater concern ... [a] transformation rising from deep within society. (LD, 71)

Step Three: Making Connections



Being a person of faith means acting for a better world. We call this action 'social justice'. Did you know this? As a group, discuss ways in which we can act to help take care of God's creation.

Watch the *Laudato Si'* **Primary** animation then discuss these questions as a group:

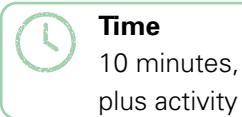
- Does the video include any of the ideas you mentioned in your group discussion?
- Did you get any new ideas from the video?



- In session three, we discussed our favourite places and our circle of influence. Is the information in this video related to these things in any way?

Step Four: Action

Prayer A Prayer for Our Earth



All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe
and in the smallest of your creatures.
You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.

Pour out upon us the power of your love,
that we may protect life and beauty.

Fill us with peace, that we may live
as brothers and sisters, harming no one.

O God of the poor,
help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten
of this earth,
so precious in your eyes.
Bring healing to our lives,

that we may protect the world and not prey on it,

that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction.

Touch the hearts
of those who look only for gain
at the expense of the poor and the earth.
Teach us to discover the worth of each thing,
to be filled with awe and contemplation,
to recognise that we are profoundly united
with every creature
as we journey towards your infinite light.
We thank you for being with us each day.
Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle
for justice, love and peace.

Amen.

(*Laudato Si'*, 246)

Family Action

Well done! You have reached the end of our four sessions.

Name one thing that inspired you and one thing you learned here.

We invite you to do a movie night to watch *The Letter: A Message for Our Earth*, Pope Francis' film, which you can download here: [https://](https://theletterfilm.org)

theletterfilm.org. The film is for children over twelve.

You could also start to plant a garden together at home or in your parish. The Irish bishops have asked parishes to come together to return some ground to nature. You can get some help here:

<https://www.catholicbishops.ie/laudato-si/returning-to-nature/>

Laudate Deum! Praise God!

TRÓCAIRE IS THE OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT AGENCY OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN IRELAND

More resources, photos and videos are available at:
trocaire.org/our-work/working-in-ireland/parishes

Cover photo: Machinga district, Malawi.
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Resources by Anna Keegan (Trócaire), Jane Mellett
(Trócaire) and Noirin Lynch (FCJ Spirituality House).

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