Laudato Si’
Caring for Creation and future generations
Five years ago, Pope Francis called out to the world to heed the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor. The encyclical letter Laudato Si’: On care for our common home proposed a unified vision of the crises facing our planet and its creatures, including us humans.

As Churches marked the fifth anniversary of the encyclical in May, the COVID-19 pandemic had already claimed over 300,000 deaths worldwide. Our interdependence was glaringly evident. “Everything is interconnected” is the leitmotiv of Laudato Si’. We have seen how the pandemic disproportionately affected elderly, lay or consecrated. It also particularly impacted racialized minorities, migrants and refugees, the homeless and the poor – while many in those groups, notably women, also composed the frontline workers in healthcare, essential services, and held the fort while homeschooling and teleworking.

It should be painfully obvious that we need urgent change. Never again can we subdue our common home to benefit individualistic consumerism and neoliberal ideologies. We need to advocate for the common destination of goods and for an economy of communion, with consistent environmental policies.

The journey to understanding and enacting an integral ecology is before us. The Dicastery for promoting human development is rolling out a seven-year plan towards sustainable communities and institutions. In Canada, Churches, religious communities and faith organizations are uniting under the banner of the “For the Love of Creation” campaign.

In this issue of ad vitam, our contributors renew their outlook on Laudato Si’ and current issues. We also welcome testimonies and reflections from religious communities and their collaborators.

Consecrated life communities have been at the forefront of this movement years before Laudato Si’. Their voice must continue to be prophetic in the public square and in our own Catholic Church, to call for a just ecological transition. This is our kairos moment. Here we are, Lord. Praise be to You!

Sabrina Di Matteo, Executive Assistant - Mission, Canadian Religious Conference
Indigenous Peoples facing Pandemic and Promise

Sr. Patricia Solomon, CSJ

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 (Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, Encyclical on Care for our Common Home, no. 13). And change they have!

Pope Francis expressed the above challenge in his historic encyclical letter, *Laudato Si’*, in which he articulates his vision for a global conversion and transformation of human participation in the life-community of our planet, our Mother Earth. At that time, he did not envision the presence and the effect of a life-threatening microscopic virus: COVID-19.

Yet, we are now making a concerted global effort to mitigate the effects and protect against this deadly virus. Medical researchers around the world are engaging more cooperatively. Some governments, including Canada’s, are engaging more directly and in multiple ways with the people whom they govern. Interspersed with such dreaded words as tested positive and the total death-count, are flattening
One of the societal failures that we now see more clearly is the vulnerability and the economic and social neglect of the elderly, of the poor and of Indigenous peoples.

The urgency of the challenge Pope Francis named has not lessened; rather, it has increased. We are confronted with the truth so clearly expressed by liberation theologians, Pope Francis, and some of his predecessors that the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor are one and the same. This is clear in Pope Francis’ words: “The human environment and the natural environment deteriorate together; we cannot adequately combat environmental degradation unless we attend to the causes related to human and social degradation” (*Laudato Si*, no. 48).

In the post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Querida Amazonia*, he writes: “For though it is true that the Amazon is facing an ecological disaster, it also has to be made clear 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’ (*Querida Amazonia*, no. 8). This is the Gospel call to justice today.

**Unheard cries of the poor**

One of the societal failures that we now see more clearly is the vulnerability and the economic and social neglect of the elderly, of the poor and of Indigenous peoples. We haven’t really heard the cry of these poor. The earth has long cried for clean water and unpolluted skies; for reprieve from our onslaught. Respite is happening in some little ways now, but not enough to prevent radical climate change. We have yet to see how the social justice dimensions will change. Certainly, there is greater awareness of vulnerable peoples but the necessary transformation still needs to happen. We cannot go back to ‘business as usual’. Nor would Pope Francis want us to do so!

For the past 20-plus years, Indigenous peoples globally have been publicly challenging the nations of the world to recognize that the earth and humans are interdependent and intimately connected. Though deeply impacted and disadvantaged by the processes of colonization, Indigenous Peoples have insisted that we humans have a great responsibility to care for the earth of which we are an interdependent part, and to acknowledge by our actions that we are grateful for the ways in which Our Mother Earth as cared for us. The reciprocal relationship of Indigenous peoples with the earth is expressed in the introductory Joint Statement on Implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. In addition, numerous articles of the document highlight the relationship between land, Indigenous culture and justice1.

In *Laudato Si* (no. 146) and the final document of the Amazonian synod (no. 9), synod participants and Pope Francis speak of the need to dialogue with Indigenous peoples and to understand and learn from their approach to good living.

Their approach most certainly involves a vision that does not relentlessly deplete the earth or violate its integrity or that of other forms earth life, as does our current globalized neocolonial
consumerist and extractive lifestyle. Rather, it sees the earth as sacred gift from its Creator.

**Indigenous vision and calls to conversion**

Indigenous leaders in Canada know well the vulnerability of their people who live with inadequate and over-crowded housing, lack of potable water, major health issues, limited or no access to medical services and resources, challenges of transportation, unemployment, and limited, unrealistically-priced food supplies. As in previous epidemic instances, the elderly and those with compromised health are at the greatest risk. The leaders are taking responsibility for protecting their people in this crisis. They’ve cancelled all communal gatherings, limited access to their communities and sought funds for medical needs specifically related to COVID-19. As of April 25, 2020 there were 88 cases of COVID-19 and one death identified in Indigenous communities on Reserves in Canada. Indigenous people, living off-reserve would be included in the provincial counts, and thus not specifically identified.

Indigenous organizations and leaders in Amazonia took early measures to educate and protect their people about the pandemic. We know that Indigenous peoples in colonized countries around the globe know the devastation caused by epidemics in the past. In this current pandemic historical memory, the virus, the struggle to decolonize, and the reality of global warming and a climate crisis all come together. They are the challenge facing us. Where and what is the promise we face?

I find this promise in the vision of *Laudato Si’* which I see as an expression of Pope Francis’ ability to “Think globally”. I see the *Synod on the Amazon* as an expression of “Act locally”, since he focuses on one specific vital biome. His subsequent apostolic exhortation *Querida Amazonia* highlights the need for relationships of love with the land and its peoples. It is a clear call to conversion reminding us that the power of faith and love are what will transform us.

All three of these documents call us to conversion. “Conversion (…) is the common thread running through the final document of the Pan-Amazon Synod. Conversion is expressed with different accents: integral, pastoral, cultural, ecological, and synodal” (Vatican News). Another key message, expressed in *Querida Amazonia* (no. 6) is that of incarnation, specifically focused on the way in which the Church is being called to live and act in very concrete, localized and integral ways.

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**Sr. Priscilla Solomon, CSJ, during a smudging ceremony** *(ourladyofguadalupecircle.ca)*.
Could this reveal the ‘new normal’ to which we are called? Are we called in our daily living to be a Church and a people converted to God’s way of seeing and relating to Creation and all life in this shared home?

In *Laudato Si’* (no. 10), Pope Francis speaks of St. Francis, his inspiration for integral ecology. He says: “He was particularly concerned for God’s creation and for the poor and outcast. (...) He was a mystic and a pilgrim who lived in simplicity and in wonderful harmony with God and with others, with nature, and with himself. He shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society and interior peace.”

For me, this describes ‘integral ecology’ and reminds me that we need both prayer and action in order to live in this way. For many of us, our ability to engage in this call appears limited. However it is not, if we recognize in it a call to deepen our prayer life and if we realize the power of witness and prayer. In his April 30th homily, Pope Francis spoke of the power of “witness and prayer.” Our lives witness to both our faith and our chosen way of living and being in this world. Pope Francis reminded us that it is God who draws us and empowers us for conversion. If we live in simplicity, faith, trust and harmony as Francis and other saints have done, we can incarnate in our lives the kind of love for creation and for others, and the conversion to which we are called. Can we choose to truly live simply and in respect for and communion with all creation? This is the challenge and the promise that faces not only Indigenous peoples but all of us.


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**Our Lady of Guadalupe Circle: Reflection on the COVID-19 Pandemic**

“This time of isolation is ironically a time that has sensitized many of us to our common humanity and called us to a deeper unity and solidarity. However, the COVID-19 crisis has also shone light into the darkness of what has been tolerated and accepted for too long. It has highlighted the oppressive vulnerability of many Indigenous communities: Communities that suffer from inadequate and over-crowded housing; those that lack clean water; under-funded and inadequate health and community services as well as unreliable infrastructure that are at greater risk and result in communities living with heightened fears.”

Read the letter here.
1. How has your outlook on the environment evolved?

My love of nature was sparked in my youth as a scout and deepened through my involvement as a scout volunteer. In 1989, I was teaching in a forestry school in Québec City when I read the Brundtland report. Titled “Our Common Future”, this document by the World Commission on Environment and Development proposed a roadmap for change and international cooperation. Social issues were linked with environmental problems, in the same way that *Laudato Si’* connects the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor.
At the same time, I was journeying towards religious life and I joined the Jesuits. When *Laudato Si’* was published, I started facilitating activities to lead groups in reflecting on the encyclical (see the Jesuit Forum’s dialogue guide).

During my two-year regency (a time of apostolate between philosophy and theology during the Jesuit formation), I was responsible for a committee of the CRC (Québec region) on environment and social justice. We organized a week-long session on environmental issues and also participated in provincial commissions of inquiry.

2. Five years after *Laudato Si’,* what do you make of its reception?

The encyclical gave a new impetus to the ecological commitment of religious communities. The environmental crisis is a fundamental one, and we need a mass movement to generate change.

Care for Creation is at the core of the Franciscan mission and they get to voice that at the United Nations. The encyclical has an ecumenical vocation and it engages the whole world. With the concept of integral ecology, Pope Francis has placed ecology at the heart of the common good. In this respect, *Laudato Si’* is a social encyclical and not just an environmental one. It shows a preferential concern for the poor and marginalized populations who are first to feel the impact of climate change.

3. How are the Jesuits underscoring the encyclical’s fifth anniversary?

A recent worldwide discernment among Jesuit communities has led to the “Universal Apostolic Preferences”. Integral ecology is a part of them: “Collaborate, with Gospel depth, for the protection and renewal of God’s Creation”. A Canadian committee will reflect on how to enact this preference in our country. Next year, our provincial retreat will take place in Sudbury, Ontario, to observe the city’s journey to sustainability after years bearing the impact of mining pollution. We also plan to launch environmental audits in our largest Canadian houses, and ask each local community to reflect on renewing and deepening their ecological commitments.

4. Can you describe the environmental spirituality workshop that you facilitate?

I developed a weekend workshop where contemplation is achieved through the natural sciences. I start with an overview of the major environmental issues, and provide notions in astronomy and astrophysics. We then move into the infinitely small by studying a lake’s ecosystem. Contrary to what we think, the Earth’s lungs are not the Amazon. Rather, the phytoplankton present in oceans produces about two-thirds of the Earth’s oxygen. Finally, a commented excursion on botany leads us into an initiation to Ignatian contemplation, and we close with a time of thanksgiving.

5. What must we pay attention to in the energy transition?

We have to leave the oil industry behind, while working on a transition for employees of this sector, and valuing renewable energy. We have not yet won the battle against climate change. It’s a crucial one for humanity. The Earth, in fact, can survive, but we might not.

As Christians, we have to act with a measure of hope. The year 2050 is looming. The Earth’s average temperature has already gone up by one degree. If we reach two degrees, the situation will be critical. Our contemplation must drive our action, with urgency and hope.
After COVID-19
rethinking the social safety net

Tara Kainer, JPIC Office, Sisters of Providence of St. Vincent de Paul, Kingston (ON)

As the weeks passed with ongoing physical distancing and social isolation due to the emergence of COVID-19, Canadians are experiencing a new reality. Required to stay home if at all possible, many have returned to spending quality time with their families and remembering the importance of friends. There’s renewed interest in home-cooked meals and the domestic arts. With schools and countless businesses closed, many cars are off the roads, and with much industry shut down, air pollution has visibly improved. There is more birdsong, and rarely seen wildlife is re-emerging.

Had you asked any conscientious observer in any sector — whether it be the environment, climate, indigenous rights, farming, healthcare, housing and homelessness, food security, poverty — they would have been able to articulate in detail the injustices and vulnerabilities inherent within them. But as so many have noted, the arrival of COVID-19 has brought the flaws into sharp relief for all to see: pre-existing holes in our social safety net, the claim that austerity measures, upheld by neoliberals for decades, is the only possible way forward.
Citizens have come together in solidarity to support the public good. Making sacrifices, they follow measures during this unprecedented public health emergency to slow down the progress of the virus and to protect not only themselves but also all of society. Proclaiming “We’re all in this together,” governments have stepped up to the challenge in dramatic and surprising ways to take an essential role in enabling Canadians to adhere to public health directives. Multiple policies which mere months ago had been deemed impossible by politicians and economists alike have been put into place in only a matter of weeks. We have seen numerous financial aid packages, a moratorium on tenant evictions, deferred mortgage payments, free inter-city public transit, free parking, free hotel rooms for the homeless, the early release of non-violent inmates from prison, and more.

Choice and necessity

Canada’s federal government has poured more than a billion dollars into research grants to study the virus, make medicines, and discover a vaccine, along with additional millions to purchase Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) for front-line healthcare workers. To cushion workers and businesses from the economic shocks of COVID-19, it has created the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) which with the click of a computer mouse has put $2,000 a month into the pockets of more than eight million eligible Canadians; the Wage Subsidy and Canada Emergency Rent Assistance Program for business owners; salary top-ups for low-income essential workers; an increased Canada Child Benefit; the Canada Emergency Student Benefit; additional funding for Indigenous infrastructure and business; money to arts, culture and sports organizations; funds for farmers to house migrant workers during the necessary 14 days of quarantine; millions for fisheries; $1.7 billion to the fossil fuel industry to hire 10,000 workers to clean up abandoned oil wells and restore farmland.

Nearly every day, Prime Minister Trudeau has announced new measures to cover the gaps of yesterday’s aid packages. It’s costing hundreds of billions of dollars, but no one is blinking an eye. Austerity, it turns out, as journalist Gwynne Dyer put it, had been an ideological choice, not an economic necessity.

Falling through the cracks

Unfortunately, protection isn’t being applied equitably across the board – sometimes because of split federal/provincial responsibilities – and some Canadians are still falling through the cracks. The vast majority of deaths from COVID-19 are seniors residing in long-term care homes. Grocery store clerks are being hailed heroes along with front-line healthcare workers but many go to work without PPE or pandemic pay. Expectant mothers who have exhausted Employment Insurance aren’t eligible for CERB. Businesses are receiving rent relief but residential tenants are not. Students are getting some assistance but not as much as workers who have lost their jobs. Migrant workers remain outside the labour force. While governments are deploying military personnel and recalling retired medical workers to the front lines, fully-trained foreign doctors remain excluded. Social assistance recipients continue to struggle far below the poverty line, and the illnesses their chronic poverty have
caused put them at increased risk of contracting COVID-19. In the general population, after many weeks of restrictions and no idea how long this is going to last, tempers are fraying and anxiety is palpable. Liquor sales are up and so is domestic violence. There’s increased surveillance in the name of public safety. Too many are dying, and dying alone. There are no wakes and no funerals.

**People, not profit**

Government’s extensive financial aid has led to unprecedented discussion about implementing a basic income. Why continue to patch together myriad programs that still exclude some Canadians when a single measure could protect everyone from falling into poverty? Fifty members of the Senate of Canada sent a letter to the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, and the Minister of Finance on April 21st, calling on them to restructure the CERB to implement a “minimum basic income”. There are similar efforts to make basic income a reality across the world: Spain announced it will introduce a universal basic income “as soon as possible” to be in place “indefinitely” as part of its efforts to combat the economic effects of coronavirus. Pope Francis supports basic income as a priority in a post-COVID world to help “eliminate inequalities” and “heal injustices.”

Every global pandemic has been unique. And in the aftermath of widespread suffering and loss, positive change has come. Likewise with COVID-19, the real test will come once the crisis is over. Daily, Canada’s prime minister acknowledges that there is still much to do and he is committed to doing a better job. Many expect no less than transformative change. Instead of a world order characterized by ‘capital’, ‘profit’ and ‘consumerism’, there’s an opportunity to shift towards ‘cooperation’, ‘equity’ and ‘sustainability’. Will we take the lessons learned during COVID-19 and apply them to a new way of living? Or will we return to ‘business as usual’, where profit takes precedence over people, and we continue to shut out and discriminate against our poorest and most vulnerable citizens?

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**A Maritime response to *Laudato Si’* **

Over the course of the last months, the Audité Centre for Spiritual Growth (Saint John, NB) launched a journey of reflection into *Laudato Si’*. The first initiative introduced adults from a small farming town to the encyclical’s six chapters. There were a Jamaican husband and wife; small farm owners; a teacher and grandmother; an engineer; a beloved elder and son; a gentleman of a large family unit.

The second initiative focuses on Sean McDonagh’s book *An Irish Response*, which features the responses of nine scholars, scientists, activists, to *Laudato Si’*. Nine residents of New Brunswick committed to inviting four persons known for their competence in the book’s themes. Each circle meets in a “listening mode”, rather than discussion, as they prepare for a Gathering Day of all nine circles, in the Fall of 2020.

The Fall Gathering will be held at Villa Madonna, in Rothesay, NB, where each group will present their unique “New Brunswick Response”. At the conclusion of the Fall Gathering, each person will receive one more copy of Pope Francis’ work. This time, they will be entrusted with a mission: “Go, gather others where you live. Expand the breath of response, and the resilience to act for the respect and care of creation!”
Environmentalists and scientists have been shouting from mountaintops urging citizens of our mother Earth to slow down and stop our mad addiction to fossil fuels. Along comes COVID-19 and suddenly we see the mountain.

Coal burning, oil refining and airline traffic reductions due to China’s lockdown reduced the country’s carbon emissions by 25 per cent, or 200 megatons of CO2 according to the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air.

Toronto and other major Canadian cities have seen drastic reduction of atmospheric nitrogen dioxide (NO2) from just a year ago. NO2 irritates our lungs, causes coughing, wheezing and difficulty breathing. It is linked to the development of asthma and other illnesses.

The evidence that human activity causes pollution and climate change is as clear as the Himalayan mountain range that can be seen from India for the first time in 30 years. And this was accomplished in just a few months.
COVID-19 has also shown us what is possible when we work together and what the consequences of inaction are. Scientists and economists have been warning us for decades that the longer we take in addressing the challenge of climate change the worse it will be. We must act now to avert a future global catastrophe. We need to build more resilience into our systems including our healthcare system, our food system, and our local economy in order for us to deal with what we know will be the adverse impacts of climate change.

And while the immediate concern must be the health and well-being of citizens, our politicians must use this time to consider how post-COVID-19 stimulus could be directed to creating jobs in clean tech, renewable energy, energy conservation, and greener transportation.

At the top of our list of priorities, alongside human welfare, must be the biosphere and its future.

This is not a time to bail out oil and gas companies unless to help them transition to clean tech and renewable energy.

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**A new start for a new world**

*Jeremy Milloy, JPIC Office, Sisters of Providence of Saint Vincent de Paul, Kingston ON*

Climate change. Economic chaos. Mass extinction. Racist violence. Creeping fascism. Millions responding with bravery, creativity, resilience, and love. Our Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation Office is reminded, in this moment, of Pope Francis’s astute diagnosis that “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” (*Laudato Si’,* no. 139). Certainly, these times affirm his words that “Because all creatures are connected, each must be cherished with love and respect, for all of us as living creatures are dependent on one another” (*Laudato Si’,* no. 42).

We are also inspired by his call to look again at reality with fresh eyes, so that we may see clearly a way forward towards justice and harmony, one that respects the Earth as it actually exists. It seems today that an old world is dying: one of great technological achievement and narrow prosperity, but also widespread violence, materialism, and ecological destruction. We are called by *Laudato Si’* to work with imagination, resolution, and love in the dawning of a new world of justice.

Five years on, *Laudato Si’* provides vision and accountability to our work for social and environmental justice. It also inspires hope and tenacity, even in dark times: “All is not lost. Human beings (...) are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start (...) and [embarking] on new paths to authentic freedom” (*Laudato Si’,* no. 205).
Dreaming of a field hospital

Joe Gunn, Centre Oblat, Ottawa, (ON)

I started experiencing my first pandemic in March 2020. While serving seven years in refugee camps and poor countries of the Global South, I never personally knew the ravages of malaria, tuberculosis, AIDS, or Ebola. My family was never faced with the frustrating reality of maternal or infant mortality – knowing that treatments are available, but far beyond our reach.

My experience of social distancing from loved ones has not been too grave. Of course, I do not reside in cramped quarters with extended family, nor do I face daily challenges to obtain clean water, enough food and sanitary toilet facilities. My Latin American friends, when I can reach them online, enquire how I’m doing while isolated in my privileged “Disneylandia.”

Perhaps there are similarities between the coronavirus and the climate collapse... the threats to human well-being and livelihoods are both silent and serious, present but preferentially visited upon the poor at home and abroad. We have now come face-to-face with the explanation of what Francis meant by his term “integral ecology,” where “everything is connected” (Laudato Si’ nos. 91 and 117).

To mark the fifth anniversary of the release of Laudato Si’, members of “Joint Ecological Ministries,” led by religious women, drafted a letter to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau outlining six demands. They are: an end to federal subsidies to fossil fuel industries, a Just Transition Act for affected oil and gas workers, expansion of renewable energy and clean public transportation, implementation of promised Indigenous rights and debt cancellation to allow the poorest nations to address the pandemic as well as the climate emergency. We hoped for 500 signatures in two weeks – but received over 530, as well as over 70 institutional endorsements.

During this pandemic, the Church has left the sanctuaries, perhaps to become more like “the field hospital” of which Francis dreams.

Creation and the Sabbath
Sr. Lorraine St-Hilaire, SNJM

From June 7 to 11, 2020, residents of Despins Residence in Saint-Boniface (MB) slowed down to explore the mystical dimension of creation. “The universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely” (Laudato Si’, no. 233). Readings from the encyclical, short talks, music, poetry and dance enlightened our experience of personal and communal prayer. Contemplation led us to ponder the distress of our Mother Earth and reflect on ethical questions presented in Laudato Si’. We opened our hearts to conversion to change our behaviors in order to protect the Earth. We called this Sabbath a “delight” (Isaiah 58:13), for it “motivates us to greater concern for nature and the poor” (Laudato Si’ no. 237), that we might live in deeper communion, embraced by the Love that pervades the universe.
In 1998 the Ursuline Community of Bruno made a "Corporate Stance of Reverencing Creation." This opened its members to a greater awareness of their relationship with creation.

I am a member of that community and served as missionary in Brazil from 1987 until 2014. I returned to Canada at the end of July 2014 and Laudato Si’ was published on Pentecost, May 24, 2015. Beginning in February 2016, two Sisters in my community and I began a monthly study of the six chapters of Laudato Si’ on Care for our Common Home.

The first chapter painted the portrait of climate change, water loss, pollution, the depletion in the biodiversity of plants and animals, and the declining quality of human life, and their interconnectedness. This gifted me with a greater appreciation of creation as more profound than just a place for exercising and being grateful for the sun and fresh air.

Each of the chapters awakened my awareness of the various aspects of our common home and the dangers it is facing, and how it is calling us to action. For example, are we wasting water or re-using it? Are we composting leftover food to benefit fields and gardens?

A greater knowledge of the inter-connectedness of everything moved us to change our attitudes toward creation and to reconsider our attitudes toward poverty and its causes, whether in our neighborhoods or the world.

Awareness is the lens to seeing and responding to all of God’s creation and all humanity in kindness and love.

To mark the 20th anniversary of the Ursulines of Bruno’s Corporate Stance of Reverencing Creation, we arranged to plant a tree in the front yard of Trinity Manor, Saskatoon, where most of the community members reside. Laudato Si’ has affirmed our past actions and calls us forth to keep caring.
Webinar: **Five years after Laudato Si’**

A collaboration between Development and Peace and the Canadian Religious Conference

To mark the fifth anniversary of the encyclical *Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home*, a nation-wide webinar was organized on May 23rd, 2020, by Development and Peace – Caritas Canada, in collaboration with the Canadian Religious Conference and the Global Catholic Climate Movement – Canada.

The guest speakers were:
- **Stephen Bede Scharper**, Associate Professor of Environment at the University of Toronto and Toronto Star columnist, addressed the significance of *Laudato Si’* for Canadians, its contribution to reshaping spirituality, and a renewed outlook on the encyclical in this time of COVID-19.
- **Sr. Sue Wilson, CSJ**, of the Office for Systemic Justice, Federation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Canada, provided an overview about the work of Canadian religious communities in the ecological movement.
- **Agnes Richard** spoke about the mission of the Canadian branch of the Global Catholic Climate Movement.
- **Kelly Di Domenico**, Director of Communications at Development and Peace, moderated the webinar, which included a question period.
Respecting no boundaries, the coronavirus arrived in Canada in early March 2020. Upon returning to Toronto from California in mid-March, I went into self-isolation at the Sisters’ summer home near Orillia, Ontario.

Patches of snow still covered the ground and Lake Simcoe was frozen. I began to sketch some leafless trees by the lake.

On my second day of isolation, I strolled by the birch trees near the statue of St. Joseph. Since then, I have been haunted by the image which is expressed in my painting.

In the tree trunk, I saw a First Nations woman standing tall, with arms stretched skyward and her sad eyes cast down to the earth.

We lamented the suffering and rapid spread of COVID-19 throughout the world and spoke of the interconnectedness of all creation. Here I was, happy to be in the presence of a First Nations Water Carrier.

As we talked about climate change and the urgency of protecting water, the words of Prime Minister Trudeau, medical and scientific experts echoed in my ears: “Wash your hands...”
frequently, keep two meters apart, and stay at home.”

I thought of the lack of the basic human right to water experienced by so many people worldwide. And how is it that there are still areas in Canada where First Nations people lack clean water or live with boiled water alerts? It was good for us to share our concerns and hopes regarding water as well as asking ourselves, “What is ‘the more’ we might be called to as a CSJ Blue Community?”

We wondered if this pandemic with its loss of life, job closures, safe distancing, and creative new inventions might result in a change of attitude towards climate change, which is linked to the health and sustainability of our planet.

_I Thirst_ is my prayer for peace and unity as more countries dream and act together with our committed youth in discovering new ways to preserve and protect our Common Home.

During the May 2019 meeting of the International Union of Superiors General, Sr. Teresa Maya stressed that “Hope is the gift of communion.” It is this great hope that the Christ made known at the Last Supper and that he comes to renew in us at each Eucharist. Armed with the active presence of the Risen One, we dare to build bridges, according to our charisms and the inspirations of the Spirit. Let us ask for the grace not to shy away from the challenge of being missionaries of communion.

In our congregation, not only do we think, pray and create in response to social issues, including the pandemic, but, many times, we are also called to action.

**Here are some examples of water justice-related action taken prior to COVID-19:**

After listening to and being inspired by 18-year-old Kehkashan Basu at the Conference of the Parliament of Religions, I introduced her to a supervisor of environmental studies at the TCDSB (Toronto Catholic District School Board). As a result, she was invited to be the keynote speaker in June 2018 at their Environment Summit for “EcoSchools” which engaged 350 elementary students.

In November 2019, Sr. Evanne Hunter, CSJ, and I invited Kehkashan to lead a session with women and men religious and lay residents and staff at Presentation Manor in Scarborough, Ontario. She shared stories of her work with youth in 15 countries (including many in refugee camps) related to the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Youth are inspired by her and many have become members of her Green...
Mr. Stéphane Ouellette, gardener for the Sœurs Missionnaires du Christ-Roi (Quebec).

Bless, O Lord my God, the earth and its fruit; bless our hands and our labour. Give us the seed of life, teach us to sow, to reap and to share with love.

In our daily pilgrimage in this life, the earth with its rich and fertile soil, shows us a glimpse of a better future. Each seed is a prayer for future generations.

(...) you are dust, and to dust you shall return. (Gn 3:19). We are a natural, mature compost, a promise of abundance. Mother Earth teaches us that time cannot be bought, but it must be taken. This earth is filled with divine wisdom and its fruit ripens until harvest.

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted. (Ecclesiastes 3:1-2). The flower that blooms in the sun is in no hurry to wither. Each thing lasts for a time, and when it wilts, it is so that another flower can blossom in its turn.

A flower garden is like a family: some flowers mature before others, some need more sun or water, some need the support of a stake. All colours, shapes and sizes come together to form one great garden.

"In the meantime, we come together to take charge of this home which has been entrusted to us, knowing that all the good which exists here will be taken up into the heavenly feast. (...) Let us sing as we go. May our struggles and our concern for this planet never take away the joy of our hope." (Laudato Si’, no. 244)

Unity is built in diversity. The mission of the garden is to nourish and satisfy. God has given us sight to contemplate his works and our beautiful blue planet! The earth gives generously and asks for nothing in return. Let us also give without counting the cost to future generations by taking care of our common home. For one thing is certain: God is the gardener, and the Earth is one of His gardens.
Our current global circumstances present many challenges. One of the less obvious perils is the threat to world peace and the elevated risk that war and conflict bring to protecting people from the virus. For this reason, the United Nations has been leading a call for a global ceasefire until we contain the virus. In March, Pope Francis appealed for a global ceasefire as the pandemic spread, and Pax Christi supported this call.

Another danger looms when our attention and most media coverage are focused on COVID-19. A pressing Canadian example of this is the swelling support for small modular nuclear reactors on the part of some provincial governments. The Coalition for Responsible Energy Development in New Brunswick seeks to promote nuclear-free renewable energy, as well as responsible energy use. This technology is being promoted as a homegrown solution to climate change (an alternative energy source to fossil fuels) and is being supported by the federal government with public funding.

Monica Lambton, Coordinator - Office of JPIC, Congregation of Notre-Dame (Visitation Province)
Another danger looms when our attention and most media coverage are focused on COVID-19.

The Coalition is challenging this assertion and calling on all those concerned about the proliferation of nuclear technology to speak up.

Sample letters to federal and provincial governments are available at crednb.ca and after this article. We encourage you to contact your elected representatives about these concerns – this is an especially significant opportunity for those in Saskatchewan, Ontario and New Brunswick, the three provinces most keen on these reactors. Individuals and organizations from various New Brunswick locations (including members of Religious Communities) are core members and “champions” with the Coalition. Others are welcome to inquire about being “Champions of responsible energy development.”

Just as COVID-19 was reaching Canada, several groups, including the Council of Canadians and the Sisters of Charity of the Immaculate Conception in Saint John, invited Dr. Gordon Edwards, an award-winning nuclear consultant and president of the Canadian Coalition for Nuclear Responsibility, to speak about this issue. He held two public sessions in Saint John and the remaining lecture planned for Fredericton was held online. Sr. Roma De Robertis, SCIC, has written an excellent review of his presentation here.

The public in New Brunswick, Ontario and Saskatchewan, is receiving ample information from proponents of nuclear energy expansion. The Coalition is committed to providing an alternative awareness. Your prayer and support are appreciated.
Dear Prime Minister Trudeau and Minister O'Regan,

I write to express deep concern about federal funding for development of small modular nuclear reactors (SMNR). I am opposed to nuclear expansion and believe your government and three provincial governments are headed in the wrong direction by promoting and funding development of SMNRs with taxpayers’ money.

With industry, your government and the governments of New Brunswick, Ontario and Saskatchewan are promising jobs and carbon neutral electricity generation from SMNRs. We are all committed to meeting vital carbon emissions targets. However, steep financial costs and serious dangers to human health and the environment from nuclear expansion far outweigh any promised benefits. More sustainable and cost-effective advantages would flow from a nuclear-free focus on renewable energy from wind, solar, geothermal and tidal sources.

My main concern is dangerous radioactivity throughout the nuclear cycle, from uranium mining and transportation, to radioactive waste for many generations. Proposals to extract and transfer radioactive materials from conventional nuclear reactors to SMNRs pose grave risks. I am also alarmed about plans for SMNR exports after prototypes are developed in Canada.

Internationally, there have long been troubling connections between nuclear power generation and nuclear weapons. Globally, Canada has played a major role for many decades in this unstable nuclear cycle. Now is the time for you and your government to take the lead by resisting costly and dangerous nuclear expansion, while investing in sustainable energy alternatives for the sake of the environment, as well as present and future generations.

Sincerely,

(Name) ________________________________________________ (Date) _______________________________________
(Address) __________________________________________________________________________________________
(Signature) __________________________________________________________________________________________
News on anti-human trafficking

Sr. Lois Anne Bordowitz, FCJ

There have been some new initiatives in both Canada and the United States in the work against human trafficking.

In Canada, we finally have a nationwide hotline for persons who are in a trafficking situation and need help. The number is 1-833-900-1010, and it can be a call or a chat. Learn more on the website.

In the United States, the Catholic Sisters have a new website, which is now hosting the Stop Trafficking newsletter: https://www.sistersagainsttrafficking.org/. It also includes a monthly reflection. The reflection this month is very timely as it is about women survivors who are living in a safe house during this time of isolation. Read it online.

The Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR) continues its work on advocacy for people caught in trafficking situations of every sort. They held a National Forum in November in Ottawa. The key theme of this year’s forum was
It is clearly inconsistent to combat trafficking in endangered species while remaining completely indifferent to human trafficking, unconcerned about the poor, or undertaking to destroy another human being deemed unwanted. This compromises the very meaning of our struggle for the sake of the environment. 

*Laudato Si’,* no.91.

...protection and justice for trafficked persons. The report of the Forum can be read here.

Following up on the Forum, the CCR has produced an “An Anti-Trafficking Action Strategy”. In it the CCR calls on the federal government to adopt a holistic approach to human trafficking that addresses root causes, protects rights, provides permanent status and offers access to justice and to services. Now more than ever is the time to focus attention on our demands, in light of the government’s new National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking (2019-2024). The CCR has five central policy demands:

1. **Root Causes:** Recognize and address systemic inequalities that are the causes and consequences of trafficking.

2. **Protect Rights:** Protect the rights of trafficked persons and those at risk. This means fixing laws and policies that create barriers and providing better protection of rights.

3. **Permanent Status:** Provide permanent protection of trafficked persons. This means implementing legislative changes to ensure that there is a permanent and fundamental change in policy to protect trafficked persons.

4. **Access to Justice:** Ensure effective access to justice. This means stronger human rights-based recourses, and implementing law reform that is non-punitive and recognizes trafficking in all its forms.

5. **Access to Services:** Ensure universal access to public services for trafficked persons and those at risk. This means access healthcare, education, childcare services, and other psychosocial services.

Poster, the Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline Campaign (Young Indigenous Woman)
During the last ten years, a great number of documentary films on the ecological crisis have contributed to public discourse and education on the necessary and urgent efforts to reverse climate change. The following is a selection of recent productions ranging from a contemplative outlook on creation to conservation efforts and the intersection of ecological and economical crises. We encourage you to view these films and discuss their impact on your worldview and actions.

**Planet Ocean (Documentary, 2012, France)**
Dive into our planet’s greatest mysteries with a team of international underwater cinematographers as they explore the breathtaking bond between humanity and the ocean.

**The Salt of the Earth (Documentary, 2014, France)**
For the last 40 years, Sebastiao Salgado has been traveling through the continents, in the footsteps of an ever changing humanity. He has witnessed the major events of our recent history; international conflicts, starvation and exodus. He is now embarking on the discovery of the wild fauna and flora, of grandiose landscapes as part of a huge photographic project which is a tribute to the planet’s beauty.

**Tomorrow (Documentary, 2015, France)**
Showing solutions, telling a feel-good story... this may be the best way to solve the ecological, economical and social crises that our countries are going through. [...] Cyril Dion and Mélanie Laurent, together with a team of four people, carried out an investigation in ten different countries to figure out what may lead to this disaster and above all how to avoid it.
**Planet Earth II (Documentary, 2016, UK)**
David Attenborough returns in this breathtaking documentary showcasing life on Planet Earth 10 years after the first series *Planet Earth*. This series celebrates the amazing variety of the natural world in this epic documentary series, filmed over four years across 64 different countries.

**What are we waiting for? (Documentary, 2016, France)**
Ungersheim’s city council launched in 2009 a program for participative democracy, baptized “21 actions for the 21st century”, and comprising all aspects of everyday life: food, energy, transportation, housing, money, work, and schooling. This documentary has been filmed over four seasons during the crucial year of 2015, where the transition program was almost fully completed.

**Earth seen from the heart (Documentary, 2018, Canada)**
Scientists, writers and artists join Hubert Reeves and Frédéric Lenoir to sound a warning: biodiversity is under threat. While some humans are responsible for this crisis, others, in growing numbers, are tackling it head on and forging solutions. In this film dedicated to future generations, they remind us that life in all its forms is a fascinating and touching mystery.

**This Mountain Life (Documentary, 2018, Canada)**
After months of preparation, Martina and her 60 year-old mother Tania embark on a 6 month, 2300 km journey from Squamish, BC to Alaska through a relentless mountain wilderness. Shot in cinematic detail, *This Mountain Life* is a riveting portrait of human passion set high in the peaks of British Columbia, Canada.
About

The CRC
Established in 1954, the Canadian Religious Conference (CRC) is an association that brings together 250 leaders of Catholic congregations of religious men and women in Canada. “The CRC is both a voice for and a service to leaders of religious institutes and societies of apostolic life. Our mission is to encourage our members to live fully their vocation in following Christ. We support them in their prophetic witness to justice and peace within society and the Church. The CRC looks for innovative ways of interpreting faith and life so as to embrace the new vision of the universe.”
Mission statement adopted in 2010

ad vitam
Launched in 2019 by the Canadian Religious Conference, ad vitam is a webzine and a window into consecrated life in Canada. Featuring articles and audio-visual media, ad vitam proposes theological and pastoral reflections on the Catholic Church and consecrated life. This resource aims to serve religious communities and their leadership, as well as readers interested in consecrated life and Church issues.

Theological Commission of the CRC
The Theological Commission was established by the Administrative Council of the CRC in September 1999 to deepen the meaning of consecrated life according to a theological approach that integrates the contributions made by human and social sciences. The Theological Commission proposes future directions that will inform consecrated life in a creative and prophetic way while taking into account the various charisms of the congregations.