

# **“On Care for Our Common Home” (“*Laudato Si*”) Reading Guide Answer Key**

## **Group 1**

1. (Paragraphs 1–2) What is significant about the Latin title of this encyclical?
  - *Laudato Si*’ comes from the words of Saint Francis of Assisi’s Canticle of the Sun. The Earth is our Mother and Sister who “cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her” (paragraph 2).
2. (Paragraphs 3–9) Why do you think Pope Francis mentioned all of those who have enriched the Church’s teaching on care for the environment?
  - He wanted to emphasize that caring for the environment isn’t a new topic of discussion. He’s not the only pope or patriarch who has spoken out about the environment, all of whom “echo the reflections of numerous scientists, philosophers, theologians and civic groups” (paragraph 7). The deep concern for the environment is shared around the world and has been for some time.
3. (Paragraphs 17–19) Explain the problem of “rapidification.”
  - The “speed with which human activity has developed . . . [is] not necessarily geared to the common good or to integral and sustainable human development. Change is something desirable, yet it becomes a source of anxiety when it causes harm to the world and to the quality of life of much of humanity” (paragraph 18).

## **Group 2**

4. (Paragraphs 20–22) Explain the problem of “a throwaway culture.”
  - We throw too many recyclable things away. The “cycle of production and consumption, has not developed the capacity to absorb and reuse waste and by-products. We have not yet managed to adopt a circular model of production capable of preserving resources for present and future generations, while limiting as much as possible the use of non-renewable resources, moderating their consumption, maximizing their efficient use, reusing and recycling them” (paragraph 22).
5. (Paragraphs 23–26) What does it mean to say that “the climate is a common good”?
  - It belongs to all and is meant for all humankind, as it is “linked to many of the essential conditions for human life” (paragraph 23).
6. (Paragraphs 23–26) Why are there concerns about the climate?
  - “A very solid scientific consensus indicates that we are presently witnessing a disturbing warming of the climatic system” (paragraph 23). “Many of those who possess more resources and economic or political power seem mostly to be concerned with masking the problems or concealing their symptoms, simply making efforts to reduce some of the negative impacts of climate change” (paragraph 26).



### Group 3

7. (Paragraphs 27–31) What is the issue with water, and why is it a concern?
- Fresh drinking water is an issue of primary importance, because it is indispensable for human life (see paragraph 28). There is a serious problem with the quality of water available to the poor, resulting in preventable death and disease (see paragraph 29).
8. (Paragraphs 48–49) Explain the connection between caring for the poor and caring for the environment.
- "The deterioration of the environment and of society affects the most vulnerable people on the planet. . . . The gravest effects of all attacks on the environment are suffered by the poorest" (paragraph 48). In other words, caring for the poor and caring for the environment are inextricably linked.
9. (Paragraph 50) Explain Pope Francis's reasons for rejecting solutions focused only on "reducing birth rates."
- "To blame population growth instead of extreme and selective consumerism on the part of some, is one way of refusing to face the issues. It is an attempt to legitimize the present model of distribution, where a minority believes that it has the right to consume in a way which can never be universalized, since the planet could not even contain the waste products of such consumption" (paragraph 50).

### Group 4

10. (Paragraph 65) What do the great biblical narratives say about the relationship of human beings with the world?
- "God's plan includes creating humanity . . . every man and woman is created out of love and made in God's image and likeness (cf. Genesis 1:26). This shows us the immense dignity of each person" (paragraph 65).
11. (Paragraph 66) (a) What are the three fundamental, intertwined relationships, (b) what happened to them, (c) why, and (d) as a result, what was distorted?
- a. Relationships: with God, with our neighbor and with the Earth itself
  - b. These three vital relationships have been broken, both outwardly and within us.
  - c. This rupture is sin. The harmony among the Creator, humanity, and creation as a whole was disrupted by our presuming to take the place of God and refusing to acknowledge our creaturely limitations.
  - d. This in turn distorted our mandate to "have dominion" over the Earth (see Genesis 1:28), to "till it and keep it" (Genesis 2:15). As a result, the originally harmonious relationship between human beings and nature became conflictual (see Genesis 3:17–19).
12. (Paragraph 67) What is (a) the *incorrect* interpretation of Genesis 1:28 that is Pope Francis insists we forcefully reject, (b) what has it led to, (c) what *should* our interpretation be?
- a. The incorrect and rejected idea is that "being created in God's image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures."
  - b. This interpretation has "encouraged the unbridled exploitation of nature by painting [humankind] as domineering and destructive by nature."
  - c. The biblical texts are to be read in their context, with an appropriate hermeneutic, recognizing that they tell us to "till and keep" the garden of the world (see Genesis 2:15). "Tilling" refers to cultivating,



ploughing or working, while "keeping" means caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving. This implies a relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature. Each community can take from the bounty of the Earth whatever it needs for subsistence, but it also has the duty to protect the Earth and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations. "The earth is the Lord's" (Psalm 24:1); to him belongs "the earth with all that is within it" (Deuteronomy 10:14). Thus, God rejects every claim to absolute ownership: "The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with me" (Leviticus 25:23).

## Group 5

13. (Paragraphs 53–54) Note the reason(s) why Pope Francis characterizes certain responses to caring for the environment as weak.

- Money and politics: "Our politics are subject to technology and finance. There are too many special interests, and economic interests easily end up trumping the common good and manipulating information so that their own plans will not be affected" (paragraph 54).

14. (Paragraph 76) Clarify the significance of "creation" as distinct from "nature."

- "The word 'creation' has a broader meaning than 'nature,' for it has to do with God's loving plan in which every creature has its own value and significance. Nature is usually seen as a system which can be studied, understood and controlled, whereas creation can only be understood as a gift from the outstretched hand of the Father of all, and as a reality illuminated by the love which calls us together into universal communion."

15. (Paragraphs 96–100) In each paragraph, note at least one way Jesus lived in full harmony with creation.

- a. Paragraph 96: Jesus invited disciples to "recognize the paternal relationship God has with all his creatures," saying that "each one of them is important in God's eyes." Specifically, with the sparrows (see Luke 12:6) and birds of the air (see Matthew 6:26).
- b. Paragraph 97: Jesus "was in constant touch with nature, lending it an attention full of fondness and wonder." He "often stopped to contemplate the beauty sown by his Father."
- c. Paragraph 98: Jesus lived in full harmony with creation, and others were amazed: "What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?" (Matthew 8:27).
- d. Paragraph 99: The destiny of all creation is bound up with the mystery of Christ, present from the beginning: "All things have been created through him and for him" (Colossians 1:16).
- e. Paragraph 100: The New Testament . . . shows [Jesus] risen and glorious, present throughout creation by his universal Lordship: "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross" (Colossians 1:19–20).

## Personal Reflection

16. (Paragraph 246) Which of the two prayers best reflect your own prayer to God for the environment? Why?  
Answers will vary.

(The quotations on this handout are from Pope Francis's encyclical "On Care for Our Common Home" [*Laudato Si*"], at [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html). Copyright © Libreria Editrice Vaticana.)

