

Action for Ecological Justice: Celebrating a Year of Creation, Breakout Sessions

1. A Path to the Good Life: Pope Francis' famous environmental encyclical, *Laudato Si'*

In this session, we will take a deep and welcoming look into Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*, what it instructs, and how it can lead to a better life for all of us, giving particular attention to the spiritual place of local food and farming in our lives.

Presenter:

John Carroll has been Professor of Environmental Conservation at the University of New Hampshire in Durham for 43 years. He has authored thirteen books, with particular attention to ecological ethics and values and ecology and religion, as well as recent works on sustainable agriculture and local food and farming in New England. He assisted the Catholic Bishops of New England and, as well, the Episcopal Bishops of New England, in the writing of their respective pastoral letters on the environment. He has recently authored two published analyses of *Laudato Si'* for Springer, an international academic publisher, and has assisted his local parish in its response to the papal encyclical.

"Our human ability to transform reality must proceed in line with God's original gift of all that is." –Pope Francis (*Laudato Si'* 5)

2. Can economics save the world?

When it comes to the environment, and climate in particular, is the perspective of economics part of the problem? Pope Francis criticizes the modern world's relationship to money, markets, and consumption, and sees these disordered relationships as drivers of our social and environmental crisis. But, can the insights of economics be turned to serve the common good? We will engage in a dialogue over whether economics can help society understand – and even mitigate – its self-inflicted environmental crisis.

Presenter:

Patrick Walsh is an Associate Professor of Economics at Saint Michael's College in Vermont. He primarily teaches courses focused on domestic policy issues, such as Principles of Microeconomics, Macro Theory, Public Finance, and Economics of Healthcare. He created the EconGuy video series (<https://www.youtube.com/user/thateconguy>) as a resource for economics teachers. A public finance economist, his research is on the economics of education. Walsh earned his Ph.D. in Economics from the University of Michigan in 2006. He lives in Essex with his family.

"We urgently need a humanism capable of bringing together the different fields of knowledge, including economics, in the service of a more integral and integrating vision." –Pope Francis (*Laudato Si'* 141)

3. Dialogue: Collaborating to care for our common home

Pope Francis brought religiously motivated ecological consciousness into sharp focus with *Laudato Si'*. In addition to the encyclical's obvious contribution to conversations on faith and ecology, it also makes strong statements about dialogue among Christians, theists and humans in general. While not a document explicitly on dialogue, *Laudato Si'* addresses the concept extensively and acts as an example of how creation care provides a common-ground initiative on which people of faith can and must collaborate. This session will explore the significance of working together with our sisters and brothers in all faith traditions, how to do so effectively and with appreciation for each other.

Presenter:

Julia McStravog works at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), in Washington, DC, as the program and research specialist for the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs. Her experiences and contributions to interfaith dialogue include: serving as the USCCB representative to the executive committees for Shoulder to Shoulder Campaign and Religions for Peace USA; coordinating the USCCB/CUA 2015 conference celebrating the 50th anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*, as well as the 2017 USCCB/CUA conference on Luther and Catholic tradition; interning at the Jewish Council on Urban Affairs in Chicago; volunteering with the Archdiocese of Philadelphia's Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs; serving with Christian Appalachian Project in Eastern Kentucky; and working at Pendle Hill Quaker Retreat Center.

She assisted the Vatican Accredited Media Pool and Holy See Press Office during Pope Francis' 2015 Apostolic Journey to the United States and is a 2017 Seminary Fellow of The Fellowships at Auschwitz for the Study of Professional Ethics. Julia has a BA in Theology from Marymount University, an MA in Interreligious Dialogue, focusing on Catholic-Muslim relations, from Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, and is currently working on her ThD in Catholic Studies at La Salle University.

"I urgently appeal, then, for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet. We need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all."—Pope Francis (*Laudato Si'* 14)

4. Engaging the parish: How do I invite others to join me?

This session will explore practical ways to broaden involvement of your parish in care for creation and other solidarity opportunities. We'll discuss strategies to identify existing leaders, and build on their interests and networks, and practice how to invite and convene others. How can we better share the joy of responding to the gospel and not "do it alone?"

Presenter:

Chris West has worked at Catholic Relief Services for more than twelve years. He currently directs the Partnership, Training, and Engagement Unit. Chris has over 20 years of experience in leadership development, training, and helping Catholics engage successfully in Social Mission. He holds a BA in Human Services from Virginia Wesleyan College and a Master's Degree in Political Communication from the Johns Hopkins University.

David Mullin has Worked with Habitat for Humanity for over 15 years and he is presently the Executive Director of Green Mountain Habitat for Humanity, covering Northwestern Vermont. Habitat's faith-based housing ministry works with tens of thousands of volunteers annually worldwide from all walks of life. Engaging volunteers in meaningful work for the benefit of those less fortunate is that for which Habitat for Humanity is best known. David's experience both in the nonprofit and the for profit world has enabled him to successfully engage small and large local groups including churches, synagogues and businesses in Volunteer service. David is a graduate of Champlain College and resides in Williston, Vermont with his family.

"Social problems must be addressed by community networks and not simply by the sum of individual good deeds... The ecological conversion needed to bring about lasting change is also a community conversion."—Pope Francis (*Laudato Si'* 219)

5. From Climate Science to Climate Justice

Modern science has learned a great deal about the causes and consequences of today's drastic changes to the earth's climate, but science has only begun to catch up with the underlying social, political and ethical issues that surround the global climate crisis. Climate changes have drastically differing consequences for people in different areas of the world, and many of the proposed "solutions" to climate change avoid addressing the real sources of the problem. How can we begin to change our institutions, technologies and ways of living, working and thinking to truly stabilize the climate in a just and equitable manner? And what lessons can we learn from people around the world who are already experiencing the most severe consequences? These are some of the issues we hope to address in this informative and wide-ranging discussion.

Presenters:

Brian Tokar is a Lecturer in Environmental Studies at UVM and an active board member of 350Vermont and the Institute for Social Ecology. His many published books include *Toward Climate Justice: Perspectives on the Climate Crisis and Social Change*, and he is a frequent contributor to web sites such as CommonDreams, Counterpunch, ZNet, Popular Resistance, New Compass, Toward Freedom, and Green Social Thought.

Alan K. Betts is Vermont's leading climate researcher, and a frequent speaker to citizen, professional and church groups, explaining the impacts of climate change on life on Earth. He is a listed author on more than 170 peer-reviewed scientific papers, and is a regular columnist for the Rutland Herald/Times-Argus.

Rachel Smolker is a field biologist, environmental consultant and community organizer. She is the co-director of Biofuelwatch, an international organization concerned about the negative impacts of large-scale bioenergy and seeking to advance climate justice. In her home town of Hinesburg, she helped found Protect Geprags Park, a citizen group opposed to Vermont Gas Systems' proposed fracked gas pipeline.

Johanna DeGraffenreid has worked as a grassroots trainer, street medic, campaign director, and educator with numerous organizations, including Coal River Mountain Watch in West Virginia and the Gulf Restoration Network in rural Louisiana. She recently returned to Vermont to work with the Vermont Public Interest Research group as an Environmental Advocate focused on toxics, zero waste, regenerative agriculture, and other issues.

“Our goal is not to amass information or to satisfy curiosity, but rather to become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it.” -Pope Francis (Laudato Si’ 19)

6. Pristine or Polluted: Do you know what is threatening our water resources?

If you don’t think clean water is a basic necessity, try living without it. Clean water is a fundamental necessity to human life and a determining factor in the quality of our lives. Clean water is also the underpinning of a sustainable economy. No vibrant downtown exists without adequate safe drinking water supplies nor sufficient wastewater treatment. This session will offer critical information about water quality, such that we can better work together to reverse the trend of polluted waters, and degrading ecosystems.

Presenter:

James Ehlers has an incredible history of environmental activism. He worked for 18 years as a political consultant and freelance columnist, promoting active dialogue across the environmental spectrum. Currently hosting a radio show, writing opinion editorials for the Rutland Herald, and serving on the board of Rights and Democracy, in addition to his role as executive director of Lake Champlain International, James tirelessly navigates for environmental solutions among business owners, land owners, politicians, sportsmen, farmers, advocacy groups, and underrepresented populations.

“Access to safe drinkable water is a basic and universal human right, since it is essential to human survival and, as such, is a condition for the exercise of other human rights.” -Pope Francis (Laudato Si’ 30)

7. Spirituality, Justice, and *Laudato Si’*

This session will focus on the encyclical, *Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home* and Pope Francis' deep call to create the world we know is possible.

Presenters:

Nancy Audette, RSM, and **Mary Pendergast, RSM**, have enthusiastically embraced the Direction Statement of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas “To Act in Harmony With All Creation.” They are certified facilitators and trainers for the Awakening the Dreamer/Changing the Dream Symposium. Since the publication of Pope Francis’ encyclical, *Laudato Si’*, they have given presentations and workshops to parishes and other groups in the Northeast and New York state. Both are on the Board of Directors of Mercy Ecology, Inc. which sponsors Mercy Farm in Benson, Vermont. Both are very involved in local Earth issues and serve on the Critical Concerns Collaborative of the Sisters of Mercy.

“As never before in history, common destiny beckons us to seek a new beginning... Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life.” – Pope Francis (Laudato Si’ 207)

8. Water is Life: Giving access to safe water to the poor around the world

In this workshop, Elias Backash will help participants to understand efforts to improve the poor’s access to safe water around the world. Elias will share some ways CRS has assisted some of the poorest and most remote communities, including refugees to get access to clean water and sanitation. Mari Barboza, will highlight how we can use CRS education resources on water for youth and adults.

Presenters:

Elias Backash, a native of Aleppo, Syria, is a water supply and sanitation infrastructure researcher. He worked with Catholic Relief Services from 2014-2016 as a Water and Sanitation officer in Turkey to provide safe water access and sanitation for Syrian refugees. Previous to working with CRS, Elias worked with Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS) a partner of CRS, in Turkey. Elias is

the second oldest of four children. Because of the civil war in Syria, Elias' family has been separated. His mother and one of his sisters took a tremendous risk migrating by boat to seek safety in Austria. His father and another sister are still in Syria after several attempts to leave. Elias' brother works in Turkey on a water supply project to assist Syrian refugees. Elias has a degree in Mechanical Engineering from Aleppo University, and is currently enrolled in a Master's program in Sustainable Engineering with focus on water resources management and international development at Villanova University.

Maria Isabel (Mari) Barboza works for Catholic Relief Services, as a Relationship Manager in the Northeast Region, covering 9 dioceses in northern New York and New England. In this role she strives to raise awareness on global issues and develop collaborative relationships with Catholic institutions to promote global solidarity. Mari began her career with CRS in 2000, as a Project Manager in Kenya and Zambia working in projects ranging from emergency response to peacebuilding. She served in the Latin America Regional Team working on Human Rights and Peacebuilding issues and in the Global Solidarity Partnerships Unit in Baltimore. Before joining CRS, Mari worked for the Inter-American Foundation and served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Guatemala. Mari has a B.A. in Political Science from the University of Michigan and an M.A. in International Relations from Johns Hopkins.

"Our world has a grave social debt towards the poor who lack access to drinking water, because they are denied the right to a life consistent with their inalienable dignity." –Pope Francis (*Laudato Si'* 30)

9. Your Cousin, Your Neighbor's Cousin: Consuming ethically in today's world

Do you know from where your morning coffee comes? Do the farmers who grew it make an adequate living from it? How have small farmers around the world banded together for fair prices, justice and prosperity for their communities? How has the Catholic Church supported them? How have alternative trade organizations supported them? How can you and your parish join in? Is this an abstract act of solidarity, or do you sit next to someone in church who has family back home growing coffee? This workshop will discuss fair trade coffee and chocolate, in the context of the ties between the peoples of the Diocese of Burlington, and the peoples of Central America, the Caribbean and Africa.

Presenters:

Peter Buck is a Senior Interfaith Program Representative at Equal Exchange, an alternative trade organization based in West Bridgewater, Massachusetts. Equal Exchange imports coffee, chocolate, tea, and other foods through long-term, direct and mutually beneficial trading relationships with over 40 small farmer co-operatives in 20 countries around the world. Through their Interfaith Program, they partner with 13 faith denominations, fostering solidarity between farmers and consumers and providing organic, fairly traded, delicious and righteous products to over 6,000 congregations nationwide. Peter joined Equal Exchange in 2002, and is responsible for its relationships with Catholic Relief Services, the United Methodist Committee on Relief, the Church of the Brethren, the American Friends Service Committee and the Mennonite Church. He is a lector and minister of coffee and donuts at Sacred Heart Catholic Parish in Roslindale, Massachusetts. He and his wife live in Roslindale with their cat and sometimes one or both of their grown children.

Mary O'Brien is the Global Solidarity Coordinator in the Office of Catholic Social Justice Ministry (OCSJM) for the Archdiocese of Hartford. After many years in social service work with the State of Connecticut, Mary joined the OCSJM staff in January, 2011, thanks to a grant received from Catholic Relief Services to increase capacity in parishes in the area of global solidarity. She serves in leadership with United Action CT, a local CCHD-supported non-profit, that works to encourage community efforts for social change. Mary is a member of St Francis of Assisi Parish in her hometown of New Britain, CT, where she serves as a music minister and catechist.

*"Every effort to protect and improve our world entails profound changes in 'lifestyles, models of production and consumption, and the established structures of power which today govern societies.'" -Pope Francis (*Laudato Si'* 5)*