

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'*

This session 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. Focus will include the spiritual place of local food and farming in our lives.

Presenter: John Carroll is a professor of environmental conservation at the University of New Hampshire in Durham. The author of 13 books, he assisted the Catholic and Episcopal bishops of New England to write their respective pastoral letters on the environment. He authored two published analyses of *Laudato Si'* 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, specifically the climate, 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. This breakout will engage in a dialogue about whether economics can help society understand – and even mitigate – its self-inflicted environmental crisis.

Presenter: Patrick Walsh is an associate professor of economics at St. Michael's College in Colchester. He teaches domestic policy and economics. He created the EconGuy video series ([YouTube.com/user/thateconguy](https://www.youtube.com/user/thateconguy)) as a resource for economics teachers.

"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'*. While not a document explicitly about dialogue, *Laudato Si'* addresses the concept extensively and serves 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 people of all faith traditions and how to do so effectively and with appreciation for one another.

Presenter: Julia McStravog is the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' program and research specialist for the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs. She has extensive experience in interfaith dialogue, including work coordinating interfaith conferences hosted by the USCCB and volunteering with Philadelphia's Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs.

"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. This session will discuss strategies to identify existing leaders, build on their interests and networks and practice how to invite and convene others.

Presenter: Chris West has worked at CRS for more than 12 years. He currently directs the Partnership, Training and Engagement Unit. He has more than 20 years of experience in leadership development, training and helping Catholics engage successfully in social mission.

Presenter: David Mullin is executive director of Green Mountain Habitat for Humanity in Northwestern Vermont. Habitat's faith-based housing ministry works with tens of thousands of volunteers annually worldwide. His experience both in the non-profit and the for-profit world has enabled him to successfully engage small and large local groups including churches, synagogues and businesses in volunteer service.

"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 significantly differing consequences for people in different areas of the world. This session will explore the questions: 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 throughout the world who already are experiencing the most severe consequences?

Presenter: Joseph Gainza is a member of Pax Christi, and, until its restructuring, chair-person of the Peace, Justice and Integrity of Creation committee of the Vermont Ecumenical Council and Bible Society. He was the Vermont Program Coordinator of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) a peace and justice organization based on Quaker principles for 15 years.

Presenter: 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.

Presenter: 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.

Presenter: Johanna de Graffenreid 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 reform, 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. 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: Environmental activist James Ehlers has worked for 18 years as a political consultant and freelance columnist, promoting active dialogue across the environmental spectrum. As executive director of Lake Champlain International, he tirelessly navigates for environmental solutions among business owners, landowners, 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 *Laudato Si’* and Pope Francis’ call to create the world we know is possible.

Presenters: Sisters of Mercy Nancy Audette and Mary Pendergast have embraced enthusiastically 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 *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. Both are 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, presenters will help participants understand efforts to improve the poor’s access to safe water throughout the world. They will share some ways Catholic Relief Services has assisted some of the poorest and most remote communities including helping refugees get access to clean water and sanitation. They will highlight how we can use CRS educational resources on water for youth and adults.

Presenter: Elias Bakhsh, a native of Aleppo, Syria, is a water supply and sanitation infrastructure researcher. He worked with CRS as a water and sanitation officer in Turkey to provide safe water access and sanitation for Syrian refugees. Before working with CRS, he worked with Jesuit Refugee Services, a partner of CRS, in Turkey.

Presenter: Maria “Mari” Isabel Barboza works for CRS as a relationship manager in the Northeast Region, covering nine dioceses in northern New York and New England. She began her career with CRS as a project manager in Kenya and Zambia, working on projects ranging from emergency response to peacebuilding. She served on the Latin America Regional Team working on human rights and peacebuilding issues and in the Global Solidarity Partnerships Unit in Baltimore. Before joining CRS, she worked for the Inter-American Foundation and served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Guatemala.

“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 alternative trade organizations supported them? How can you and your parish join in? 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.

Presenter: Peter Buck is a senior interfaith program representative at Equal Exchange, an alternative trade organization based in West Bridgewater, Mass. Equal Exchange imports coffee, chocolate, tea and other foods through long-term, direct and mutually beneficial trading relationships with more than 40 small, farmer co-operatives in 20 countries. He is responsible for its relationships with CRS, the United Methodist Committee on Relief, the Church of the Brethren, the American Friends Service Committee and the Mennonite Church.

Presenter: Mary O’Brien is the global solidarity coordinator in the Office of Catholic Social Justice Ministry for the Archdiocese of Hartford. After many years in social service work with the State of Connecticut, she joined the social justice ministry staff through a grant from CRS to increase capacity in parishes in the area of global solidarity. She serves in leadership with United Action CT, a local Catholic Campaign for Human Development-supported non-profit that works to encourage community efforts for social change.

“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)