

## **Suggested Discernment Process**

A journey to integral ecology often begins with what St. John Paul II and Pope Francis describe as an “ecological conversion.” Through this conversion, the effects of our encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in our relationship with the world around us, as we seek to protect our brothers and sisters by protecting the home we share. (Laudato Si’, 217)

Your “ecological conversion” may already be in motion, or it may be something that you are just beginning to consider. Wherever you are in this process, committing to pursuing a Laudato Si’ Plan—or any other path—should be the fruit of sober, prayerful reflection.

The Laudato Si’ Action Platform will encompass a library of resources, community-building tools, and Laudato Si’ Plans. All elements of the platform may be used independently, and you may find that simply using resources or building community is the best fit for you.

If you seek a more structured approach, the Laudato Si’ Plans offer a way for you to discern and implement your response to Laudato Si’. Discerning whether God calls you to this journey is essential.

You will know the discernment process that is best for your institution, community, or family. If a process has not already been established, you are welcome to use the suggested process below.

### Build a community

- Identify people in your community who are called to discerning a response to Pope Francis’ call to action on integral ecology. In order to include a range of perspectives and promptings from the Holy Spirit, seek to create a diverse group.
- If possible, ground your group in our faith and the science before proceeding to more in-depth conversations. Consider holding an all-day prayer retreat or a brief prayer service in order to invite the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Suggested resources are available on the Laudato Si’ Action Platform website.
- Cultivate an attitude of loving kindness within your group. Strive to speak

respectfully and honestly. Share your personal reasons for participating in this process as well as any hopes or fears you may have.

- If possible, seek advice from outside the community. Learn whether your diocese, professional association, or local groups offer other programs. Additional support and relationships may be helpful now, as you discern your commitment, and may also be helpful in the future, as you continue your journey.

### Establish clear processes

- Determine the relationship between your discernment group and your community's leader(s). This is an important step to ensure that there are common expectations and a shared understanding of your group's role.
  - In a large institution or community, your leader may prefer to simply receive a final recommendation from the discernment group, without being directly involved in the process.
  - In a smaller institution or community, your leader may prefer to be directly involved in the work of the group.
  - In a family, it is likely that the leader will be a member of the discernment group.
- Define what will happen as the conclusion of your discernment group's efforts. (For example: Will it make a recommendation to the leader? Will it vote on whether to pursue a Laudato Si' Plan or another path, and will its vote decide the direction for the entire community?)
- Decide on a regular meeting time and place for the discernment group.
- Ensure that each person in the group knows his or her responsibilities. Some ideas for potential areas of responsibility include the following:
  - ensuring the process is grounded in the Holy Spirit and the teachings of the Church,
  - recording meeting minutes and ensuring the discernment process stays on track,
  - seeking input from members of the community, and
  - delivering reports to the leader and other stakeholders.
- Establish a final date for your discernment group to conclude its efforts. It is important to have a clear date when your work concludes and a commitment to the Laudato Si' Plans—or any other program—begins. Depending on the needs of your institution, community, or family, this date might be just a few days away or several months away. Be sure to

take as much time as needed. The journey to integral ecology is a marathon, not a sprint, and it's important to embark on it mindfully.

- You may want to consider how your group will manage disputes and competing priorities. Will you pray together, seek the guidance of a leader, or use some other process?

### Collect feedback

- Speak with community members beyond your small group to get their perspective on how a journey through a Laudato Si' Plan would affect the life of the community.
  - It is important to speak with people whose day-to-day activities would be most affected by this project. For institutions, that might include the heads of facilities, education, social service, and worship departments along with members of the wider community. For families, this might include children and adults within the nuclear family.
  - If possible, strive to also speak with a wider range of community members in order to truly represent the breadth of the community. Depending on your context, this might include parishioners, students, service recipients, or more distant family members.
  - In a larger institution, your conversations with community members might take the form of one-on-one interviews. In a smaller community, you might find that a structured group discussion is more efficient. In a family, a few shared conversations may be sufficient.
- Whatever form your conversations take, be sure to take notes so that you accurately remember and represent others' perspective.
- You might find it helpful to prepare a few points in advance. If so, you're welcome to directly ask the questions in the "reflect together" section below; alternatively, you might prefer to hold a more free-form conversation by covering points such as the following:
  - We're considering embarking on a journey to integral ecology. Through this project, we would create a Plan that helps us develop our relationships with each other, our community, and our Creator, as we seek to protect creation and all who share it.

- What are your thoughts on our Church's teaching on protecting the most vulnerable? How do you think our social-environmental crisis connects with those teachings?
- What concerns do you have about this proposed project?
- How do you think this project would help us fulfill our mission or help us live our our values?
- However you choose to seek community members' input, be sure to tell them that their collective feedback will inform your discernment.
- As a group, review community members' input together. Consider creative ways of review that can encourage deep reflection on the collective wisdom of the community and invite the movement of the Holy Spirit.
  - For example, perhaps the questions below could be written on large pieces of paper and taped to the wall. Group members could write which pieces of feedback from community members pertain to each question.
  - As another example, perhaps group members could take turns sharing which of the pieces of feedback from community members most resonated with them, and which pieces of feedback changed their minds on certain topics.

### Reflect together

- After collecting community members' input, prepare a document or convene a conversation that will help you organize your thoughts about how developing a Laudato Si' Plan would affect the life of your community.
- You may want to start with the questions below.
  - How would developing a Laudato Si' Plan benefit our relationships with each other?
  - How would developing a Laudato Si' Plan help us protect creation?
  - How would developing a Laudato Si' Plan enable us to better serve our Creator?
  - What existing programs or activities would be enriched through this work?
    - For institutions or communities, this might include youth and adult education, advocacy or social service programs to care for vulnerable people, worship activities such as masses or

- the provision of prayer guides, facilities-based efforts to lower costs and create more healthful spaces, etc.
    - For families, this might include education, connecting with neighbors, prayer and reflection, lowering costs and creating more healthful spaces, etc.
  - Looking ahead to the next several years, whom would we need to engage in this project?
    - For institutions, this might include the heads of facilities, education, social service, and worship departments along with members of the wider community.
    - For families, this might include children and adults within and beyond the nuclear family
  - How would contributing a few hours per week or month to this project affect these people? What are they be excited about? What concerns do they have, and how can we address those concerns?
  - Actions for the Laudato Si' Plan process can be completed for free or at low cost, but in the future we may decide that we want to use some budget for this project. Is budget available? If so, how much? Can this project be included as a standing item in the existing budgeting process?
- Work together as a group to answer these questions and any others that are important to you. Depending on your needs, answering these questions might take several weeks and multiple rounds of input from group members, or it might take just an hour or two.
- Whatever process you use, be sure to base your answers on the insight you gleaned from conversations with the wider community.

### Conclude your work

- After understanding the community's collective wisdom and the possible effects of this project on your community, pray to receive the illumination of the Holy Spirit, and seek to discern God's will. The group may want to ask questions such as these:
  - How would journeying through a Laudato Si' Plan better enable us to better fulfill our mission or live out our values?
  - Under what conditions would this journey be feasible for us?
  - *Do we feel called to begin this journey?*

- After your final review and reflection, take the last step that has been identified as the outcome of your discernment. That might be informing your leader of your recommendation, taking a vote together, or some other action.

Throughout your discernment process, be sure to return to prayer as often as possible. Prayer is an inexhaustible wellspring of guidance and inspiration, and will guide you wherever you are called.