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COMMUNION within the EARTH COMMUNITY:

Prayer and Action on Laudato Si

A Guide to Conversion and Transformation

Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet

This process is designed to help us implement the many calls to conversion and lifestyle change that Pope Francis has directed to all peoples who share “our common home” as a way of addressing climate change.

- *Laudato Si* makes concrete the Chapter 2013 call in “Communion within the Earth Community” to radical transformation of our current lifestyle.
- Conversion to the changes that Pope Francis suggests will take time and consistent action: transformation is a process.
- The larger Truths that we are seeking through these prayer and reflection experiences are a living awareness of God in the sacredness of creation, that everything exists in a communion of interdependence, and that we must respect the dignity and place of every being and person (especially the poorest and most vulnerable).
- The goal of these experiences is changed behavior that acknowledges our connections within the sacred Earth community, and that leads to communal actions.
- Suggested use: by individuals for daily prayer and later with a group for communal action.

OPENING OURSELVES TO CONVERSION: (To be done prior to the Communal Process below):

We invite you to pray using the individual reflection sheets that focus on some of the most provocative, conversion-requiring statements in *Laudato Si*. There are five different ways of reflecting on each statement, best pondered in order, over several days.

The form has been inspired by the structure used in the booklet “Deepening Communion with Creation” and the practice of Lectio Divina. It includes the following:

- **Doing a Careful Reading:** Similar to Lectio Divina, this section is meant to help us read the quote deeply, noting and understanding the words, looking for how God is speaking to each of us individually;
- **Recalling My Experience:** Focuses awareness on our personal experience of the issues in the

quote (awareness, privilege, affluence, conspicuous consumption, denial, previous actions toward change, etc.);

- **Reflecting Theologically and Spiritually:** Presents theological and spiritual foundations for the passage, and a vision of the sacred Earth community toward which we move, evoking the desire to restore and build up the sacred connections of creation;
- **Understanding the Background:** Examines the statement in light of contemporary discoveries and current reality, highlighting the implications for poor, oppressed, and disadvantaged people, and for Earth's damaged systems.;
- **Committing to Making a Difference:** Challenges us to commit to some specific action related to the statement beyond "superficial ecology." (*Laudato Si* #59) What am I willing to consider doing myself? What can I suggest as a communal action?

COMMUNAL PROCESS: Commitment to individual and communal actions

- To be done with a group *after* individuals have completed personal Opening Ourselves to Conversion sheets (either one or as many as this meeting will address)
- **Group Sharing:** Each person shares on
 - The conversions/transformations I am experiencing around the specific call,
 - How I am growing in awareness of and responsibility for the consequences of my actions on the poorest and most vulnerable (air, soil, water, creatures, people),
 - The commitments I am willing to make,
 - The areas where I am being called to conversion but am not yet ready. How I will work toward further conversion.
- **Group Process:**
 - The group discusses the action(s) they might take together to affect climate change.
 - The group decides on communal action(s), practical steps to be done, by whom, before the next gathering.
 - The group schedules the next gathering.
- **Communal Prayer of Commitment and Support:** Please design your own prayer to include the following elements:
 - Individual Commitment statements
 - Group Commitment statements
 - Blessing of the group on these commitments
 - Areas of call, praying for whatever graces of openness and willingness are needed
 - Blessing of the group on where each individual and the whole group is right now, prayers for conversion, openness to grace
 - Summary prayer: aligning ourselves with the movement of God's on-going creation toward deeper communion, increased consciousness, and care for all our dear neighbors within the Earth community.
- **Celebration:** Take the time to celebrate not only the commitments but the new awareness that the group shared.



Opening Ourselves to Conversion

By Honoring the World as Sacrament

Laudato Si

9a. As Christians, we are also called “to accept the world as a sacrament of communion, as a way of sharing with God and our neighbors on a global scale. It is our humble conviction that the divine and the human meet in the slightest detail in the seamless garment of God’s Creation, in the last speck of dust of our planet.”*

**Patriarch Bartholomew, “Global Responsibility and Ecological Sustainability”, Closing Remarks, Halki Summit I, Istanbul (20 June 2012).*

Reflection 1: Doing a Careful Reading

Here Francis calls on rich Christian imagery. How is the world a sacrament? What does he mean by “a sacrament of communion? What are the implications of the phrase “the seamless garment of Creation”? Do I see the divine and human meeting in what I see around me?

Reflection 2: Recalling My Experience

Do I experience the world as a “communion of subjects,” each being with its own life and relationships with each other? When have I experienced communion with a person or created being or in a situation in my life? Do I have difficulty accepting the world as a sacred place, with all its problems? Do I experience God and myself meeting even in the dust of our planet?

Reflection 3: Reflecting Theologically and Spiritually

In our sacrament of Eucharist, Jesus gives himself to us to nourish us and strengthen our relationship with him and each other. In all of Creation, God is poured out for the same reasons: to nourish us and strengthen our communion with God, each other, and all that exists. God continues to create as we learn to be with one another and with all that exists in a respectful, loving and sacred manner, sharing among us all the gifts of our common home.

Reflection 4: Understanding the Background

In actuality, the global picture is far from one of a communion of sharing among all of us. Rather, it is a picture of some having much and many having less than what they need. It is not communion when producing the fossil fuel for our cars pollutes the streams of poor people, makes neighborhoods unlivable, and endangers the towns that the oil trains roll through. The poor share the dangers, the richer get cheap gas.

Reflection 5: Committing to Making a Difference

Everything I use is a gift of the energy of others in Creation. What if I were to share so much that everyone experienced advantages, privileges, rights, and a chance to fulfill their dreams? Today I will be conscious that everything is gift, and meant to deepen the communion of all creation.



Opening Ourselves to Conversion

Through an Encounter with Jesus Christ

Laudato Si

217. The ecological crisis is also a summons to profound interior conversion...an “ecological conversion”, whereby the effects of their encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them;... it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience.

Reflection 1: Doing a Careful Reading

What feelings and thoughts rise within me as I read “profound interior conversion?” Do I find my encounters with Jesus Christ are transformative? Is that transformation evident in my relationship with the world? If an ecological conversion” is not an option,” do I pray for the willingness to undergo one?

Reflection 2: Recalling My Experience

Do I experience myself acting in relation to the Earth crisis? Where do I experience resistance to ecological conversion within me? What form does it take? What could “profound interior conversion” look like in me? When I take my resistance and feelings of being overwhelmed to prayer, where do I feel nudged to change? Where does my “encounter with Jesus Christ” result in action for a healthy Earth?

Reflection 3: Reflecting Theologically and Spiritually

If we were to live today as Jesus lived, we would become “prophetic and challenging, promoting care, protection and healing of the natural world even if these go counter to powerful economic and political interests – and they do” (Elizabeth Johnson, CSJ).

Reflection 4: Understanding the Background

According to Bernard Lonergan, conversion is about falling in love with a larger understanding of the Sacred. If we can see all of creation as involved in God’s own activity, we can find the motivation to change our behavior. As Francis says, “the Eucharist is a source of light and motivation for our concerns for the environment, directing us to be stewards of all creation.” (*Laudato Si*, 236) Eucharist is about incarnation, self-giving, and gratitude. Jesus’ “act of cosmic love” can motivate us to protect all creation.

Reflection 5: Committing to Making a Difference

Spirituality (personal and communal) includes ways of being that connect us with Jesus Christ alive today. How can this be more evident in how we live and work? By simplifying my lifestyle? By asking, “How does this decision/action impact the Earth community?” In what areas could the congregation stand up for Earth in the spirit of Jesus? Change our communal lifestyle? How might our community live prophetically regarding a healthy Earth and people?



Opening Ourselves to Conversion

Through Suffering with Our Neighbors

Laudato Si

19. 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.

Reflection 1: Doing a Careful Reading

In this statement, Pope Francis is sharing a glimpse into what motivates him to care about the whole human community. Do I share his goal and his attitude of compassion? What words or images inspire me? Which ones concern me? Challenge me?

Reflection 2: Recalling My Experience

Where do I see myself in this statement? Do I tend to keep informed on things but not think of the implications for who are those behind the scenes, or who might be suffering in this situation? Of what crises in our world am I “painfully aware”? Or do I feel so overwhelmed by the problems I see that I have “compassion fatigue”, tending to avoid reading or hearing about bad news?

Reflection 3: Reflecting Theologically and Spiritually

Rabbi Abraham Heschel reminds us that God suffers with us. And the Spiritual Exercises ask us to put ourselves into every scene, identifying with what each being is experiencing. By doing so we put on the compassion of Jesus Christ; we participate on the heart of God.

Reflection 4: Understanding the Background

In order to motivate ourselves to radical action, we must tap into our emotional and spiritual energy as well as gather information and strategize. The task facing us, to change our lifestyle both individually and socially, is so challenging that we need to bring to bear the full force of ourselves as moral, compassionate beings. Cultural pressures encourage us to distance ourselves from the needs of our world, to stay safe and calm in our “gated communities”. But what we do has consequences far beyond our borders.

Reflection 5: Committing to Making a Difference

Am I willing to open myself to painful news about the state of our world until I can discover what I can do about it? Can I learn to “pray the news” and hold all that I hear in my heart? Can I consider what the consequences of my actions may be for others, sometimes reconsidering what I will do? Being willing to make the suffering of others my own, how will I be today? When I work and celebrate with other groups, how will we hold the concerns of all our dear neighbors until we discover what we can do about them?



Opening Ourselves to Conversion

Through Acknowledging our Common Origin & Future

Laudato Si

202. Many things have to change of course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change. We lack an awareness of our common origin, of our mutual belonging, and of a future to be shared with everyone.

Reflection 1: Doing a Careful Reading

What do I know of a “common origin” of all that exists? Belonging refers to everything having a right to be here. How do I “mutually belong” to an Earth that could live without me? How do I respect each being and find my right place as a human? Do I believe that I must also change? Which words move me to consider a more relational way of being?

Reflection 2: Recalling My Experience

What has been my experience of the natural world? Do I feel connected or somewhat separate? When have I felt one with the other beings within the Earth community? Have I ever felt that we are all one community with a common future? Remember, savor, and (perhaps) share a mind expanding experience of connection with the natural world. Let wonder and awe be a guide.

Reflection 3: Reflecting Theologically and Spiritually

The expansive CSJ term “Dear Neighbor” includes all that exists. It invites us to reflect on how we “mutually belong” to the living Earth and it to us. Our sacred story reveals an image of God as continuing to create in and through us. If I fall in love with this vision of God, I become passionate about being a responsible co-creator. What other images of God-actively-involved-in-this-world help me to become ready to change?

Reflection 4: Understanding the Background

Our cosmological perspective places humans late in the evolutionary story; humans are part of the web of life that already exists and are part of the Earth Community. All that exists came from a common origin; we share common elements. “From the primordial flaring forth, everything has been, is and will be forever in relationship. This is communion” (Preamble, Chapter 2013). Our role is to enhance the communion by which God continues to create.

Reflection 5: Committing to Making a Difference

How am I seeing myself as part of the Earth Community? What specific change in me will bring me closer to speaking and acting relationally for our common home? How will our local units move in solidarity on this awareness that we as humans are a part of the Earth Community? How will we express the necessary relationship with all that exists (images, prayers, rituals, etc)?



Opening Ourselves to **Conversion** Through Reducing Our Use of Fossil Fuels

Laudato Si

23. Humanity is called to recognize the need for changes of lifestyle, production and consumption, in order to combat this warming (of the climatic system) or at least the human causes which produce or aggravate it...Scientific studies indicate that most global warming in recent decades is due to the great concentration of greenhouse gases (carbon dioxide, methane, nitrogen oxides and others) released mainly as a result of human activity...The problem is aggravated by a model of development based on the intensive use of fossil fuels, which is at the heart of the worldwide energy system.

Reflection 1: Doing a Careful Reading

What stands out for me as I read this passage? Does reading about “human causes” of global climate change bring up feelings? Do I feel overwhelmed with the scope of changes that are being called for?

Reflection 2: Recalling My Experience

Life in the developed world is based on the use of fossil fuels. When I travel by car, airplane, bus, or train, when I buy products produced in factories, when I turn on the air conditioner or heat, am I aware of the pollution being caused? What changes have I been able to make to reduce my contribution to this problem?

Reflection 3: Reflecting Theologically and Spiritually

The gift of creation includes adequate energy to support our needs. There is energy as well as blessing in warm sun, and cooling breezes. Energy could be considered a sharing in the very life of God whose energy propels the universe. This makes our participation in the energy of creation a “sacrament of communion...a way of sharing with God and our neighbors on a global scale” (*Laudato Si*, Paragraph 9).

Reflection 4: Understanding the Background

“Many of the poor live in areas particularly affected by phenomena related to warming, and their means of subsistence are largely dependent on natural reserves and ecosystemic services such as agriculture, fishing and forestry....changes in climate, to which animals and plants cannot adapt, lead them to migrate; this in turn affects the livelihood of the poor, who are then forced to leave their homes, with great uncertainty for their future and that of their children. There has been a tragic rise in the number of migrants seeking to flee from the growing poverty caused by environmental degradation.” (*Laudato Si*, Paragraph 25)

Reflection 5: Committing to Making a Difference

How can my lifestyle produce less pollution? Can I choose to get solar or wind energy for my heating and cooling needs or join those actively working for energy alternatives? What can our community do together?



Opening Ourselves to **Conversion** Through Taking Small Steps that Matter

Laudato Si

5. 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.”*

**Saint John Paul II, Encyclical Letter Centesimus Annus (1 May 1991), 58: AAS 83 (1991), p. 863.*

Reflection 1: Doing a Careful Reading

Where do I see myself in this statement? Do I feel a need to protect and improve our world? What does “profound change” mean to me? What do I believe are the connections between my actions and a better world?

Reflection 2: Recalling My Experience

My lifestyle includes many privileges, from availability of transportation, TV, electronics, and appliances, to access to healthy food and safe living environment. Why would I change any of these? Have I ever limited my buying to products that don’t pollute in their manufacture and that provide a living wage to those who make them, like fair trade?

Reflection 3: Reflecting Theologically and Spiritually

The compelling vision which underlies this passage is one of a world where we respect every being and its place in the ordered system of God’s Creation. The communion and interdependence of the Earth community reflects that of the Trinity. By considering this communion in all the decisions and actions of my life I am aligning myself with God’s ongoing act of Creation and participating in building a better world.

Reflection 4: Understanding the Background

Every act of a human today has consequences for others in the Earth community. If the ways we produce things are polluting, we restrict the rights and dignity of other beings and destroy what all of us need to survive. How do we affect the economic power which decides models of production and has more control than political democratic power?

Reflection 5: Committing to Making a Difference

The challenge is to commit to a profound change in lifestyle. Can I buy (more) fair trade products, or boycott manufacturers that have known human rights or environmental violations? What radical individual action am I called to? With whom can I join to gain collective power to effect change?



Opening Ourselves to **Conversion** Through Changing Our Mindset

Laudato Si

210. Environmental education has broadened its goals. Whereas in the beginning it was mainly centered on scientific information, consciousness-raising and the prevention of environmental risks, it tends now to include a critique of the “myths” of a modernity grounded in a utilitarian mindset (individualism, unlimited progress, competition, consumerism, the unregulated market).

Reflection 1: Doing a Careful Reading

This paragraph calls into question some of the destructive attitudes of our modern culture. In what aspects of my life do I have a “utilitarian mindset”? Do I recognize that the “resources” of our world are limited? Do I see how these beliefs might be damaging to the Earth and her beings?

Reflection 2: Recalling My Experience

Our lives depend on a host of modern conveniences – food plentiful in all seasons, water at the turn of a faucet, lights and heat or cooling at the flick of a switch, inexpensive clothing and furnishings. How do I honor the people who are involved in bringing these services to me? How am I being counter to the culture of individualism, competition, and consumerism?

Reflection 3: Reflecting Theologically and Spiritually

We live in a world of profound interconnectedness. Everything that I touch has been brought to me by the generosity, effort, grace of some other being – whether person or Earth. Everything that leaves my hands goes on to affect others. This web of interdependence is a sacrament of communion with an intimate Creation.

Reflection 4: Understanding the Background

In this section of *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis directs our attention to some of the causes of our environmental crisis – namely the “myths” or irrational beliefs we have come to hold about ourselves, others, and the world. If we hold to individualism, we think we are separate from others, independent of them, and that our actions have no effect on anyone but ourselves. If we are competitive, we lose the opportunity to maximize our collective potential to create solutions to our planetary problems.

Reflection 5: Committing to Making a Difference

Examine each of the “myths of modernity” for what they demand of some and how they privilege others. How do these myths show up in my behavior? How will I begin to address my individualism, competitiveness, consumerism, and belief that humans should have no limits to expansion? How might a spirituality of “moving always toward love of God and neighbor without distinction” motivate me/us to be counter-cultural?



Opening Ourselves to Conversion

From Consumption, Greed and Wastefulness

Laudato Si

9b. [Patriarch Bartholomew] asks us to replace consumption with sacrifice, greed with generosity, wastefulness with a spirit of sharing, an asceticism which “entails learning to give, and not simply to give up. It is a way of loving, of moving gradually away from what I want to what God’s world needs. It is liberation from fear, greed and compulsion”.*

**Patriarch Bartholomew, Lecture at the Monastery of Utstein, Norway (23 June 2003).*

Reflection 1: Doing a Careful Reading

What stands out for me as I read each phrase of this passage? Do these or other habits need replacing in my life? In my prayer, what does God lead me to understand that the world needs? If I were to be as loving as suggested, from what attitudes might I be liberated?

Reflection 2: Recalling My Experience

So much in this culture creates waste: unnecessary wrappings, onetime use, trial size things designed to break or become obsolete. What do I find wasteful-by-design in my life? What have I been able to change so as to share instead of throwing away? Am I able to rejoice in the gift of our world and celebrate its healing action in my life? Do I recognize what motivates my behavior when I am impatient with all this talk of changing my lifestyle? How do I feel about doing more?

Reflection 3: Reflecting Theologically and Spiritually

Creation is an act of total generosity on God’s part. Everything is given to us from God’s fullness. But our life experiences may not make it easy for us to be as generous as our Creator. It takes a deeper level of trust to believe that even if I give away my widow’s mite I will have enough.

Reflection 4: Understanding the Background

Patriarch Bartholomew reminds us that we can experience psychological, spiritual, or emotional healing to the extent that we replace individualistic attitudes and behaviors with ones that give priority to “what God’s world needs.” Not only does creation nurture and heal us, but it can and will contribute to our spiritual freedom if we are in right relationship with it.

Reflection 5: Committing to Making a Difference

How much can I change in my life? How will I replace consumption with sacrifice, greed with generosity, wastefulness with a spirit of sharing? What sacrifices will I make; what sharing will I do? What efforts could accomplish more if done with our communities, parishes and work places?



Opening Ourselves to Conversion To a Global Spirituality

Laudato Si

240. The human person grows more, matures more and is sanctified more to the extent that he or she enters into relationships, going out from themselves to live in communion with God, with others and with all creatures. In this way, they make their own that trinitarian dynamism which God imprinted in them when they were created. Everything is interconnected, and this invites us to develop a spirituality of that global solidarity which flows from the mystery of the Trinity.

Reflection 1: Doing a Careful Reading

Note the connections being made by the language – “grows, matures, is sanctified, enters relationships, goes out, is interconnected, develops global spirituality, and flows from the mystery of the Trinity.” What specifically moves me in this paragraph? How do I see myself in each of those phrases?

Reflection 2: Recalling My Experience

A Native man living in Colorado wrote a book called *I Am the Grand Canyon*. When do I experience everything (every one) as myself?...interconnected?...in solidarity? God’s Trinitarian relatedness is “imprinted” in each of us. How do I experience this? With what and with whom do I identify?

Reflection 3: Reflecting Theologically and Spiritually

This statement implies that we embody the relationships at the center of the Trinity when our relationships with others draw us all into communion. Chapter 2013 reminded us that “communion holds harmony and dissonance, inspiration and frustration, enthusiasm and exhaustion, readiness and hesitation.” Where am I today in this experience of communion with a larger sacred universe?

Reflection 4: Understanding the Background

Everything is interconnected physically and with a Trinitarian dynamism. Driving a car in the U.S. affects the atmosphere, the glaciers, the fish in the ocean and the girl with asthma. How do I exercise responsibility for those physical relationships? A spirituality of global solidarity would relate to all beings in a way that increases their flourishing.

Reflection 5: Committing to Making a Difference

With what commitment (actions of global solidarity) can we become stronger, living the fact that “everything is interconnected?”...Personally, changing our living style? Buying fair trade (that insures worker dignity and rights)? Driving less? Supporting those working for change? Communally divesting from fossil fuels and Investing in energy alternatives.