Integral Ecology

In his apostolic exhortation *Laudato Si* (LS), Pope Francis introduces us to the concept of Integral Ecology. Integral ecology is the understanding that all life - all creation and all social, cultural, economic and ecological systems - is interconnected.

“Since everything is closely interrelated, and today’s problems call for a vision capable of taking into account every aspect of the global crisis, I suggest that we now consider some elements of an integral ecology, one which clearly respects its human and social dimensions” (LS, 137)

Pope Francis’ integral ecology builds upon Saint John Paul II’s concept ‘human ecology’ (*Centesimus Annus* (CS), 38–39): “Not only has God given the earth to man, who must use it with respect for the original good purpose for which it was given to him, but man too is God’s gift to man. He must therefore respect the natural and moral structure with which he has been endowed” (CS, 39). He notes the intimate link between care for the earth and care for creation and the respect and care we must give for the natural and moral structure with which we have been endowed (cf. CS, 39). Pope Francis also builds upon Pope Benedict’s ‘ecology of man’, by which he emphasizes that we have a human nature that must be respected and that cannot be manipulated at will.

Pope Francis reminds us that “Ecology studies the relationship between living organisms and the environment in which they develop” (LS, 138). He goes on, “Just as the different aspects of the planet – physical, chemical and biological – are interrelated, so too living species are part of a network which we will never fully explore and understand. A good part of our genetic code is shared by many living beings” (LS, 138). Understanding this interconnectedness helps us to realize that “a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor” (LS, 49)

“An integral ecology includes taking time to recover a serene harmony with creation, reflecting on our lifestyle and our ideals, and contemplating the Creator who lives among us and surrounds us, whose presence “must not be contrived but found, uncovered” (LS, 155)
At the heart of integral ecology is a call to living in right relationship with God, others and all of creation. This echoes the Gospel of Jesus Christ which is a call to all people to live in right relationship. Jesus models this for us. We can hear this call in Luke’s gospel (4:16-21) as Jesus makes his first public appearance and announcing his relationship to the Father and how he is here to come fulfil the Father’s mission and bring good news to those who live on the margins of society. In Matthew’s Gospel this call is found in the Beatitudes (Mt 5), in the discourse of the greatest commandment (22:36-40), and in the parable of the last judgement (Mt 25:31ff). At the root of all Jesus does is his relationship to his Father (Jn 10:30, Jn 14:6-7), his commitment to the mission for which he was sent (Lk 22:42).
Actions You Can Take

Parish Activities & Education
- Form “Green Teams,” or a Laudato Si’ circle
- Bring in expert speakers
- Speak from the pulpit
- Create or expand your library

Energy Conservation & Efficiency
- Determine current energy performance
- Set a goal
- Create & Implement an Energy Action Plan

Purchasing & Recycling
- Use recyclable or reusable plates and other materials for parish events
- Reduce, reuse & recycle at home
- Embrace simpler living

Making Laudato Si for Young People
- Use the resources at NatureConservancy.ca
- Cultivate a school garden
- Celebrate St. Francis Day
- Encourage children to help with gardening
- Explore the outdoors
- Visit botanical gardens, nature centres, aquariums, city parks

Water Conservation
- Upgrade your plumbing & repair leaks
- Minimize outdoor water use with water-wise landscaping
- Use rain barrels for outdoor watering
- Remember the basics: turn off the water when you brush your teeth, check toilets for slow leaks, take shorter showers

Buying & Sharing Food
- Buy local
- Avoid food waste
- Use cloth shopping bags
- Grow food in your backyard, schoolyard or church yard
- Compost when possible
- Avoid bottled water
- Support the local food bank or food pantry
- Fast during Lent

Assisting Climate Vulnerable Populations
- Know who in your parish is vulnerable to flooding and other environmental damage
- Collaborate with government organizations on disaster preparedness
- Ensure vulnerable parishioners have access to cool or warm spaces, and an evacuation plan

Creating Sustainable Landscapes
- Plant trees and native plants
- Plant for pollinators
- Create a water-wise landscape
- Connect the church landscape with urban forests
- Minimize chemical use
- Consider a community garden
- Become a citizen scientist

Transportation
- Carpool to church, school, etc.
- Consider an electric, hybrid or alternative-fueled car
- Remember the basics: don’t idle unnecessarily, pick the first available parking space, keep your vehicle maintained

Political Action
- Become informed about environmental issues
- Encourage parishioners to lobby their elected representatives
- Support products and businesses that are ethical and sustainable
- Support candidates who support the environment
- Get involved in environmental projects

Helpful Resources:
The Government of Canada on conducting an energy audit:
https://www.nrcan.gc.ca/energy/efficiency/energy-efficiency-industry/energy-management-industry/conducting-energy-audit/20401

Water-efficient landscaping resource from the Ontario Clean Water Agency:

Resources for kids from NatureConservancy.ca:

1 cf. Address to Bundestag September 22, 2011