



# The Beauty of Our Common Home

## Keywords

**Stewardship Environment Responsibility Solidarity  
Biodiversity Gospel Values**

**Introduction:** Play the video made by various artists in advance of the Parish Conference on Climate Change (COP21) for Friends of the Earth.

**Watch:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZSnOXbaXzfM>

**Discussion:** Did any of the images, either spoken or visual, strike you in particular?

What do you think the line 'Heaven's poetry to us' means?

Do you think the main problems regarding the environment are caused by 'stress, speediness and too much greediness'.

How appropriate is it to describe the earth as a mother?

## *Laudato Si'*

In 2015, Pope Francis issued an Encyclical called *Laudato Si' – On Care for Our Common Home*. In it, the Pope criticizes consumerism and irresponsible development, warns about climate change and environmental destruction, and calls all people of the world to take 'swift and unified global action'.

**Watch:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IG-8fQ1-qN0>

**Discussion:**

**Think – Pair – Share**

Make a list of the threats to our common home that are identified in the video. Share them with a partner, and then a small group. Write your longer list in your religion journal.

Now, look at signs of hope. Where does the encyclical find hope?

Do you think that young people can make a significant difference?

**Reflective Exercise:** What difference have you made in your life to protect our common home? Write your answer in your Religion journal.

In the Encyclical Pope Francis also compared the earth to a mother.

Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth.

The name of the Encyclical, comes from a song of praise written by St Francis of Assisi, and is said to have been written in late 1224.

**Watch:** [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kpPSZkmr\\_Js](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kpPSZkmr_Js)

**Discussion:**

Why do you think St Francis speaks of Brother Sun and Sister Moon, of Brother Wind and Sister Water?

What difference would it make if we treated the earth and all its creatures and elements as brothers and sisters?





In 2013, Pope Francis explained why he took his name.

Some people wanted to know why the Bishop of Rome wished to be called Francis. Some thought of Francis Xavier, Francis De Sales, and also Francis of Assisi. I will tell you the story. During the election, I was seated next to the Archbishop Emeritus of São Paulo and Prefect Emeritus of the Congregation for the Clergy, Cardinal Claudio Hummes: a good friend, a good friend! When things were looking dangerous, he encouraged me. And when the votes reached two thirds, there was the usual applause, because the Pope had been elected. And he gave me a hug and a kiss, and said: 'Don't forget the poor!' And those words came to me: the poor, the poor. Then, right away, thinking of the poor, I thought of Francis of Assisi. Then I thought of all the wars, as the votes were still being counted, till the end. Francis is also the man of peace. That is how the name came into my heart: Francis of Assisi. For me, he is the man of poverty, the man of peace, the man who loves and protects creation; these days we do not have a very good relationship with creation, do we? He is the man who gives us this spirit of peace, the poor man ... How I would like a Church which is poor and for the poor! (Address of the Holy Father Pope Francis, Saturday, 16 March 2013)

What three aspects of St Francis does Pope Francis mention?

Pope Francis is the first pope to take the name Francis. Does that surprise you?

### **'I Agree'/'I Disagree' Walking Debate**

Place signs that say 'I Agree' and 'I Disagree' on either side of the room. Invite all the students to stand in the centre of the room, explaining that you will call out a number of statements, and they are to move to the side that best represents their opinion on this statement. Encourage a short discussion after each decision.

The choices I make do not have a large impact on the earth.

It is up to governments to care for the Earth – it is not the responsibility of individuals .

Science will solve the climate crisis

Religious people have a particular responsibility to care for the earth.

Depending on time available, students could either do a Prayer/Reflection Exercise or the Ecological Footprint exercise. Alternatively, they could do the Ecological Footprint as homework.

**Prayer and Reflection:** You could either use <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W5-5UFd5OxQ> which is a slow paced examination of conscience re environment with visuals

OR

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uSDFiqs1Fpk> This video illustrates a prayer for our earth from *Laudato Si'*.

### **Homework/Extension Exercise**

Numeracy moment: Exercise adapted from Royal Society of Chemistry

This can also be taken online at <http://www.rsc.org/Education/Teachers/Resources/jesei/ecofoot/students.htm>



## Protecting the Earth: how big is your ecological footprint? (for pupils)

How many Earths would we need if everyone on the planet had the same standard of living as you? Work through this questionnaire to find out how much land is needed to support your lifestyle – your ‘ecological footprint’.

Your ‘ecological footprint’ is the area of land needed to support your lifestyle. If we need any more planets than just the one we have, then your lifestyle is not sustainable.

### How much water do you use?

- Do you have a bath every day? If yes, score 14
- If you have a bath once or twice a week, score 2
- Do you shower everyday instead of having a bath? If so, score 4
- If you only take a shower once a week, score 1

ENTER YOUR SCORE

### What kind of food do you eat?

- Do you have meat with every meal? If yes, score 85
- Do you eat a mix of animal protein and vegetarian dishes? If yes, score 50
- Do you eat mostly vegetarian dishes? If yes, score 30

ENTER YOUR SCORE

### How do you shop?

- When your family go shopping, do they buy mostly locally produced fresh vegetables, bread and meat eg from local butchers, greengrocers, farmers’ market? If so, score 2
- Or do they tend to buy more packaged, processed food? If so, score 15
- Or do they buy a combination of imported, local, fresh and processed food? If so, score 5

ENTER YOUR SCORE

### Where do you live?

- If you live in a small flat score 7
- If you live in a terraced house score 15
- If you live in a large flat score 12
- If you live in a semi-detached house score 23
- If you live in a detached house score 33

ENTER YOUR SCORE

Divide your score by the number of people: who live in your home.

### Where do you go on holiday and how do you get there?

- If you flew as far as Australia last year, score 155
- Or did you fly to Asia or North or South America? If so, score 85
- Or did you just fly as far as Europe? If so, score 20
- If you didn’t fly anywhere, but travelled by road or rail in Ireland score 10.

ENTER YOUR SCORE

### Heating your home

In this section start with 45 points since heating a house usually uses energy obtained by burning fossil fuels. This releases carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. To soak it up, trees will have to be planted, using up precious land. So, subtract points for each energy-saving thing you do.

- Does your family set the thermostat low, putting on a jumper before turning it up? If so, subtract 5 (from 45).
- Is your home well insulated? If it is, subtract another 15.
- If your home is double-glazed subtract 5.
- Does your family only turn on the heating when absolutely necessary, rather than leaving it on the timer all year? If so subtract 10.

ENTER YOUR SCORE



### How much electricity do you use?

For most people, the electricity they use comes from burning fossil fuels which releases carbon dioxide. So start this start with 75 points and subtract points for every electricity-saving thing you do.

- Do you always switch off the lights if a room is no longer in use? If you do, subtract 10.
- Do you always switch off the TV, computers and other electrical equipment rather than leaving them on stand-by? If you do, subtract 10.

ENTER YOUR SCORE

### How do you get to school?

- Do you normally get a lift to school? If so, is it in a modern car with a small engine? If so score 40.
- Or is it in a big 4x4? If so, score 75.
- Or, is the car something in between these two? If it is, score 50.
- If you don't get a lift to school, do you travel by bus or train? If so, score 25.
- If you walk or cycle to school, score 3.

ENTER YOUR SCORE

### How much paper do you use?

- If you always buy books, instead of borrowing them, score 2
- If you always borrow books, score 0.
- If you sometimes borrow and sometimes buy books, score 1.
- Do you always share your magazines and newspapers? If yes, add 5.
- Or do you throw them in the bin once finished with? If so, add 10.

### How much rubbish do you throw away?

You can't help but create some waste, and what you throw away has to be disposed of in landfill sites, using up valuable land. So, start this section with a score of 100 points and subtract points for every waste-reducing thing you do.

- Have you or your family visited the bottle bank in the last month to throw away your empty glass bottles? If you have, subtract 15.
- Do you save your waste paper for recycling? If you do, subtract 17.
- Do you keep your used cans to recycle rather than just throwing them in the bin? If you do, subtract 10.
- Do you recycle empty plastic containers? If you do, subtract 8.
- Does your family keep kitchen and garden waste for composting? If they do, subtract 5.
- If you reduce the amount of waste you generate by buying less, mending and reusing old things, buying second hand clothes then subtract 15.

ENTER YOUR SCORE

ENTER YOUR SCORE

### Total score

Click here to add up all of the above to make your total score.

### Grand total

Now, many of the amenities that we use every day such as roads, shops, schools and leisure centres make their own demands on land. So, to take this into account, click here to double your score.

ENTER YOUR SCORE



## How many hectares are needed to support your lifestyle?

Each point in your score represents one-hundredth of a hectare used. Work out how many hectares your lifestyle has an impact upon by dividing your grand total by 100. Now find out how many 'Earths' we would need if everyone on the planet were to use the same amount of land (ie share the same standard of living) as you:

**2 hectares or less** Well done! If everyone lived like this, then human existence would be both sustainable and fair as there is enough land on the Earth to support the whole population at this level of land use. At present, about two-thirds of the global population have an ecological footprint of less than 2 hectares each.

**2 – 4 hectares** Your footprint is below the European average! But, it is double the area that would be available if land were distributed evenly amongst the population of the Earth. If everyone on the planet lived like you then we would need at least one extra planet to provide enough land to support us. About 15% of the world's population falls into this category.

**4 – 6 hectares** Your footprint is close to the European average. It is about three times the land area that would be available if all the land on Earth were divided up fairly, so for everyone to live like you we'd need another two planets. About 7% of the world's population falls into this category.

**6 – 8 hectares** Your footprint is larger than the European average but still smaller than the average North American one. If everyone lived like you we'd need another three whole planets to support us because you are using up four times your share of the Earth if it were divided up equally amongst the whole population.

**More than 8 hectares** Your footprint is close to that of the average North American. If everyone on the planet lived like this we would need at least four additional planets to support us because you are using up five times what your share of the Earth would be if it were divided up equally amongst the whole population. About 5% of the world's population have a footprint this big.

### What can we do?

What action could you take to make your own ecological footprint smaller? Make a list. If you can think of any actions that aren't included in the questionnaire, add them to your list as well.

### Which of these could you start tomorrow?

Describe how these actions would reduce the impact your life has on the environment. Which changes are not possible in the immediate future, and why?

Make a list of the actions your school could make to reduce its ecological footprint.

Make a list of the actions the government could make to reduce its ecological footprint.

