

## Care for our Common Home : Article by David Nash

On Wednesday 20th March our Diocesan Caritas team Deborah Fisher and Teresa Maguire facilitated a Care for our Common Home Event at the Parish Hall, St Catherine's, Wimborne attended by a group of 20 people.

We were reminded of the Pope's 2015 Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si* the first encyclical in the Catholic Church to directly address the social and ecological crisis. Inspired by the example of St. Francis of Assisi, whose "Praise be to you" shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace, Pope Francis invites us to a radical ecological conversion and a spirituality filled with gratitude for the gifts of creation.

*Laudato Si* directly addresses the complex social and ecological crisis we face today:

- It emphasises our responsibility to care for our world and not exploit resources from future generations.
- It recognises the intrinsic value of all creatures, not just humans.
- It calls for protecting the climate and biodiversity as part of the common good.
- It proposes lines of action at personal, political, and economic levels.
- It demands a redefinition of progress that responds to both the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth.

Within our Parish Event we discussed what the Church locally already does to Care for our Common Home and what more we could do to respond to the cry of the earth.

It was easier for participants to identify how we reach out to the poor and although there is lots happening on the environment, few people could easily recall a festival or Mass for creation in their parish. Nevertheless there is a lot of great work already happening like Food bank collections, Charity Action Group, Easter Gardens, Cafod Hunger Lunches, reusable Oasis for the flower arrangements and support for refugees to name but a few. Locally, it was felt that we could do much more to use eco products, to provide facilities for cyclists to reduce car journeys, think about re-wilding our church grounds to include native species and attract insects and birds to our Parish Garden. We could also encourage behavioural change like more reuse, repair and recycling by providing advice, through workshops, and regular reminders through the Liturgy, Father Darline's homilies and bidding prayers or events like walk to church week.

We have a Parish refurbishment project coming up soon so we should investigate a net zero carbon approach, optimising insulation and renewable technology like solar panels and/or heat pumps and sourcing sustainable, ideally local, materials. Questions like how much to increase our parking or retain external space for a community garden, where the young can learn how to grow plants from an older generation more used to growing produce, spring to mind.

The participants identified formation and engagement with young people as priorities as well as sharing practical ideas such as; using the power of prayer for community and planet, promoting Fair Trade, use of seasonal / local food, and make Church Marketplace accessible to parishioners.

Existing groups in parishes such as SVP and CAFOD are already demonstrating Catholic Social Teaching in Action. Where there is a Live Simply group there seems to be more structured planning and where there is no group things happen more ad hoc depending on who is interested. There was agreement that we needed to do more to share our prophetic voice on environmental and social issues including *Pacem in Terris*. It was also agreed that we need to do more to engage clergy who can then involve the wider parish community.

Some of the big thinking that came from the Caritas event included:

- Checklist of parish strategies for sharing and implementing our common home
- Encourage and work with Young Activists
- Connect parishes – deanery events
- Church Land/property - measure the baseline of our biodiversity and set targets for net gain
- Ethical and social investment and ‘peer to peer’ lending – help those who cannot afford it to have solar panels/ASHPs installed (and running costs)
- Work with other churches (Eco-Church)
- Support SVP and other initiatives to reach out to the poor, and
- Caritas to run a large scale diocesan conference to inspire, encourage action and share ethical trade and sustainable purchasing ideas.

From the work that I do I am aware of a number of sustainability initiatives. Developed by BioRegional and the WWF *One Planet Living* is a holistic framework designed to encourage sustainable living because 2022 ecological footprinting data indicates, that if everyone in the world consumed as much as the average person in western Europe, we’d need three planets to support us. It envisions a world where everyone lives happily and healthily within the Earth’s resources, leaving space for nature according to ten principles:

1. Health and Happiness: Promoting active, social, and meaningful lives to enhance well-being.
2. Equity and Local Economy: Creating safe, equitable places that support local prosperity and fair trade.
3. Culture and Community: Nurturing local identity, empowering communities, and fostering sustainable living.
4. Land and Nature: Protecting and restoring land for the benefit of people and wildlife.

5. Sustainable Water: Efficient water use, protection of local water resources, and flood/drought reduction.
6. Local and Sustainable Food: Advocating for humane farming, healthy diets, and local, seasonal organic food.
7. Travel and Transport: Reducing travel needs and promoting walking, cycling, and low-carbon transport.
8. Materials and Products: Using sustainable materials and promoting products that reduce consumption.
9. Zero Waste: Minimizing waste through reuse, recycling, and pollution reduction.
10. Zero Carbon Energy: Enhancing energy efficiency and sourcing all energy from renewables.

This framework, backed by science and experience, helps organisations worldwide create a brighter, better future. It's been embraced by developers, businesses, local authorities, tourist resorts, schools, and community groups. Maybe it is something we should adopt at Diocesan, Parish and personal levels to shape what we can do better to put the Planet and others first. It would seem to be missing the spiritual dimension for our use, love of God and love of others and the power of prayer, but could be adapted, with that as the first of eleven principles for our Catholic needs?

God gave human beings a special responsibility within creation to cultivate it, guard it and use it wisely. The Bible confirms this:

God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. (Genesis 2:15)

Everything that lives and moves about will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything. (Genesis 9:3)

As God provides for us, humans should show they are thankful by taking care of what God has given them:

The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it. (Psalm 24:1)

Let's be thankful and responsible because, as the comedian Rob Newman and activists like Greta Thunberg say, 'there is no Planet B'.