

JUBILEE -FOR THE- EARTH

PODCAST STUDY GUIDE

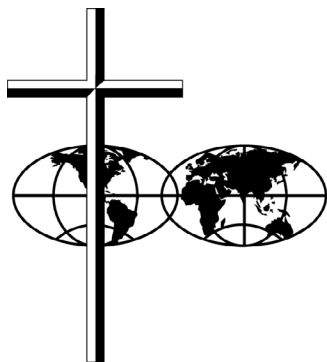


Missionary Society
of St. Columban



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INTRODUCTION

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis writes that “each year sees the disappearance of thousands of plant and animal species which we will never know, which our children will never see, because they have been lost forever. The great majority become extinct for reasons related to human activity. Because of us, thousands of species will no longer give glory to God by their very existence, nor convey their message to us. We have no such right” (LS 33).

The Pope’s encyclical reminds Catholics and all people of goodwill of something that many of us have forgotten about: that caring for our brother and sister species is fundamental to our lives as people of faith and as global citizens.

And yet, in 2019, an international group of scientists [predicted](#) that up to one million plant and animal species face extinction due to human activities. This mass extinction has already started, and it will be more severe and longer lasting than any previous mass extinction event.

That’s why the Missionary Society of St. Columban created “Jubilee for the Earth,” a podcast mini-series about the beauty of biodiversity and the threats it faces.

Biodiversity is the stunning variety of life on Earth. This variety exists at the genetic level, the species level, and the ecosystem level. The complex interactions between these levels have made Earth habitable for billions of years. The study of biodiversity has shown that every member of creation is interconnected.

Over the course of six episodes, we explore the spirituality of biodiversity, how our economic system is the root cause of biodiversity loss, and so much more. You can learn more about the podcast [here](#).

You can listen to the podcast on [Apple](#), [Spotify](#), or [SoundCloud](#), or watch them as videos on [Facebook](#) or [YouTube](#).

This study guide is a companion to the podcast and can be used by an individual or a group. It includes three reflection questions and one activity for each episode.

If you choose to use this study guide in a group setting, we suggest listening to or watching the episode before you meet, so you’ll have more time to discuss it with one another. Each episode is only 20 minutes long.

You may also want to set aside some time at the beginning of each meeting to talk about your experiences completing the activity from the previous week.

Thank you for joining us on this journey.

You can learn more about the Columbans’ work to care for biodiversity [here](#) or by contacting [Amy Woolam Echeverria](#).

Episode 1

THE SPIRITUALITY OF BIODIVERSITY

Listen to or watch the episode [here](#).

St. Columban (a sixth century Irish missionary) famously said that "if you want to know the Creator, look at creation." As people of faith, we believe that creation - animals, plants, ecosystems, and all natural things - is a sacred gift from God and that God is revealed to us through each member of creation.

Thanks to generations of people in the scientific community, as well as artists, activists, and frontline communities, we are now aware of previously unknown aspects of the natural world. This dialogue has expanded our hearts and minds so that we can rejoice in the beauty and bounty of our planet and the entire universe. At the same time, we can better understand how to live within its limits.

In 2019, an international group of scientists [predicted](#) that up to one million plant and animal species face extinction due to human activities. This mass extinction has already started, and it will be more severe and longer lasting than any previous mass extinction event.

Now more than ever, we humans need to heal our broken relationship with the rest of God's creation.

DID YOU KNOW?

A [study](#) in 2011 estimated that there are some 8.7 million species on Earth and humans have only identified 1.6 million of them. We don't know 86% of the creatures created by God.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What biodiversity is unique to the area where you live? What does this tell you about God?
2. St. Francis of Assisi said that living creatures are our brothers and sisters. How should this affect the way we care for other living creatures? What changes might it demand in our lives?
3. What are your hopes for the biodiversity of the Earth 500 years from now? What is needed to ensure the long-term protection of biodiversity over such a period of time?

ACTIVITY

Reflect on your personal relationship with God's creation using this [ecological examen](#), developed by the Jesuits.



Episode 2

A NEW KIND OF ECONOMY

Listen to or watch the episode [here](#).

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis says that “[the Earth] cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as [the Earth’s] lord and masters, entitled to plunder her at will” (LS 2).

In particular, it is human plundering for profit and comfort that is a root cause of the current mass extinction of species.

In 2019, the United Nations published its “[Global Resource Outlook](#),” which concluded that “90% of biodiversity loss is caused by resource extraction and processing.”

This includes human activities like habitat destruction for agriculture and mining and the over-consumption of natural resources like non-renewable energy and fishing stocks.

“We need to grow in the conviction,” Pope Francis says, “that a decrease in the pace of production and consumption can at times give rise to another form of progress and development” (LS 191).

In other words, now more than ever, we need to urgently reimagine how our economy operates and to redefine what human flourishing looks like.

DID YOU KNOW?

In 2021, the Philippines celebrates the 500th anniversary of the arrival of Christianity. [In the last 500 years](#), 93% of the country’s forest cover has been lost and 70% of the country’s coral reefs are now in a poor or fair condition.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What values influence your economic decisions? What values influence your country’s economic decisions? How does the wellbeing of creation factor into these decisions?
2. What would an economy that recognizes the interconnectedness of all things - and respects the limits and cycles of creation - look like?
3. What needs to happen so that this new economy can begin and grow?

ACTIVITY

In his encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*, Pope Benedict XVI teaches us that our purchases are moral acts (CV 66). How do your purchases impact workers, local communities, and the Earth? Complete this [consumer examination](#) to find out.

Afterwards, visualize an economy that recognizes the interconnectedness of all things, then draw it, create a poem about it, or choose a symbol to explain it.



Episode 3

EMBARKING ON THE PATH OF DIALOGUE

Listen to or watch the episode [here](#).

The call to wonder at the beauty of creation, and in doing so give praise to God, is at the heart of most of the world's religions and spiritualities.

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis acknowledges that "the majority of people living on our planet profess to be believers. This [then] should spur religions to dialogue among themselves for the sake of protecting nature, defending the poor, and building networks of respect and fraternity" (LS 201).

Columbans work in many non-Christian majority countries and this experience has taught us that it is through dialogue with people of other faiths (including indigenous spiritualities) that the fullness of God's wisdom is revealed.

We believe that the combined spiritual resources of the world's faiths is a crucial component in guiding humanity away from its Earth-killing lifestyle and towards a more holistic and sustainable way of living.

In his encyclical, the pope says "I would like to enter into dialogue with all people about our common home" (LS 3). Caring for the environment and protecting all species for future generations is the crucial task of our time. All believers have an inherent spiritual and religious responsibility to help care for our common home and to do so together.

DID YOU KNOW?

In 2018, noted environmental scientist Haydn Washington said that "a sense of wonder towards nature is central to change. This is because it gives us the deep belief necessary to undertake difficult issues. It helps us break the denial dam and solve our problems. An Agnostic, a Christian, a Buddhist, a Hindu, a Muslim ... all can feel a sense of wonder, even if they call it by varying names."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. During the episode, what similarities did you notice between Islamic teaching and *Laudato Si'*?
2. Why do you think all of the major religions have teachings about the environment? What does this theological abundance tell us about God?
3. How could you partner with people of different faiths in your community to care for creation? Could the Season of Creation move from being Christian-only to a multireligious celebration?

ACTIVITY

Visit [this website](#) to learn more about Columban ministry in Interreligious Dialogue



Listen to or watch the episode [here](#).

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis says that “war always does grave harm to the environment and to the cultural riches of peoples ... ‘Despite the international agreements which prohibit chemical, bacteriological, and biological warfare, ... laboratory research continues to develop new offensive weapons capable of altering the balance of nature’” (LS 57).

Because Columbans work and live in many heavily militarized countries, we see this alteration of nature first hand. We have come to believe that violence done to the Earth itself is a part of war, whether through habitat destruction, the extraction of resources for weapons, or the murder of environmental defenders. We see all too frequently how many international and national laws that are designed to protect fragile ecosystems and human rights are disregarded when they get in the way of military growth and profit-making.

“The violence present in our hearts,” Pope Francis says “is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life” (LS 2).

As people of faith, we have a responsibility to practice nonviolence. We can do this by choosing to live simply and sustainably, by preventing conflicts before they become violent, and by advocating against the rapid expansion of militarism around the world. We need this not only to save human life, but to save all life on Earth.

DID YOU KNOW?

Over the [last six decades](#), armed conflicts have occurred in more than two-thirds of the world’s 36 biodiversity hotspots. “Hotspots” are biogeographic regions with significant levels of biodiversity. This poses a critical threat to conservation efforts around the world.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How did listening to the story of Jeju Island in South Korea challenge your ideas about the military and armed conflict? Imagine that you lived in a place like that. What comes to mind?
2. Berta Cáceres’ story illustrates that violence is not limited to military and police repression, but also includes the violence of extractive industries that devastate both creation and indigenous communities. What kinds of militarism or violence do you see in your own communities? How does this impact your community and its biodiversity?
3. What can we do to prevent militarism and violence from further destroying the Earth and all its inhabitants?

ACTIVITY

What does our faith have to say about militarism? Find out by reading the Missionary Society of St. Columban’s [statement on peace and demilitarization](#).

Episode 5

NO LAND TO LIVE ON

Listen to or watch the episode [here](#).

In 2015, Pope Francis gave a [speech](#) to the Second World Meeting of Popular Movements in Bolivia - a speech he described as a "summary of the Church's social doctrine." In it he asked if "we truly realize that something is wrong in a world where there are so many farmworkers without land, so many families without a home, so many laborers without rights, so many persons whose dignity is not respected?" (#1).

Because of the damage we are inflicting upon the Earth, more and more land is becoming uninhabitable. In 2018, the World Bank estimated that by 2050 three regions of the world (Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, and Southeast Asia) will generate 143 million internally displaced people (or IDPs) because of environmental factors. According to the United Nations, "the forcibly displaced population increased in 2017 by 2.9 million. By the end of the year, 68.5 million individuals were forcibly displaced worldwide," more than at any point in human history.

Climate change and biodiversity loss create environmental conditions that strain local economies and exacerbate conflicts for scarce resources. In these situations, it is always those who are living in poverty or are forced to the margins of society that suffer the most.

The Earth's resources - which have been entrusted to us - are for the life of the whole world. They do not belong to a wealthy minority, or even a human minority.

DID YOU KNOW?

By 2016, one-fifth of Tuvalu's population had already left their homes to seek refuge on larger islands because of climate change. However, "climate refugees" and other people forced to migrate because of environmental factors are not protected under international law.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How did listening to the people living in the internally displaced persons camp in Myanmar affect you? What did you learn from their experiences?
2. What impact is climate change or other environmental issues having on the place where you live? Imagine these problems getting so bad that you're forced to become a "climate refugee." How would your life be different? What impact would that have on your family?
3. In many countries like Myanmar, war is often used as a tool to protect mining and logging companies and the governments that profit from them. How do different injustices in society (like racism and militarism) reinforce and protect each other? How does this intersection play out in your community?

ACTIVITY

Watch [this video](#) to hear Raul Perez explain how climate change is the biggest threat to his family's 120-year-old coffee farm.

Episode 6

A NEW BEGINNING

Listen to or watch the episode [here](#).

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis reflects on the wisdom of the Sabbath and sabbatical rest:

“the biblical tradition clearly shows that renewal entails recovering and respecting the rhythms inscribed in nature by the hand of the Creator. We see this, for example, in the law of the Sabbath. On the seventh day, God rested from all his work. He commanded Israel to set aside each seventh day as a day of rest, a Sabbath. Similarly, every seven years, a sabbatical year was set aside for Israel, a complete rest for the land, when sowing was forbidden and one reaped only what was necessary to live on and to feed one’s household. Finally, after seven [sabbatical years], which is to say forty-nine years, the Jubilee was celebrated as a year of general forgiveness and “liberty throughout the land for all its inhabitants.” This law [of Jubilee] came about as an attempt to ensure balance and fairness in [each Israelites’] relationships with others and with the land on which they lived and worked. At the same time, it was an acknowledgment that the gift of the earth with its fruits belongs to everyone. Those who tilled and kept the land were obliged to share its fruits, especially with the poor, with widows, orphans and foreigners in their midst” (LS 71).

Our challenge today as people of faith is to reimagine this Biblical vision for the 21st century.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. As people of faith, we believe that God intends all members of creation to exist and flourish as a community of love. Can you recall a time when you felt like you and another member of creation were a part of the “community of love”?
2. In the Creator’s wisdom, life was designed to be in harmony among humans and nonhuman life. How have humans disrupted this harmony? How can you and your community help restore it?
3. Jubilee is a time to feel again, to rejoice in the beauty of life and to give glory to the Creator. As we look around in our families, in our communities, in the world, where do we see and experience joy, hope, and inspiration for today and the future?

ACTIVITY

The [Columban Creation Covenant](#) is a tool to help us reconnect with the natural world and reexamine how our lifestyles affect its wellbeing. You’re invited to think of one practical and specific commitment for each category. These can be discrete tasks (like, “read *Laudato Si'*” for Prayer & Spirituality) or on-going lifestyle changes (like, “fast from meat twice a week” for Daily Commitments for a “Greener” Lifestyle).

Share your Columban Creation Covenant with us on social media. Use the hashtag [#JubileePodcast](#) or tag us at [@ColumbanCenter](#).

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You can learn more about the Columbans’ work to care for biodiversity [here](#) or by contacting [Amy Woolam Echeverria](#).



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