DICASTERY FOR PROMOTING INTEGRAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

DICASTERY FOR LAITY, FAMILY AND LIFE

INTEGRAL ECOLOGY IN THE LIFE OF THE FAMILY

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List of Abbreviations

AL *Amoris Laetitia*
CA *Centesimus Annus*
CV *Caritas in Veritate*
EG *Evangelii Gaudium*
FC *Familiaris Consortio*
GE *Gaudete et Exsultate*
GS *Gaudium et Spes*
FT *Fratelli Tutti*
LD *Laudate Deum*
LS *Laudato Si'*
SRS *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*

PRESENTATION

In his Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis emphasized the faith-inspired motivations that move us to hear both the cry of the poor and the cry of the Earth, and to respond to them in the best way possible.

In continuity with this vision, Pope Leo XIV has reaffirmed the importance of contemplating creation in order to understand "the Creator's original plan. Everything has been wisely ordered from the beginning, so that all creatures contribute to the realization of the Kingdom of God. Every creature has an important and specific role in his plan, and each one is "good" … (cf. *Gen* 1:1-29)" (*Homily during the Inauguration and Blessing of the Borgo Laudato Si'*, 5 September 2025). Referring to the Gospel (cf. *Mt* 6:30), the Holy Father noted that, in the act of creation, a special place was reserved for the human being — "the most beautiful creature, made in the image and likeness of God. But this privilege comes with a great responsibility: that of caring for all the other creatures, in accordance with the Creator's plan (cf. *Gen* 2:15). Care for creation therefore represents a true vocation for every human being, a commitment to be fulfilled within creation itself, without ever forgetting that we are creatures among creatures" (ibid.).

Such commitment expresses our faith, which, as the Pope reminded us, "is handed on [in the family] together with life, generation after generation. It is shared like food at the family table and like the love in our hearts. In this way, families become privileged places in which to encounter Jesus, who loves us and desires our good" (*Homily for the Jubilee of Families, Grandparents and the Elderly*, 1 June 2025).

The values that take shape and mature within the family undoubtedly provide the fertile soil from which the life of society springs forth. Families are therefore essential for nurturing and transmitting the value of caring for our common home and for every person. Indeed, many families already live this vocation with open hearts and with the hope that is Christ Jesus (cf. 1 *Pt* 1:13–17). Within the family, its members learn self-giving, patience and dedication; the welcoming and protection of life, so that it may flourish fully; as well as complementarity and reciprocity, intergenerational exchange and solidarity with other families, together with the transmission of knowledge

and traditions. For this reason, we affirm once again that the family is the first and fundamental cell of society.

Although this volume is addressed primarily to families, it concerns all of us. The effects of the recent pandemic have shown how deeply the world and the vital role of the family are interconnected, underscoring the need for an approach rooted in *integral ecology* that is in accordance with the teachings of *Laudato Si'*. Moreover, we cannot remain indifferent to the devastating and ongoing scenes of destruction, bombings, killings, the use of landmines, abductions and hunger in so many countries. Each of these represents a unique and tragic story of human rights violations and of divided, grieving and impoverished families. Nevertheless, the family remains the place of care, welcome and sharing, a source of resilience, comfort and enduring relationships.

We long for true peace — peace that is disarmed and disarming — built upon the conditions that make possible genuine integral human development and the authentic common good of the human family within our common home. As the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* reminds us, "the welfare of the family is decisive for the future of the world and that of the Church" (n. 31).

We are therefore pleased to present this joint work of our two Dicasteries, enriched by external contributions — including those of many married couples — which offers practical insights into how the teachings of *Laudato Si'* can be integrated into Christian family life.

We express our heartfelt gratitude to all who have made this work possible. We entrust the dissemination and use of this volume to the intercession of Saint Francis of Assisi and Saint Hildegard of Bingen — both remembered for their profound sense of nature as a revelation of God — as well as to Saint Joseph and Saint Monica, together with Blessed Luigi and Maria Beltrame Quattrocchi, patrons of the family.

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OVERVIEW

A Family Focus

Drawing upon the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, this booklet aims to inspire and encourage families to adopt attitudes and practices that promote the teachings of the Encyclical *Laudato Si'* on care for our common home and on integral human development. It proposes concrete paths of reflection and suggestions on how to practise an integral ecology with the family in the leading role. If we seek to care for "the environment and the quality of human life," (*LS* 142), it makes sense to adopt the principle of subsidiarity and begin from the most basic social group, the family, where primary social relations take place. This is why working to protect, promote and empower families is so important, as is facilitating how families then relate to the realities of civil society, business, health, education, and local government. This requires a deep understanding of the role of families. We hope that all families will embrace this booklet and learn about integral ecology.

Integrity and Consistency

When working towards the proper care for our common home and care for all, an integral approach must be considered. As Pope Francis reminded us when referring to Pope Benedict XVI's words in this regard, "the world cannot be analyzed by isolating only one of its aspects, since 'the book of nature is one and indivisible', and includes the environment, life, sexuality, the family, social relations, and so forth. It follows that 'the deterioration of nature is closely connected to the culture which shapes human coexistence'" (*LS* 6). Consequently, the booklet insists on a consistent and constant integration of the many aspects of integral human development, integral ecology and family life.

Structure and Contents of the Booklet

Part I provides foundational concepts based on key writings of Pope Francis.

Part II contains thematic chapters reflecting seven goals taken from *Laudato Si'*. Each chapter has four sections:

Explanation of the theme.

One or more implications of the theme.

A list of questions for reflection and discussion.

A list of proposed actions.

There are occasional references to documents of the Church's Magisterium. These documents are freely accessible online in multiple languages on Vatican websites. We hope that this will make the booklet useful for families that – after all – are domestic churches!
The booklet does not contain an exhaustive list of statements by recent Popes, nor an inventory of all possible best practices with detailed instructions for use everywhere. Those who want more practical suggestions can, of course, turn to their local Church (diocesan offices, networks of Christian professionals, universities, Bishops' Conference Commissions specializing in specific areas, Caritas/Catholic Charities, the *Laudato Si'* Action Platform) or to other qualified organizations on the ground, which may be able to indicate projects and experiences suited to their specific context.

FIRST PART

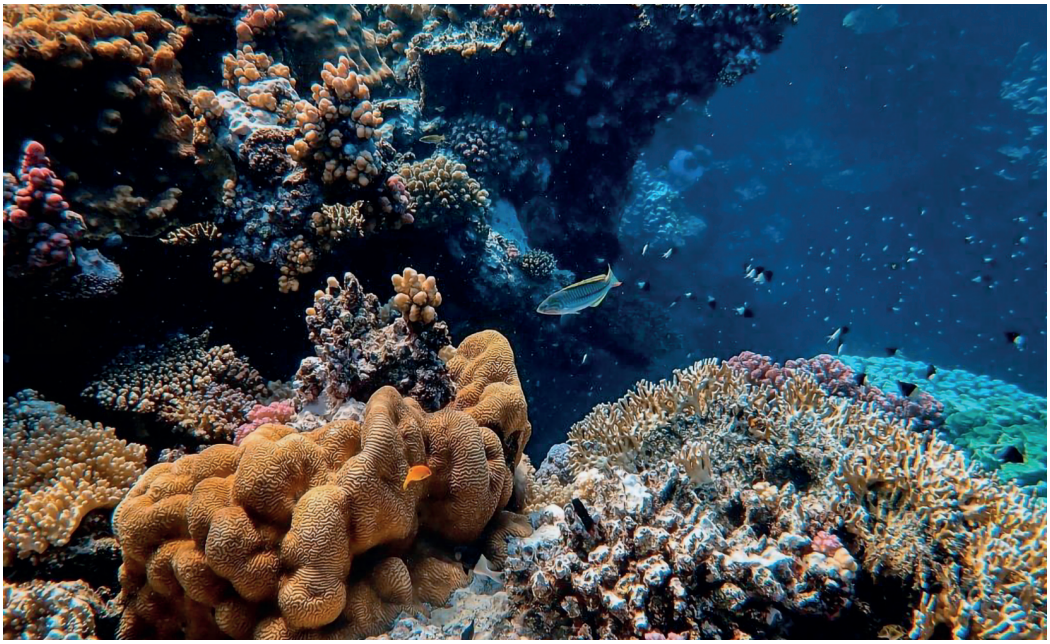
FOUNDATIONS

Integral Ecology according to *Laudato Si'*

Pope Francis presents Saint Francis of Assisi as a model of living "in wonderful harmony with God, with others, with nature and with himself" (*LS* 10). These four elements offer a solid and integral foundation for the entire Encyclical. Integral ecology – the concept at the heart of *LS* – is a paradigm for analysis, discernment and commitment. Within integral ecology, *LS* encompasses numerous specific ecologies: environmental, economic, social, cultural, societal institutions, daily life, and overall human ecology. This list entails interconnectedness and consistency. When we better appreciate the interconnectedness of our natural world, we will better understand the interdependence of human and natural environments. After all, human persons are a part of nature, and so they need to have a proper relationship with it. When initiatives are proposed, there must be a consideration of the human person's relationship with God, others and the natural world; "everything is connected" as Pope Francis often likes to remind us. This same principle applies to individual believers: living a full and meaningful life (*Jn* 10:10) entails caring for all aspects of a person's flourishing. Not surprisingly, right after the list of ecologies, *LS* evokes the common good, namely "the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups, and their individual members, relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfilment." Here too, the "sum of conditions" implies interconnectedness and consistency. Further, while it is right to make use of specialized expertise in any particular field, this does not mean imposing personal preferences; rather, it is necessary to work comprehensively in consideration of all the above ecologies.

Moreover, the reference to "daily life" reminds us that care for creation, as well as care for our sisters and brothers, are not tasks for experts only; they are for everyone. It is also an issue of cooperation, since alone we will not go far; it is also about "how" we cooperate with one another.

Finally, integral ecology – especially when considering the common good and integral human development – is not merely a method. It is not about promoting interconnectedness and transdisciplinary approaches as ends in themselves. Integral ecology has a purpose: the fulfilment of the entire human family through a life based on solidarity and sustainability, and the fulfilment of each of us through lives of wholeness and holiness.



The Human Family in *Fratelli Tutti*

The parable of the Good Samaritan and the love with which we relate to one another are key elements of *Fratelli Tutti*. The Encyclical highlights the bonds of love, solidarity and hospitality that can and should animate a family, in which each person can develop with his or her own dignity. The Holy Father warns against the culture and "acts of discarding" that are contrary to this love: the discarding of the unborn, the child, the disabled, the elderly; but also the discarding of families with problems or difficulties. In such a throwaway culture, families are disfigured and impoverished, as is society as a whole (cf. *FT* 19).

Instead, love should give rise to acts directly aimed at people that will create healthier and more just institutions and customs (cf. *FT* 186). In fact, *FT* dwells on the universal openness of love, since we all have the same Father. We are called to make daily efforts to expand our circle since "every brother or sister in need, when abandoned or ignored by the society in which I live, becomes an existential foreigner" (97). Indeed, I cannot "reduce my life to my relationship with a small group, even my own

family; I cannot know myself apart from a broader network of relationships." For loving couples too, "we find that our hearts expand as we step out of ourselves and embrace everyone" (89): love becomes a seed that grows until it "becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches" (*Mt* 13:32).

What is needed, then, is a sense of unity, co-responsibility, interdependence and shared hope; a sense of a common origin and destiny, as *LS* explains (cf. 202). Then it will be possible to join in caring for our common home and contribute together to the common good of the whole human family, while respecting the variety and diversity of the contributions each can make according to their own traditions.

The Human Family and *Amoris Laetitia*

The family, the micro-community where new life arises, is both socially and ecologically significant. Pope Francis declares that the family is "the principal agent of an integral ecology, because it is the primary social subject which contains within it the two fundamental principles of human civilization on earth: the principle of communion and the principle of fruitfulness" (*AL* 277).

The family represents a fundamental cell for integral ecology: it is a school of life, in which people are gradually educated in "the covenant between humanity and the environment" (cf. *LS* 209). This education requires growth in human virtues because "only by cultivating sound virtues will people be able to make a selfless ecological commitment" (*LS* 211). Starting from our families and virtuous relationships, "we first learn how to show love and respect for life; we are taught the proper use of things, order and cleanliness, respect for the local ecosystem and care for all creatures. In the family we receive an integral education, which enables us to grow harmoniously in personal maturity" (*LS* 213).

The integral development of the person, nurtured through family relationships, can radiate beyond the home, through volunteering, working with others, serving the vulnerable, showing tenderness and patience in difficult situations, and lovingly accompanying people in need. "The strength of the family lies in its capacity to love and to teach how to love" (*AL* 53),

and this strength is manifested through giving, gratuitousness, care and responsibility towards both others and the environment.

A spirit of fraternity can flow from families, leading to the recognition of others as brothers and sisters belonging to the human family: "A married couple who experience the power of love know that this love is called to bind the wounds of the outcast, to foster a culture of encounter and to fight for justice. God has given the family the job of 'domesticating' the world and helping each person to see fellow human beings as brothers and sisters" (*AL* 183).

In the Church specifically, the Christian family is called to take an active part in ecclesial life and pastoral action, fully living out its vocation and mission, which has an ecological dimension: "The family is thus an agent of pastoral activity through its explicit proclamation of the Gospel and its legacy of varied forms of witness, namely solidarity with the poor, openness to a diversity of people, the protection of creation, moral and material solidarity with other families, including those most in need, commitment to the promotion of the common good and the transformation of unjust social structures, beginning in the territory in which the family lives, through the practice of the corporal and spiritual works of mercy" (*AL* 290). By including "the protection of creation" in this list of various forms of witness, Pope Francis signals that the "domestic Church", no less than any other Church body or organization, is also called to an "ecological conversion." The family can be a faithful and effective channel for God's children to cooperate in caring for our common home.

Holiness and Families in *Gaudete et Exsultate*

The Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate* stresses that "growth in holiness is a journey in community, side by side with others." This is why, in marriages, "each spouse becomes a means used by Christ for the sanctification of the other" (*GE* 141).

Undoubtedly, a shared life "is made up of small everyday things. This was true of the holy community formed by Jesus, Mary and Joseph, which reflected in an exemplary way the beauty of the Trinitarian communion…

A community that cherishes the little details of love, whose members care for one another and create an open and evangelizing environment, is a place where the risen Lord is present, sanctifying it in accordance with the Father's plan" (143-145).

Pope Francis invites members of families to grow in holiness. A spouse can "be holy by loving and caring for your husband or wife, as Christ does for the Church… Are you a parent or grandparent? Be holy by patiently teaching the little ones how to follow Jesus" (14).

A united couple (including children united to their parents) can better reflect and discern the way to make right choices and respond to the Pope's invitation to grow in happiness and holiness. Since discernment is also grace (cf. 170), it is important to pray and to listen to God's word (172). In their marriage, spouses have the grace available to grow in holiness together by their concrete testimony of life with their children and in their environment. *GE* insists on patience and perseverance, self-giving, tenderness and meekness, understanding and forgiveness, and sharing the sufferings of others. These elements help the couple and family to mature, flourish, grow in mutual love and advance in holiness. They foster a human and moral climate that enables the couple and family to contribute to the life of society and to care for our common home.

In conclusion, the journey towards holiness within a family can help to address the origins of the ecological crisis, since "we cannot presume to heal our relationship with nature and the environment without healing all fundamental human relationships" (*LS* 119).

Commitment from Below in *Laudate Deum*

The Apostolic Exhortation *Laudate Deum*, released eight years after the Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, opens by noting that the earth – our common home that welcomes us all – is changing, with consequences spanning many sectors, such as health, work, migration and access to resources and housing. The illness of nature, Pope Francis emphasizes, is also a social problem that is intimately linked to the dignity of human life (cf. *LD* 3). The sixth chapter of the Exhortation, drawing on *Laudato Si'*, notes that faith can be an important motivator for the contemplation and care of our common

home, and rejects the idea of an "autonomous, omnipotent, and limitless" human being. Rather, we are invited to reconsider matters in order to see ourselves "in a more humble and richer way" (*LD* 68). Indeed, "the Judeo-Christian vision of the cosmos defends the unique and central value of the human being amid the marvellous variety of God's creatures", but also observes that human life "is incomprehensible and unsustainable without other creatures" (*LD* 67).

Everyone, each according to his or her own situation, has a meaningful contribution to make. In themselves, technical remedies to environmental and social challenges will never suffice. It is necessary to address the root causes of the problems we face, including our way of thinking about them. To this end, considering things from a genuinely human perspective is crucial: "There are no lasting changes without cultural changes, without a maturing of lifestyles and convictions within societies, and there are no cultural changes without personal changes" (*LD* 70). It is no surprise that the Exhortation emphasizes the growth of each person and the future of children (cf. *LD* 38, 58) – areas in which the family can play a leading role.

Our knowledge of one another is first fostered in families, and families often integrate diverse cultures, achieving a kind of multilateralism from below. This can spawn broader forms of involvements, where activists from different countries can help and accompany each other, put pressure on leaders and governments, and counterbalance the negative influence of marketing and false information (cf. *LD* 29; 38). By adopting responsible, sustainable, and supportive behaviours, families can create a new culture. The fact that "personal, family, and community habits are changing is contributing to greater concern about the unfulfilled responsibilities of the political sectors and indignation at the lack of interest shown by the powerful. Let us realize, then, that even though this does not immediately produce a notable effect from the quantitative standpoint, we are helping to bring about large processes of transformation rising from deep within society" (*LD* 71).

SECOND PART

SEVEN THEMES

CHAPTER

01

Listening to the Cry of the Earth

"Never have we so hurt and mistreated our common home as we have in the last two hundred years" (*LS* 53).

EXPLANATION

God's Creation

In God's perfect plan, man and woman were set over a beautiful garden, rich in biodiversity, in order to "till it and keep it" (*Gen.* 2:15). The "garden" was a gift from God entrusted to the first couple. In *Genesis*, God entrusted the care of creation not to a single individual, or to the man or the woman alone, but to the family. Creation is entrusted more broadly to humanity as a whole. We are neither its creators nor owners, but God's co-workers and stewards.

"What we call 'nature' in its cosmic sense has its origin in 'a plan of love and truth'… The world 'is not the product of any necessity whatsoever, nor of blind fate or chance'" (Benedict XVI, *Message for the 2010 World Day of Peace*, 6); moreover, "other living beings have a value of their own in God's eyes... By virtue of our unique dignity and our gift of intelligence, we are called to respect creation and its inherent laws" (*LS* 69).

In a word, "the dominion granted to man by the Creator is not an absolute power... when it comes to the natural world, we are subject not only to biological laws but also to moral ones, which cannot be violated with impunity" (*SRS* 34).

One Complex and Interconnected Situation

Environmental and social problems are linked, inasmuch as "the deterioration of the environment and of society affects the most vulnerable people on the planet" (*LS* 48).

For example, soil degradation and floods can contribute to greater food insecurity at the local level, while pollution can affect the health of humans and of animals in many ways. Moreover, in many areas of our planet, "families often lack both the means necessary for survival,

such as food, work, housing and medicine, and the most elementary freedoms" (*FC* 6). The poor often have no significant responsibility for environmental decay; nonetheless, they can be severely affected by the negative effects of pollution or sudden changes in climate if their income and/or livelihood are endangered.

Our Common Home is in Peril

There is little awareness of sustainability, nor is it easy to promote this outlook: "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" (*LS* 33). The earth is "beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth" (*LS* 21). If we need proof, look at the alarming levels of pollution produced in certain mining, farming and industrial activities.

IMPLICATIONS

Awareness

Increased awareness, then, is necessary. The causes, symptoms and implications of environmental problems (including poverty, health issues, exploitation and slavery, eviction during land grabbing processes, unbridled speculation, and corruption) must always be considered and understood. These serious situations deserve our attention, understanding, and action, for the sake of our common home and of the human family.

Sustainability and Sharing

Pope Francis at once challenges us and gives us hope that things can change; he calls upon us to become agents of change. The mistreatment of the earth has reached disastrous levels in a relatively short span of time. We need, then, to make real and substantial progress, also in a short span of time, to address environmental problems and promote sustainability.

There is a need for economic incentives, rewards and deterrents, as well as suitable education. These are important elements that are part and parcel of "the overall moral tenor of society" (*CV* 51). Families can influence the moral health of society because it is precisely within the family where we first learn respect for the local ecosystem and care for creation, and our response is taught, instilled, and passed on from one generation to the next (cf. *LS* 213). It is truly in the family that we can "join in caring for the environment as our common home" (*AL* 227).

Since God "intended the earth with everything contained in it for the use of all human beings and peoples", the goods that are produced thanks to natural resources should be available and accessible for all in like manner: "Attention must always be paid to this universal destination of earthly goods" (*GS* 69). Therefore, the degree of sustainability, inclusivity and fairness in the way we treat the earth is an indicator of how we are carrying out the divine command to care for the garden, which is the home of today's inhabitants and of future generations as well.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- Pope Benedict counselled us: "We must listen to the language of nature and we must answer accordingly" (Benedict XVI, Apostolic Journey to Germany, Visit to the Federal Parliament in the Reichstag Building, Berlin, 22 September 2011). How can our family listen to the language of nature?
- "God created the world according to his wisdom" (*Catechism*, 295). What is the difference, for our family, between living in a world created according to a wise design of goodness and love, and living in a "random" world resulting from blind fate or chance? Why?
- Human intelligence enables us "to discover the earth's productive potential and the many different ways in which human needs can be satisfied" (*CA* 32). What does "potential" mean? Are there limits, barriers or tipping points we should respect or avoid?
- Has our family noticed situations in which natural resources are used (e.g. land used for crops or grazing, mining, timber harvesting) in a way that creates or exacerbates social tensions or inequality?

- Have we tried in some manner to gauge the level of our consumption in our family and in our house?
- Waste and chemical products "can lead to bioaccumulation in the organisms of the local population" (*LS* 21). Do we see any examples of this in our country?
- What can we learn and conclude from observing the animals and bodies of water (rivers, lakes, wells) around us?
- Saint John Paul II observed that an unjustified search for profit is sometimes responsible for the destruction of ecosystems and the loss of their biodiversity, but also that, in other circumstances, such destruction is caused by people in their desperate fight against poverty. Can we find examples of both situations around us? What solutions could be envisaged to avoid problematic behaviour caused by lack of viable alternatives?

PROPOSED ACTIONS

- If you have access to an outdoor space, create a compost bin or a worm farm. If you do not have access to outdoor space and the municipality is not organizing compost, ask your local school or parish whether it would be willing to host a compost bin for community use.
- If you have access to an outdoor space (or even a balcony), plant species suited to your situation. Include native ones, plants suitable for pollinators, and plants that do not require much water. Try to grow some of the vegetables or fruits that you eat. Water your garden in the evening or early morning to reduce evaporation.
- If yours is a farming family, grow suitable crops, taking into consideration also biodiversity and sustainability.
- Teach your children respect and care for animals.
- Teach your children to avoid wasting food or electricity.
- Take public transportation more frequently.
- Collect rainwater. Be aware of your consumption of water and avoid wasting it.
- Explore low-cost options for insulating your house from cold and heat.

- When renovating your home, try to install highly efficient insulation or illumination.
- Sort your waste correctly.
- Participate in litter-removal campaigns; consider initiating one if no such campaign exists.
- Install and use solar devices (heating or electricity-generator photovoltaic devices, solar dehydrators for food, and if applicable for cooking). If possible, explore governmental and NGO options to receive funding for the equipment or related training.

CHAPTER

02

Listen to the Cry of the Poor and the Vulnerable

"A sense of deep communion with the rest of nature cannot be real if our hearts lack tenderness, compassion and concern for our fellow human beings. It is clearly inconsistent to combat trafficking in endangered species while remaining completely indifferent to human trafficking, unconcerned about the poor, or undertaking to destroy another human being deemed unwanted." (*LS* 91)

EXPLANATION

God is the God of Life

God is the God of life. The commandment "Thou shalt not kill" and the inalienable dignity of the human person demonstrated by Jesus's Incarnation (cf. St. John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 2) compel us to care the life of all our brothers and sisters with a preferential option for the poor and those who are defenceless, voiceless, marginalized or threatened.

Humans are Threatened Whenever Human Dignity is Denied

Let us keep in mind Pope Francis's insistence on the need for people to have access to the three Ts: *tierra, trabajo, techo* (land, work and housing). Housing *(techo)* refers to having a home that provides shelter and a sense of security, which accords dignity and promotes the growth of families. Its financial value aside, housing is an important asset from the perspective of human ecology: a house is a tangible sign of an intangible "home", a place from which we can build a sense of belonging, rootedness and confidence. It is disconcerting that in many European cities young people find it very difficult to buy an apartment, let alone a house. In comparison with what their parents and grandparents had experienced, they are discouraged by the economic situation and so they delay starting a family. Too many people struggle to own a home!

As for work (*trabajo)* and land (*tierra*), many people continue to be excluded (cf. *EG* 53) or find themselves exploited in subhuman and dangerous

working conditions. Many lack professional training and are deprived of "the dignity of 'making' their daily bread themselves, through work, and taking it home" (Francis, *Homily*, 1 May 2020). Fair pay is a matter of justice, whether contributive (aimed at establishing a fair share) or reparative (aimed at restoring fairness when it has been lacking); all too often, this perspective is not taught or implemented. Consequently, wherever people cannot satisfy their basic needs for such things as drinking water, nutrition, sanitation, education and healthcare, we hear what Pope Francis has called the "cry of the poor", whose fundamental human rights are trampled underfoot.

Poor families are in survival mode, with parents constantly searching for ways to earn more income and working non-stop to put food on the table. Their children may also need to start working at a young age to help make ends meet. Besides facing an often bleak and uncertain future, children from poor families may also be deprived of experiences and benefits that other children often take for granted; these might include outings with friends, basic school supplies or proper clothing. The lack of such opportunities can deeply affect the self-esteem and dignity of young people and make it harder for them to feel optimistic about life.

Human Beings are Threatened by Anti-life Ideologies, Laws and Behaviours

There is a trend today to regard population growth as the major threat to humanity. Instead, the focus should be on extreme consumerism, pollution, the throw-away culture and the desire to exercise absolute power over the human body by manipulating it, thanks to recent technological breakthroughs (cf. *LS* 104-106, 155). This is the case wherever "there is a lack of respect for the right to life and to a natural death, if human conception, gestation and birth are made artificial, if human embryos are sacrificed to research" (*CV* 51); when governments "work actively to spread abortion, at times promoting the practice of sterilization" and impose "strong birth control measures" (*CV* 28). This leads to a countless number of children never being born, children who were denied the right to the primary gift of creation, the gift of life itself. Closely linked to this is "fear and hostility towards disability" or more broadly a "eugenic

mentality" (Francis, *Address to the Participants in the Conference "Yes to Life! Taking Care of the Precious Gift of Life in its Frailty,"* 25 May 2019). This also occurs when society is disrupted by the attempts "to cancel out sexual difference because it no longer knows how to confront it" (*LS* 155).

Humans are Threatened by Addiction

Addiction is another significant problem. Besides drug addiction, other addictive behaviours can encompass an excessive and compulsive use of the internet and texting, gambling, and the consumption of pornography. These addictions can endanger families and undermine trust.

IMPLICATIONS

Involvement

We cannot remain indifferent in view "of our common origin, of our mutual belonging, and of a future to be shared with everyone" (*LS* 202). The family's role is critical and irreplaceable in this regard. "The family is… an agent of pastoral activity through its explicit proclamation of the Gospel and its legacy of varied forms of witness, namely solidarity with the poor, openness to a diversity of people, the protection of creation, moral and material solidarity with other families, including those most in need, commitment to the promotion of the common good and the transformation of unjust social structures, beginning in the territory in which the family lives, through the practice of the corporal and spiritual works of mercy" (*AL* 290).

Solidarity, patience, benevolence, compassion and fraternity can defeat individualism, selfishness and indifference. Simple daily gestures are an important element in this process. They "help to create a culture of shared life and respect for our surroundings" (*LS* 213) and thus everyone can find solace in the kindness and friendliness of others, even in difficult and challenging contexts (*LS* 148).

Children and teenagers can develop greater empathy and see how they can make a real difference to those in need. "For young people, this wide-

spread involvement constitutes a school of life which offers them a formation in solidarity and in readiness to offer others not simply material aid but their very selves" (Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 30).

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- What do the words "the intrinsic dignity of the human person" mean for our family?
- Do some of our neighbours lack a fair amount of earthly goods, sufficient to live in a manner that respects their human dignity and integral human development?
- Affluent families are called to be more sensitive to the needs of their poorer counterparts. How could this be applied in our daily lives?
- How are people with disabilities and older people integrated and involved in our community and in our parish life?
- Do we have enough positive and age-appropriate conversations about the need to protect human life from abortion, surrogacy and euthanasia? Are care and support for the elderly within families, as well as palliative care, promoted enough in our country? Are support and counselling promoted and offered for women or for families in difficult situations which could be tempted by abortion? Are men educated to adopt a sexual behaviour that respects women and is responsible towards human life, as well as towards the possibility of conceiving a child? In war zones, is organized assistance offered to women who have been raped?
- How can families witness – humbly, respectfully and powerfully – to the relevance of the papal magisterium on the themes of life and marriage?
- How can family members bring their variety of different skills to working with and for the poor?
- Do we have enough positive and age-appropriate conversations about the need to protect life from discrimination, mistreatments, violence, modern forms of slavery, and environmental degradation?
- Do we see around us people in need of help, for example those who are homeless, asylum seekers, war refugees or displaced people, unemployed, people in situations of prostitution, people in severe and

blatant forms of addictions, and children forced to beg for money? If yes, what kind of help or accompaniment do they need?

- Are there awareness-raising activities or training programs offered by the local Church, municipality or civil society to help us learn more about people in need and ways of assisting them?
- Do we have enough positive and age-appropriate conversations about pornography, which Saint Paul VI considered to be a threat to "human ecology"? Are we conscious of how the consumption of pornography influences the viewer's perceptions of others, human relations and sexuality?

PROPOSED ACTIONS

- Join projects and teams committed to assistance and solidarity, with special attention to persons in vulnerable situations such as members of indigenous communities, refugees, migrants, children at risk, families experiencing difficulties or grief, and people lacking reading knowledge.
- Check with your local parish, Catholic charitable organisations or NGOs whether there are possibilities to assist or join the pastoral team dedicated to serving those in need. For instance, the parish could help to serve migrants and refugees, prisoners, or people in situations of despair, isolation or addiction. One could search out ways to help people with special needs and visit the lonely elderly in the community and those who are sick in hospitals and receiving palliative care. Find ways to give care to women coping with unexpected or difficult pregnancies, single mothers with children, and families at risk of social exclusion and poverty. Seek to assist those that may need material help, the help of someone's expertise, spiritual accompaniment, or even simply companionship.
- Invite people to your house for a meal, even if – for economic or social reasons – they cannot reciprocate.
- Respect human life from conception to natural death by refraining from abortion, euthanasia, surrogacy and reproductive assisted technolo-

gies, and their promotion. Work proactively to support and empower women and families in socio-economic difficulty, the elderly and persons in palliative care. Work proactively to encourage and help all men to take full responsibility for every life conceived through their sexual activity.

- Pray for the spread of a culture of life and encounter. Teach and model respect at the very earliest ages, throughout childhood and adolescence in the family.
- Have special, loving and devoted care for the elderly in your family.
- Offer compassion and spiritual and practical support to couples experiencing infertility; assist those who are interested in foster care and adoption.

CHAPTER

03

Adopt and Promote Ecological Economics

"To care for the world in which we live means to care for ourselves. Yet we need to think of ourselves more and more as a single family dwelling in a common home. Such care does not interest those economic powers that demand quick profits." (*FT* 17)

EXPLANATION

Stable and Loving Families, Fundamental Cells of Society

Marriage is a public commitment of husband and wife who choose to live together uniting "their whole lives in indissoluble love and unconditional fidelity" (*FC* 68; cf. Francis, *Lumen Fidei* 52; *AL* 319). Daily life is not always easy. The endurance and resilience of a loving couple's marriage can inspire others and provide more generally a model of sustainability. Out of trust and love, the husband and wife plan to live according to reciprocity and solidarity. When raising children or caring for elderly relatives, couples are called to open their horizons, by dedicating time and income to care of others. Families clearly create and maintain important relations which can be considered goods for the whole of society; a "network of relationships of trust, dependability, and respect for rules" (*CV* 32). Certainly, the happiness, unity and "stability of the family" (*EG* 62) are significant contributions to society, including to its economic life; the marketplace, for instance, requires a climate of mutual trust. This is why families are fundamental actors of the economy and "the basic cell of society" (*LS* 157).

A Throw-Away Culture that Disregards Time and Dedication

Too often, "in the prevailing culture, priority is given to the outward, the immediate, the visible, the quick, the superficial and the provisional" (*EG* 62). The current mainstream economic system resembles a straight line. First, it extracts resources from the soil, such as coal, oil, plants or minerals, and then manufactures them into something considered to be "useful", such as, for example, fuel, food, textiles, infrastructure or tools. Marketing to clients and consumers follows, and then, once we no longer need the products, we

discard them. Resources turn into pollution and discarded items are simply thrown into landfills or in the ocean. There is no consideration for the negative side-effects or consequences of this process, including, for instance, the exploitation of workers. The result is an unsustainable throw-away culture that Pope Francis has often denounced (cf. above, Chapter 2).

The act of offering oneself in service to others is often disregarded in many societies. The precious and much-needed time that parents or older siblings devote to caring for a sick or elderly relative, cooking, gardening or educating children within a family, is often overlooked. This lack of recognition is often aggravated by inadequate policies and programmes for the promotion and support of families.

A Healthy Economic Model

What is needed is an "economic ecology" (*LS* 141) that takes into account the protection of the environment and the way natural resources are used, preserved and shared.

Economic activity must contribute to the common good and to the integral human development of all, inspired by a culture of encounter, inclusion, fraternity and trust. Families and young people can play a significant role in this transition.

Moreover, an economic ecology must also take into account the fact that "we live and act on the basis of a reality which has previously been given to us" (*LS* 140; cf. *CV* 34). Consequently, actions performed out of generosity and love are also needed, because they reflect the initial gift of love from the Creator, the God who loved us first (cf. 1 *Jn* 4:19).

IMPLICATIONS

Making Decisions in Accordance with Our Faith

All aspects of daily family life (shopping, work, leisure, education, the management of money, interactions with others) ought to be informed by moral and conscientious attitudes that are consistent with Christian values. Human dignity is a compulsory consideration with respect to integral human development and integral ecology.

Within their means and reflecting on available options, families can use their power as consumers for the good, by choosing wisely the companies from which they purchase.

There is no easier way to begin transitioning to this economic system than by managing our household resources. At home, our children can learn how to use resources properly through the reduction, reuse, recycling, and repurposing of items. When children receive second-hand clothes from their cousins or siblings, they learn the value of those items. When children know that turning off appliances reduces the use of electricity, they are drawn into thinking of God's creation. Composting and planting trees are both inspiring activities and ways to contribute to an integral ecology.

Work and Family

The relationship between working family members and their work is important. For "the family is simultaneously a community made possible by work and the first school of work, within the home, for every person" (Saint John Paul II, *Laborem Excercens* 10). At the same time, caution is required: "workdays are long and oftentimes made more burdensome by extended periods away from home. This situation does not help family members to gather together or parents to be with their children in such a way as to nurture their relationships each day" (*AL* 44).

Safe working conditions and the rights of workers can be a topic promoted by associations of families (cf. above, Chapter 6).

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- If we have savings, do we have enough information about the way our money is being used and invested by banks?
- Do we keep track of our expenses as a family? What would we like to change about how much we spend and which shops we frequent?
- What complementarity is there between our values as a family and those of the business we run or our employer? Is the work compatible with the world we seek to co-construct or does it in some way participate in the structures of sin that are destructive of our living conditions?

Is our work subordinated to our family life, or is family subordinated to one person's career?

- What does it mean that "others shall not be considered and treated as consumer goods, that are used and then discarded"?
- Are there situations in which people are humiliated and their dignity offended by the monetary transactions that we engage in, even if those transactions are correct from a fiscal or legal standpoint? Are there situations in which nature is being polluted or unsustainably exploited?
- With what spirit do we do our daily work? How do we deal with fatigue?
- Do we see our activity as linked only to our own future or also to the future of others?
- Should financial-planning decisions involve all members of our family?
- Are both spouses adequately consulted and involved in the economic decision-making processes of our family?
- Do we make room for cooperative initiatives with respect to banking, farming, and the purchasing of materials?
- What do the Gospel parables about greed, wealth and sharing mean to us as a family?

PROPOSED ACTIONS

- Ensure that investments, including those in retirement and pension funds, are aligned with values and faith.
- Apply our values and faith to our purchasing habits, including the choice of suppliers, vendors, brands and ingredients.
- Where possible, coordinate with others and increase sharing (transportation, equipment, etc.).
- Contribute to recycling and reuse, and use second-hand markets if possible.
- Discern whether food, water or electricity are being wasted. If so, fix these problems.
- Encourage local businesses to promote the well-being of workers with a special focus on the most vulnerable.

- If you own a business, pay workers fair wages and offer benefits to promote their well-being. Think about how to put people and the environment ahead of profit, while remaining financially sustainable.
- Seek equilibrium in family life (and avoid unnecessary work) during the time you are together.
- Take family trips to local farms and workshops, getting to know workers and thus promoting a spirit of community.
- Cooperate with nearby families to create family purchasing groups, in order to help support local producers and skills.

CHAPTER

04

Adopt Ecological Lifestyles

"Christian spirituality proposes a growth marked by moderation and the capacity to be happy with little. It is a return to that simplicity which allows us to stop and appreciate the small things, to be grateful for the opportunities which life affords us, to be spiritually detached from what we possess, and not to succumb to sadness for what we lack." (*LS* 222)

EXPLANATION

Simple and Humble

A simple lifestyle starts with prayer and praising God, the Creator. This can humble us and help us avoid the risk of thinking "that all things are possible by the human will, as if it were something pure, perfect, all-powerful, to which grace is then added" (*GE* 49). In reality "nothing human can demand, merit or buy the gift of divine grace, and that all cooperation with it is a prior gift of that same grace" (*GE* 53; cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, 17). Everything "depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who shows mercy" (*Rom* 9:16) and who "first loved us" (cf. 1 *Jn* 4:19). Moreover, prayer can also help us to be grateful for the people in our lives, for the work that we do and for the things that we possess; and not to take our lives and the people in our lives for granted.

"If we feel intimately united with all that exists, then sobriety and care will well up spontaneously" (*LS* 11). Let us remember that Jesus is the Good Shepherd, and that we can model our lives after him by taking good care of the environment, society and our household economy in ways both small and great. In the words of Mahatma Gandhi, we are called to "live simply so others can simply live."

IMPLICATIONS

Sobriety

A simple lifestyle means one of sobriety and moderation. Pope Benedict XVI recommended a lifestyle of moderation to all Christians. Obviously, sobriety is not an end in itself; it is for the sake of a better life. John the Baptist's plea involves something "further and deeper than a lifestyle of moderation: it calls for inner conversion, based on the individual's recognition and confession of his or her sin" (Benedict XVI, *Angelus*, 4 December 2011). A sober lifestyle should never be a "mere veneer of asceticism" (*LS* 11).

Consider two further points. The first is about quantity and responsibility. This entails becoming aware of our basic needs and therefore resisting the lures of marketing that so often promotes "extreme consumerism in an effort to sell its products, [with the result that] people can easily get caught up in a whirlwind of needless buying and spending" (*LS* 203). Impulsive consumption (cf. *LS* 162) can jeopardize our ability to provide for the needs of our family. Some people "know how to be content with little" and are able "to find joy and fulfilment in an austere and simple life" (Francis, *Querida Amazonia* 71), and to refrain from unjustified luxury. This also entails setting aside any flaunting or showing off of one's material goods.

A second point has to do with being detached from our possessions. A life of moderation involves looking for meaning and purpose, trying to "be" (and especially "be for" others and "be with" others) rather than to "have" or "appear." Being anxious to possess and own a lot of goods may well lead to a life of dissatisfaction, far from any meaning (cf. Francis, *Christus Vivit* 78), and far from God. This explains in part why "the poor have a special experience of God's mercy" (Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus* 15) and why it is hard "for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God" (*Mk* 10:23).

Implication: Time

We should assess how we employ our time. Time belongs to God and the Gospel frequently teaches us to make good use of our time. An ecological lifestyle should certainly take the use of time into consideration. Think of the time it takes for a seedling to become a tree and bear fruit, for an encounter to become a solid friendship, for a marriage to grow "over

time into something precious and enduring" (*AL* 221), the time needed for listening and reconciling, the time needed for restorative justice and forgiveness. With its speed and instantaneity, the internet makes it increasingly challenging to set time aside to nurture and heal meaningful relationships. It is important not to be hasty or superficial.

On the other hand, many issues require our urgent attention and we cannot afford to waste time. Consequently, this implication also encompasses decision-making. How are we deciding? What is our discernment process as parents? How do we eventually include our children? Family discernment is not about fostering guilt or excessive scruples, but about each family joyfully seeking the way that God invites its members to live together.

Implication: The "Art of Living" at Home

The first disciples wanted to know where Jesus lived (*Jn* 1:38), they wanted to learn the "art of living." Seeing how Jesus lived contributed to their decision to become disciples. Catholic families may hope that when others see how and where we live, they will find Jesus there and want to follow him too. The home is one of the best places in which we can adopt a simple and virtuous lifestyle. It is a place for positive learning by imitating the example of others. At home we can demonstrate our gratitude and pray to God. We become humbled by our family members and those with whom we live. We can make changes to live a sober lifestyle through sharing with others and reducing our use of resources. God blessed man and woman and told them to be fruitful. In this context, "fruitful" means more than simply receiving the gift of children into our family. We are fruitful when we exercise care for others and for the earth. Living a simple life is not always "simple" at all, but it can be great and rewarding.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- What would we like to change in our lifestyle for the benefit of the earth and our community?
- As a family, do we discuss the difference between "wants" and "needs"?

500+ YEARS

- Are art and culture useless? Is visiting museums, learning history or researching one's roots incompatible with a sober lifestyle?
- Do our peers constitute a major obstacle to changing something in our lifestyle?
- No one can achieve change alone. What would we discuss with a spouse? With parents? With sons and daughters?
- Advertisements present so much that is appealing and attractive, and show people around us "looking happy" in consuming what is offered. Can we assess and discuss what happiness means to us as a family? What are the ways we celebrate and socialize with our peers? How do we use our leisure time?
- In the case of our children, can we judge whether our sober lifestyle is contributing to their future? What are we saving for the future, for of those who will come after us?
- Can we experience greatness and joy in small and simple things like drinking water, sunlight, rain, time shared with friends or colleagues, etc.?
- How can we be more grateful towards one another and towards creation?
- How do we celebrate special seasons of the year, such as Lent, Advent, Easter and other special days of our local Church?
- How are we shepherds for our own body? We have our bodies in order to live and to be happy, here and in the hereafter. If we regard our body as a temple for the Spirit, what do we need to do differently?
- Does moderation of computer and internet use allow us to better appreciate our relatives and friends?

PROPOSED ACTIONS

- Foster a family culture of giving without expectation of receiving in return. Share products from your garden with neighbours. Offer to carry the heavy loads of elderly neighbours.
- Take a moment to reflect on the goodness of giving.
- Recognize with gratitude the gifts of time and attention that we receive.
- Speak about how to live in a good relationship with the earth. Make a plan and make a promise to cooperate with each other.

- Spend time together in parks, forests, by the seaside, or observing wildlife.
- Where possible, help children who have low incomes or financial difficulties, realizing that it is highly prudent for children to be ready to aid parents when they are in need.
- Resist advertising that equates happiness with consumption and avoid unnecessary purchases. Focus instead on what creates real happiness: loving relationships, inner peace, caring for others, and responding to God's desire for each and for all in his creation.
- In the era of consumerism and a throwaway culture, it is a meaningful and inspiring experience to repair something. For example, repair broken toys for children, teenagers can repair their own sports equipment and adults can repair and maintain items from previous generations (furniture or even houses).
- Share tools, equipment and vehicles with neighbours.
- Avoid making less affluent guests or hosts feel uncomfortable; "Whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you" (*Mt* 6:2).
- Give up eating meat on Fridays, and find occasions for fasting in a meaningful way.
- Interview our grandparents about their parents' lifestyle, nutrition, travel and work.

CHAPTER

05

Integral Ecology and Education

"Good education plants seeds when we are young, and these continue to bear fruit throughout life… The family… is 'the place in which life – the gift of God – can be properly welcomed and protected against the many attacks to which it is exposed, and can develop in accordance with what constitutes authentic human growth. In the face of the so-called culture of death, the family is the heart of the culture of life'. In the family we first learn how to show love and respect for life; we are taught the proper use of things, order and cleanliness, respect for the local ecosystem and care for all creatures. In the family we receive an integral education, which enables us to grow harmoniously in personal maturity" (*LS* 213, quoting *Centesimus Annus* 39).

EXPLANATION

Families and Education

"The right and duty of parents to give education is essential, since it is connected with the transmission of human life." This task "is rooted in the primary vocation of married couples to participate in God's creative activity: by begetting in love and for love a new person who has within himself or herself the vocation to growth and development, parents by that very fact take on the task of helping that person effectively to live a fully human life." Furthermore, "the most basic element, so basic that it qualifies the educational role of parents, is parental love, which finds fulfilment in the task of education as it completes and perfects its service of life: as well as being a source, the parents' love is also the animating principle and therefore the norm inspiring and guiding all concrete educational activity, enriching it with the values of kindness, constancy, goodness, service, disinterestedness and self-sacrifice that are the most precious fruit of love" (*FC* 36).

Integral Education

Christian education can be considered complete only if "it covers every kind of obligation. It must therefore aim at implanting and fostering among the faithful an awareness of their duty to carry on their economic and social activities in a Christian manner" (Saint John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra* 228). An education attentive to integral ecology aims at restoring "the various levels of ecological equilibrium, establishing harmony within ourselves, with others, with nature and other living creatures, and with God" (*LS* 210). Moreover, education should not be understood as "only" for children. Other members of the family, such as young adults and parents, can continue to learn and acquire skills throughout their entire life.

The Content, Means and Impact of Education

To educate our children ecologically implies, first of all, transmitting a sense of both the value and the fragility of the beings and things that surround them. If everything has been created, each day is an occasion to give thanks to God for the goodness and beauty of the world, as well as a challenge to take care to preserve all of its elements. Care, gratitude and concern for all that exists and without which we could not live, underpin an ecological education. These are important elements for an "education of the moral conscience" (*FC* 8) that can enable us to exercise critical judgment about individualism, progress, competition, and consumerism (*LS* 210). Through education, family members "will be led to evaluate material goods with more objectivity, to profit by them without compromising their dignity, to share the family circle and with all the members of the society to which they belong." (Saint John Paul II, *Letter for the 1979 World Literacy Day*).

It follows that "children must be enriched not only with a sense of true justice, which alone leads to respect for the personal dignity of each individual, but also and more powerfully by a sense of true love" (*FC* 37), being "present to those in need of help" and progressively convinced that "I should no longer say that I have neighbours to help, but that I must myself be a neighbour to others" (*FT* 81).

Integral education of children by their parents also includes their education in love and sexuality. This topic is currently the subject of many de-

bates, often causing conflict between schools and families when it comes to deciding on what to teach. We should not forget that "learning to accept our body, to care for it and to respect its fullest meaning, is an essential element of any genuine human ecology", since "the acceptance of our bodies as God's gift is vital for welcoming and accepting the entire world as a gift from the Father and our common home" (*LS* 155).

The equal dignity of men and women needs to be a cornerstone of education, since the "human race, which takes its origin from the calling into existence of man and woman, crowns the whole work of creation; both man and woman are human beings to an equal degree, both are created in God's image. This image and likeness of God, which is essential for the human being, is passed on by the man and woman, as spouses and parents, to their descendants: 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it' (*Gen* 1:28). The Creator entrusts dominion over the earth to the human race, to all persons, to all men and women, who derive their dignity and vocation from the common 'beginning'" (Saint John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem* 6). Consequently, children should be educated to cherish the beauty of the complementarity between men and women, and the demand for mutual respect.

Finally, a "historic, artistic and cultural patrimony" (*LS* 143) has to be transmitted between generations.

IMPLICATIONS

Age-Appropriate and Mission-Oriented Education

Habits do not form overnight. Both experience and psychology attest that it takes a long time to form a habit; it can take many attempts. But we have to begin! Unless we begin, good habits will never be formed. Education requires teaching by example, time, patient realism and small steps (cf. *AL* 271, 273). Age-appropriate information needs to be provided on different topics, with the help of study cases and commentary on best practices or lessons learned. Field experiences are extremely important. Some concrete practice in solidarity-related activities, cleaning

campaigns, involvement in agricultural works or gardening, and caring for animals, may – step by step – facilitate future commitment. It is important to emphasize that commitments are often the result "of an adequate educational experience" which includes values, examples and also practice (Francis, *Address during the Academic Act for the Institution of the Study Cycle on "Care for our Common Home and the Safeguarding of Creation" and of the UNESCO Chair "On Futures of Education for Sustainability"* at the Pontifical Lateran University, 7 October 2021).

Dialogue

Exchange with others (members of other ethnic groups, parishes, dioceses, and schools) is always enriching and fosters a sense of respect and sympathy inside the human family. Besides exchange and dialogue with peers, we need to recognize the role of grandparents, ancestors and extended family. They have wisdom and experience.

A Learning Environment

The parish oratory or youth group, the school, the sport clubs and similar institutions can all be places to implement improvements related to the care of our common home. In this way, the entire "learning environment" supports the educational processes.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- How can the educational needs in our group or community be addressed?
- Parents who attempt to teach sobriety and a simple way of life may be perceived as strict or as ignoring marketing and peer pressure. How can parents be supported in such struggles?
- What do children and youth learn about natural resources and sustainability? What kind of teaching did our grandparents receive on the same topics, and what were their traditions?
- Are people with disabilities excluded from educational excursions or from the possibility of having an encounter with wildlife?

- Which teachings can we learn from contemplating ecosystems? How can we and our children learn more about the natural environment (animals, plants, water ponds, geology, weather) surrounding us?
- As parents, how can we create a dialogue of trust with our children to address the issues of pornography, chastity, marriage, and sexual violence?
- As a family, how familiar are we with the Church's teaching on the care of our common home, the protection of human life, and integral human development?

PROPOSED ACTIONS

- Take responsibility for educating family members.
- Have age-appropriate conversations about the need to protect human life from abortion, surrogacy and euthanasia; about the need to care for people in difficulty within the family; about the beauty, dignity and meaning of human sexuality.
- Ask the local school to implement ecological upgrades to its facilities.
- Ask the local school to upgrade its ecological activities and teaching manuals; ask whether it helps children learn about botany with indoor plants or a school garden.
- Take a tour in nature, in a food-processing factory, or in a farm, and learn from experts in these fields.
- Learn the names and the characteristics of the animals and the plants in your area.
- Have a rain gauge and monitor it.
- Teach how not to waste food.
- See which actions proposed in the other chapters of this booklet can also be implemented with an educational focus.

CHAPTER

06

Ecological Spirituality in the Family

"Absorbed and deepened in the family, faith becomes a light capable of illumining all our relationships in society." (*Lumen Fidei* 54). [Let me offer] "a few suggestions for an ecological spirituality grounded in the convictions of our faith, since the teachings of the Gospel have direct consequences for our way of thinking, feeling and living… Such a spirituality can motivate us to a more passionate concern for the protection of our world. A commitment this lofty cannot be sustained by doctrine alone, without a spirituality capable of inspiring us, without an 'interior impulse which encourages, motivates, nourishes and gives meaning to our individual and communal activity'" (*LS* 216).

EXPLANATION

Our Conversion

Pope Francis insists on conversion: an ecological conversion through which the effects of our encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in our relationship with the world surrounding us. "Living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork... is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience" (*LS* 217). Once we acknowledge our "sins, faults and failures", we can experience "heartfelt repentance and desire to change" (*LS* 218). If we mention conversion, it is because – according to the Church – degradation of the environment can be sinful. We know that "conversion from sin is capable of bringing about a profound and lasting reconciliation wherever division has penetrated" (Saint John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, 23).

Christ in Nature

Conversion and perseverance require spirituality. Indeed, genuine religious values and spirituality can help in dealing with the question, "Why should I care?" They can "motivate us to a more passionate concern for

the protection of our world. A commitment this lofty cannot be sustained by doctrine alone, without a spirituality capable of inspiring us" (*LS* 216).
We cannot forget that our Christian tradition communicates the expression of God in creation. Scripture reveals that in the beginning God "spoke" all of creation into being (cf. *Gen* 1). God's power is manifested in that which he creates; for our part, what does what we make and do show about us? Are we living by grace in such a way, that people seeing our good works, will be inclined to give praise to our Father who is in heaven (cf. *Mt* 5:16)?
The Gospel of John tells us that: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God…all things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being…and the Word became flesh and lived among us" (*Jn* 1:1-2a, 14a). In Jesus of Nazareth, the Word of God became incarnate. John's Gospel clearly teaches that all things came to be through Christ, present from the beginning. Christ, then, is manifested in all things.
In the Letter to the Colossians, we learn about Christ's connection with all of creation: Christ "is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible… all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is also the head of the Body, the Church, he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace by the blood of his cross" (*Col* 1:15-20). The Letter makes it clear that all things were created through Christ and for Christ. Christ's power is made manifest in all things.

A Family Perspective

Amoris Laetitia (cf. 313-315) recognizes God's presence in the events of families, their daily lives and their prayer. God's love is witnessed through a couple's love for one another; they reflect that love, they are its image and mirror when they invoke God through a living faith and live out charity, the love of God and of neighbour for the sake of God (*AL* 321). The family as a unit also reflects "the mystery of the Holy Trinity" (*AL* 86). "Christian

spouses and parents are included in the universal call to sanctity. For them this call is specified by the sacrament they have celebrated and is carried out concretely in the realities proper to their conjugal and family life. This gives rise to the grace and requirement of an authentic and profound conjugal and family spirituality that draws its inspiration from the themes of Creation, Covenant, Cross, Resurrection" (*FC* 56).
Beyond the sacrament of Matrimony, spouses are called to nurture a Christian life at home with their children, beginning with their Baptism and continuing in the effort to seek God in their daily life and in the Christian community.

IMPLICATIONS

Unity

Ecological spirituality, viewed from a family perspective, therefore embraces the concept of creation as a whole. *Laudato Si'* states that everything is related: all creatures exist to give glory to God, all ecosystems – human, animal, plant – are part of creation and are linked by unseen bonds that form a kind of universal family, a sublime communion (cf. *LS* 89). Family prayer has its own peculiarities: "it is prayer offered in common, husband and wife together, parents and children together" (*FC* 59). Moreover, "the spirit of love which reigns in a family guides both mother and child in their conversations; therein they teach and learn, experience correction and grow in appreciation of what is good" (*EG* 139). It should also be noted that while ecological conversion is a personal process, it can (and hopefully will) lead to conversions on a broader scale, since we need to address "structures of sin" (*SRS* 36) and ecological challenges that cannot only be dealt with on an individual level.

Sacraments

"Through our worship of God, we are invited to embrace the world on a different plane. Water, oil, fire and colours are taken up in all their symbolic power and incorporated in our act of praise" (*LS* 235). While husband and wife are united thanks to the sacrament of Matrimony, the entire family is united to Christ through the sacraments of Baptism and of the Eucharist.

It is worth keeping in mind that, as Benedict XVI wrote, "Christian people, in giving thanks to God through the Eucharist, should be conscious that they do so in the name of all creation, aspiring to the sanctification of the world and working intensely to that end" (*Sacramentum Caritatis* 92). "We are challenged to show our commitment in such a way that everything we do has evangelical meaning and identifies us all the more with Jesus Christ" (*GE* 28). Indeed, commitment to justice is a social implication of the Eucharistic mystery (cf. *Sacramentum Caritatis* 89; *LS* 236).

Implication: Care

Within our families, we learn that "our loved ones merit our complete attention" (*AL* 323). Guided by the Holy Spirit, the family circle is open to life "also by going forth and spreading life by caring for others and seeking their happiness" (*AL* 324). An ecological spirituality from a family perspective "will certainly be centred on the one God and Lord, while at the same time in contact with the daily needs of people who strive for a dignified life, who want to enjoy life's blessings, to find peace and harmony, to resolve family problems, to care for their illnesses, and to see their children grow up happy" (Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno* 80). With *Laudato Si'*, we can add the importance of safeguarding the environment on which we depend. This is all about "an attitude of the heart, one which approaches life with serene attentiveness, which is capable of being fully present to someone without thinking of what comes next, which accepts each moment as a gift from God to be lived to the full" (*LS* 226). "When we feel that God is calling us to intervene with others in these social dynamics, we should realize that this too is part of our spirituality, which is an exercise of charity and, as such, matures and sanctifies us" (*LS* 231; cf. *Christus Vivit* 225).

Implication: Life and Love

Spirituality from a family perspective also embraces procreation and sexuality, which are particularly important issues from the standpoint of integral ecology and care for creation. The procreation is an amazing and mysterious process whereby God makes human beings co-responsible by endowing them with the power and task of procreation, by differentiating them into male and female with the necessary attributes for co-creation

of life. The family is created for life, for love, for belonging, socialization, self-giving, reciprocity, fidelity and mutual protection. In its highest expression, spirituality encompasses love. We have the life-giving capacity to continue God's creation, surely not in a random way but according to his predesigned plan, which is centred on love. Our God-centred spirituality can guide us in this direction too (cf. *Tob* 8:5-7).

Hope

The family is the cradle of life. A new life is always a sign of hope, a new chance given to mankind. Ecological spirituality from a family perspective is open to hope because we know that "the heavenly Father's providence lovingly watches over even our daily cares" (*SRS* 26) and we believe in the Lord's resurrection. We also believe with Pope Francis that "humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home" (*LS* 13). Furthermore, we know that families have a major and irreplaceable role in contributing to the "Church's mission, rich and complex as it is... of reconciling people: with God, with themselves, with neighbour and with the whole of creation" (Saint John Paul II *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, 8; cf. *LS* 10).

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- How can we promote ecological spirituality and love for nature particularly in families, and speak about God's presence in creation?
- Many families have members who are not Catholic. Where do they fit in, given their own sense of spirituality? How can they be involved, or at least invited, to join a common effort?
- Are newcomers to our community or parish finding "a spirituality which can offer healing and liberation, and fill them with life and peace, while at the same time summoning them to fraternal communion" (*EG* 89)?
- Where and when can we dedicate time for contemplation?
- Do we genuinely care for creation by choosing to save and protect rather than waste and destroy? What in our hearts and habits needs to be converted?

- People were created to be in right relationship with God, with themselves, with their neighbour and with the whole of creation. How does this apply to our family?

PROPOSED ACTIONS

- Read the Bible and learn about creation and the elements of nature. A priest or Bible teacher may help by suggesting relevant passages. Study and share relevant sections of *Laudato Si'*, especially Chapter Two, the Gospel of Creation.
- Suggest to the parish priest that he include themes of *Laudato Si'*, *Caritas in Veritate*, *Familiaris Consortio* and *Amoris Laetitia* in his homilies.
- Regularly incorporate the themes of gratitude for creation in moments of prayer, such as at bedtime and before meals, and prayers for rain or at harvest time.
- Developing an ecological and family-friendly spirituality requires study and discussion as well as sharing, action and celebration. Read and discuss, as a family, *AL* 320-325 and *LS* 216-221 and 223-245. Continue with other relevant publications or tools.
- Celebrate and respect Sunday. If Sunday is impossible, find another moment of the week to celebrate God as a family.
- Celebrate the Season of Creation (from 1 September to 4 October) as a family and as a parish community. Organize a variety of activities and invite various members of the community.
- Take the opportunity to pray surrounded by nature, which can even involve Mass outdoors if allowed by local norms. Occasions could be, for instance, while trekking with Scouts or with other families, or a moment in a park, on a mountain or by the seashore.
- Silently contemplate God's creation.
- Take hikes, camp and picnic; spend time in parks; plant a garden as a family. Foster a sense of wonder and awe before nature, the earth and God's creatures.
- Keep in mind the spiritual works of mercy. Care for our common home is both a corporal and a spiritual work of mercy.

CHAPTER

07

Families Participating in Community Life

"Social ecology is necessarily institutional, and gradually extends to the whole of society, from the primary social group, the family, to the wider local, national and international communities" (*LS* 142).

EXPLANATION

A Legitimate Role for Families

The Second Vatican Council provided for a much greater role for the laity in many areas of Church life (*GS* 1). This started slowly, first by establishing parish pastoral councils and finance committees. Lay catechists and formation leaders brought changes in some areas. Various family-oriented movements began and played an important role through the collaborative nature of their ministry, with couples and priests working together as an expression of this new vision.

Families are not only called to care for their members. Significantly, the Council also recognized the role of families to be active participants in their local communities, and even to be protagonists or "influencers" of the national policies that impact them, such as policies on social issues, education, infrastructure, work, healthcare, etc.

IMPLICATIONS

Various Forms of Action

Families can network and cooperate at various levels, and with different generations, in the duty to care for nature and at the same time, "protect mankind from self-destruction" (*CV* 51). "Whole civilizations and the cohesiveness of peoples depend above all on the human quality of their families" (Saint John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici* 40).

Families can participate in community life and cooperate to better take care of the environment and of public places. Families can support busi-

nesses which respect our common home and human dignity (cf. above, Chapter 3). When large numbers of consumers join forces, they may positively prod or influence producers, and families can form cooperatives for purchasing or producing agricultural products.

Families are also concerned about matters such as relationship breakdown, family violence, and substance abuse. Attitudes can differ, even within the same family. Here too, in some circumstances, solidarity among families can help. Several families can reinforce ties among each other; solidarity and communion can prevail, regardless of whether people live close by in a small village or are dispersed in flats or apartments throughout a city. Families play an important role in keeping the social life and the social fabric alive. Fairs, local celebrations, activities surrounding schools and parish life: these various activities serve to develop "bonds of belonging and togetherness… in which the walls of the ego are torn down and the barriers of selfishness overcome" (*LS* 149). They can also help in facing issues of loneliness (including those of the elderly, the sick, rural families, widows and migrants).

Mutual Support and Associations

Communities and families can become mutually supportive and empowering, thereby growing in resilience.

Families can join forces for advocacy purposes, campaigning, raising awareness, engaging local authorities and decision makers, and asking for better laws and decisions that serve the common good of the whole society. Also, families can legitimately request that the institutions of marriage and the family "be promoted and defended from every possible misrepresentation of their true nature, since whatever is injurious to them is injurious to society itself" (Benedict XVI *Sacramentum Caritatis* 29).

Beside the relevance of the topics addressed, the way community life is organized and animated also matters. Participation on the part of all is to be sought, with adequate time set aside for listening, sharing, encounter and decision-making. A significant level of imagination and vigilance is required for any group or initiative to endure and have a lasting impact: the involvement of youth and new families and renewal of leadership are important factors.

Associations may act as "villages of solidarity" for families, who often feel that they are alone in facing certain challenges. Associations may also help to carry families' voices into the public square. Resources from associations can be used to enhance the family structure and education. In some circumstances, ad hoc associations can be created; some can be grass-roots, interconnected, even at a national level. The scope and statutes of pre-existing associations can also be broadened in order to consider some aspects of integral ecology. Family associations that are specifically Catholic need not only address Catholic families; their services can be offered to all, so that they can have an evangelizing force. Their Catholic faith is expressed through their political action and their proposals based on the Church's social teaching. The function of Catholic family associations is recognized by the Church. "It is similarly desirable that, with a lively sense of the common good, Christian families should become actively engaged, at every level, in other non-ecclesial associations as well" (*FC* 72). In this way, civil society with its organizations ends up facilitating the exchange of knowledge and stimulating a healthy multilateralism from below (*LD* 37, 38).

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- What are the networks to which we contribute that can be a meaningful source of integral development? Which networks would we like to join or to initiate?
- Do we feel that some issues in our district, community, parish or village require common action?
- How are new families arriving from elsewhere or recently married couples welcomed and accompanied in our parish and in our local community?
- How can families in our area contribute to the life of the parishes?
- What formation is required to lead successful community activities? Is training available locally and affordably?
- Should a movement towards community participation begin with reflection and sharing on a relevant issue? If so, what approach can be used?

- Should community participation, in a Church context, be formed of specific interest groups concerned with, for example, justice and peace, or family life? Groups could also aim at a common goal (but always with a family focus), such as fundraising for a new church or shrine.
- Can families bring their religious principles and values into the arenas in which communities address their social, economic, or political problems?
- In his call to respond to "the cry of the poor" and "the cry of the earth," Pope Francis invites the whole Church community – at whatever level is appropriate – to address these issues. How can communities in different situations respond together?
- How can the synodal approach be built into Church and community interactions in the future?
- Mourning is a difficult experience. Yet, our "Sister, Bodily Death" – as Saint Francis of Assisi called it – is a universal experience. How can we prepare, as a family, to support, considerately and confidently, one another when our relatives, neighbours and loved ones are called to God?

PROPOSED ACTIONS

- Identify the communities or networks we could join and to which we can contribute (neighbours in the same village or district, families in a given parish or movement, parents in the same school or in the same Scout group, religious congregations, other apartment tenants in the same building, advocacy groups) and see which bonds of solidarity, closeness, sharing, synergy and reciprocity are possible. Be ready to be challenged, to be enriched and inspired, and to contribute and learn.
- Use the *See-Judge-Act* methodology:
  - "See" to discover the needs and study the situation;
  - "Judge" with discernment, prayer and the help of Scripture;
  - "Act" with shared decision making and community commitment for given activities, participation and monitoring.
- Work with children and grandchildren to create a list of volunteer projects or donations to be made during school holidays, benefiting members of the family, neighbourhood, district, or village.

- Identify strengths and resources you have that might be shared with others. For example, consider donating any specialised skills (such as construction, sewing, accounting, teaching, digital skills, translation, management and coordination) to the parish.
- Identify new families joining your area (parish, neighbourhood) and give special attention to them.
- Promote intergenerational dialogue and sharing, first within your family, but also including neighbours, fellow parishioners, etc. Create opportunities for the elderly to share information about their lives and challenges, with a focus on the social and spiritual practices that helped them to persevere.
- Organize social and/or ecological events such as prayer services, small neighbourhood exhibitions of homemade art about nature, home screenings of films about social and ecological issues, and the like.
- Create formal family associations based on existing commonalities and cooperation between families.
- Always choose, when possible, anything that will foster personal encounter over connecting virtually. Virtual connection serves many purposes and is a modern blessing, but it cannot replace the physical experiences of togetherness that families need. Make time for relationships and relaxation by limiting time for online games and cellular phones.

Conclusion

"Efforts by households to reduce pollution and waste, and to consume with prudence, are creating a new culture. The mere fact that personal, family and community habits are changing… [is] helping to bring about large processes of transformation rising from deep within society... As a result, along with indispensable political decisions, we would be making progress along the way to genuine care for one another" (*LD* 71-72).

These words of Pope Francis at the end of the Apostolic Exhortation *Laudate Deum*, summarize the meaning of this document dedicated to families, which we have entitled, "Let Families take Integral Ecology to Heart." When families give their fervent attention to "integral ecology" – an approach to development formed by economic, ecological, cultural, and social factors, with the integral development of the human person at the centre – they assume a central role in the care of creation. To this end, we must be able to understand the relationships between the various parts and the greater whole. This calls for an understanding that the life of each human person is linked to others and indeed to all creatures, in accordance with God's plan. In both *Laudate Deum* and *Laudato Si'*, the Pope points to the example of Saint Francis of Assisi in order to explain that integral ecology is meant to be lived out first of all in our daily lives. In this way, each one of us is responsible to care for one another, with special attention to those who are vulnerable as well as all that is fragile and defenceless. Integral ecology begins with a spirit of wonder and gratitude for the beauty that surrounds us.

It is precisely families, as the building blocks of society, which can become the engine of this profound cultural change. It is by starting from the bottom or the source that lifestyles and consumer habits can be changed. This requires us to understand the scope of our small daily actions and how they can help the environment, by being both grounded in ethical and spiritual motivations and cognizant of the social and political dynamics. In family life, the ecological responsibilities and challenges can be taken up first in the home and then in the public square. Through the combined power of families bringing their common needs and shared

values together, witnessing to an ecological lifestyle in everyday life, we can affect environmental policies at the public level.

Concrete actions in this direction include the promotion of more sober and more conscious consumer habits, greater attention to our environmental impact, and finding new forms of associations and cooperation between families, in order to give new strength to a movement that can overcome inertia and indifference at all levels. Starting from the relationships and connections that unite people, we can thus come to transform social relations for a more integral ecology.

Above all, it is the younger generations that call us to this responsibility. We therefore subscribe to the appeal of the young participants in the Fourth International Conference on Care of Creation, organized on the eve of World Youth Day 2023, who called on the families of the world to be "ecosystems of love, giving, patience, responsibility, and the transmission of Gospel values and of how to live together" in order to "create spaces of sharing and discernment for the care of our common home" (*Manifesto by the Young People participating in the Fourth International Conference on Care of Creation*, Lisbon, 2023).

APPENDIX:
Laudato Si' Action Platform for Families

Laudato Si' issued a dramatic warning about the human impact on our natural environment, threatening both natural life and human society. Pope Francis's call for "urgent and necessary action" (*LS* 57) inspired the birth of countless local and global activities and organizations to "care for our common home" (the subtitle of *Laudato Si'*).

One such effort is the https://laudatosiactionplatform.org/, an initiative by the https://www.humandevelopment.va/en.html. It provides practical guidance for families, as well as for individuals, communities, and institutions, on how to respond to the ecological crisis by living as sustainably as possible. The Platform assembles knowledge about integral ecology from all kinds of sources and all corners of the earth. This sows the seeds for a shared community of people to forge bold, energetic responses to the ecological crisis, thus putting urgent and ambitious changes in how we live within reach.

When families consult LSAP, they can find inspiration from the https://www.laudatosi.org/laudato-si/laudato-si-goals/, which show how care for the earth and the poor can enrich many areas of their lives. Then they can take concrete action by enrolling in the Action Platform, where they are invited to make a https://laudatosiactionplatform.org/7-steps-to-create-a-laudato-si-plan/ that guides their active progress through the goals. The plan is a practical roadmap for sustainable living. By following such a plan, families can take pride in their acts of care in response to our global environmental crisis. Creating the plan is a great opportunity for families to engage together in eco-conscious decision-making.

LSAP also offers families a variety of educational materials and other resources to teach everyone, across all ages, about ecological awareness, sustainable living, and the values of compassion and stewardship. The Platform guides families in engaging in discussions and practices that emphasize ecological spirituality. Activities such as composting, recycling or outdoor walks can nurture responsibility towards the environment and fos-

ter a sense of wonder based on our faith in our Creator and Lord. In these ways, LSAP helps parents to instil ecological awareness and values in their children, fostering a generation committed to practical change within the home and their surroundings.

Once families enrol, they have access to a number of tools:

- A self-assessment guide that calculates your baseline environmental impact and suggests actions tailored to your needs
- A template for the development of your *Laudato Si'* plan
- Clear guidance on some of the most impactful ways you can integrate each *Laudato Si'* goal into your plan.
- A central repository of integral ecology resources and events from many organizations around the world, searchable by language, goal, sector, and country.
- The Reflections and Plans of active LSAP participants for guidance and encouragement in creating your plan.
- An interactive map pinpointing institutions that have committed to action.
- In order to link up with others making similar efforts, information is provided about many LSAP organizations and working-group members, including the name of the organization, their contact information, the languages spoken there, and what they are hoping to find in a peer relationship.

Introductory information: https://laudatosiactionplatform.org/
Resource library: https://laudatosiactionplatform.org/resources
To join: https://laudatosiactionplatform.org/register/

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