

# OPEN SPACE

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@brenna\_quinlan 

*Engaging the Signs of the Times*

**LIVING LAUDATO SI'**

PRACTICING CARE FOR OUR COMMON HOME

## OPENSOURCE

is published  
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Mark Hathaway  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Victoria Blanco  
PROGRAM MANAGER

Trevor Scott, sj  
NETWORKING COORDINATOR

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Mary Ward Centre  
70 St. Mary Street  
Toronto, Ontario M5S 1J3

Tel: 416-927-7887

[www.jesuitforum.ca](http://www.jesuitforum.ca)

# FORUMWORD

Seven years ago, Pope Francis addressed all of Earth's people in his ground-breaking encyclical, *Laudato Si': On Care for our Common Home*. Drawing on St. Francis's words, it proclaims that "our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us'... now cries out to us because of the harm we"—particularly the richest and most powerful among us—"have inflicted upon her" (LS1-2).

Indeed, the ecological crisis threatens the entire web of life upon which we depend. Hundreds of thousands of species have already been driven to extinction while dangerous temperatures, storms, floods, droughts, and precarious food supplies are affecting billions of people each year.

We are not faced "with two separate crises... but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental" (LS139), a crisis that can be understood as a concrete manifestation of a deeper ethical, cultural, and spiritual crisis (LS119) characterized by a "violence present in our hearts" which has led many to see themselves as Earth's "lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will" (LS1).

The consequences of this exploitative, colonizing violence are "reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in" soil, water, air, and the entire web of life (LS1).

To address this crisis, *Laudato Si'* calls us to an ecological conversion that encompasses individual, communal, and societal transformation rooted in a spirit of gratitude, generosity, care, and tenderness.

More recently, the nature of this transformation has been further elaborated in the **Laudato Si' Action platform**, calling us to act based on seven points:

- Responding to the Cry of the Earth
- Responding to the Cry of the Poor
- Practicing Ecological Economics
- Adopting Sustainable Lifestyles
- Embracing Ecological Spirituality
- Promoting Ecological Education, and
- Supporting Community Resilience and Empowerment

In practice, these goals are interrelated and entwined. If the platform seems ambitious—as it must be to protect future life—remember that we are not called to do everything, but rather to find where our own gifts, talents, and passions can contribute to this collective process of ecological conversion.

In this **OpenSpace**, we explore a variety of initiatives and practices that might stimulate your own reflections on how to care for our common home. If you are part of an organization, community, parish, or workplace, these examples might also inspire you to formulate a **Laudato Si Action Plan** to live out ecological conversion with others.

As you read, I invite you to reflect on what resonates with you: Where do you feel called to ecological conversion? What kinds of actions are you inspired to undertake to care for our common home, our beloved Earth?

Mark Hathaway, *Executive Director*

## THE 7 INTERRELATED AND ENTWINED GOALS OF THE LAUDATO SI' ACTION PLATFORM



**1. Respond to the Cry of the Earth** by addressing biodiversity loss and the climate crisis; adopting energy conservation, carbon neutrality, and renewables; promoting regenerative agriculture; protecting and providing access to clean water for all; and creating truly sustainable societies.



**2. Respond to the Cry of the Poor** by defending human life and dignity; protecting and empowering marginalized and vulnerable communities; analyzing and addressing the roots of injustice and domination; and seeking to decolonize all aspects of society. At a policy level, Pope Francis notes that ecological justice requires that wealthier nations address ecological debt by financially supporting the energy, agricultural, and infrastructure transitions of poorer nations as well as biodiversity protection.



**3. Practice Ecological Economics** by acknowledging that the human economy is utterly dependent upon and embedded in the living biosphere. Because limitless growth is impossible on a finite planet, the wealthiest 20% of humans who already consume more than the entire planet can sustain must embrace “degrowth,” including greatly reducing consumption; refraining from activities that harm people and the planet; adopting a zero-waste, circular economy; and building an economy that seeks to heal the biosphere while ensuring that all can acquire what they need to live in a flourishing Earth community.



**4. Adopt Sustainable Lifestyles** based on an ethic of sufficiency and “living well” while eliminating wastes; reducing meat and energy consumption; shifting transportation towards walking, cycling, and public transportation; carrying out energy retrofits and adopting “net-zero” buildings; and finding meaning and satisfaction beyond the quest for consumption.



**5. Embrace an Ecological Spirituality** by experiencing the presence of the Creator in the living Earth community through mindfulness, prayer, meditation, reflection, liturgical celebrations, and concrete practices. We can begin by taking up the call of this year’s Season of Creation to truly listen, with our hearts and all our senses, to the diverse voices of creation. Indeed, “if we feel intimately united with all that exists, then sobriety and care will well up spontaneously” (LS12).



**6. Promote Ecological Education** by fundamentally redesigning education, infusing it with the spirit of an integral ecology that includes respecting human rights; intimately knowing and reconnecting with the land; working for ecological regeneration; and learning skills for a life-centred, regenerative way of life.



**7. Support Community Resilience and Empowerment** by building participatory and sustainable local communities; encouraging a sense of belonging and rootedness in the land; participating in campaigns for a just, sustainable transition; supporting the struggles of Indigenous Peoples for land and decolonization; promoting a fossil fuel non-proliferation treaty and divestment; and advocating for policies that support regenerative agriculture, biodiversity protection, and a transition to renewable energy.



See <https://laudatosiactionplatform.org/laudato-si-goals/> for more ideas.



**LAUDATO SI'**  
Action Platform  
**LAND AND FOOD**

*Agricultural lands are the largest terrestrial biome along with forests and, as such, contribute significantly to biodiversity loss. Globally, our food systems, including land use, transportation, food waste, and emissions from fertilizers and animals account for nearly half of all human greenhouse gas emissions. Meanwhile, hundred of millions of people lack sufficient healthy, nutritious food even though we produce far more food than needed for all. Caring for our common home therefore calls for major changes in the way we steward the land and produce our food.*

## IGNATIUS JESUIT CENTRE: LIVING AN INTEGRAL ECOLOGY



For more than a century, Jesuits have farmed and cared for 240 hectares of land just north of the city of Guelph, Ontario.

More recently, the Ignatius Jesuit Centre (<https://ignatiusguelph.ca/>) has evolved into a space open to all, focused on living out an integral ecology including an organic farm, a retreat house, and a project to restore the river-side ecosystem.

### Growing Fresh Food

Since 2001, all food grown on Ignatius farm is produced organically using rotations and cover crops that enhance the fertility of the soil without using pesticides or chemical fertilizers.



A community-shared agriculture (CSA) project now grows over 60 varieties of fruits and vegetables on the farm. People can buy a share of the farm's production and pick up their food in a variety of locations. Community gardens also provide a place for 275 households to grow their own food.

The farm also offers a seven-month internship for new farmers interested in learning how to grow food organically in partnership with national and Ontario ecological farmer's associations.

### Responding to the Cry of the Poor

The centre makes land available to anyone who wishes to grow their own food garden at no cost. Those volunteering to work on the farm receive a share of the harvest, enabling lower income persons to access healthy, organic food.

Land and infrastructure are also leased to farmers at reasonable, long-term rates.

During the height of the pandemic, when the retreat house was closed, the centre opened its doors as a temporary shelter for persons experiencing houselessness.

### Restoring the Land

The centre's Old-Growth

Forest Project is creating a 38-hectare sanctuary of wetlands, meadows, forests, and waterways along the banks of Marden Creek



and the Speed River which is protected in perpetuity by a conservation easement.

Since 2006, centre staff, volunteers, and community groups have removed a dam, allowing Marden Creek to flow freely to the Speed River and restoring fish habitat. Invasive species are also being carefully diminished, creating space for native plants to grow.

Wildflowers, sedges, grasses, and more than 11,000 native trees and shrubs have been planted to create—over the course of the next 500 years or so—what will become an old growth forest.

Image Credits: Trevor Scott, sj, Ignatius Farm, & Nick Krete

– continued on page 5

Forest trails are open to the surrounding community and school groups often come to engage in ecological education activities. A local Indigenous group also has a space in the forest lands to carry out ceremonies and land-based activities.

**Ecological Spirituality**

Within the heart of the Ignatius Jesuit Centre is Loyola House, a retreat centre that has been offering spirituality programmes since 1964. The late Canadian Jesuit, Jim Profit, SJ, sought to adapt the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises to incorporate a more explicitly ecological perspective. An agronomist by training, Jim Profit was also instrumental in converting the farm to organic production.

Today, many of the retreat house's programmes help participants build a deeper connection with creation,

including land-based retreats. The centre has also developed meditative spaces such as a labyrinth and stations of the cosmos. Programmes are also offered to school-aged students with an emphasis on ecological spirituality.

The Ignatius Jesuit Centre provides one example of how an integral approach to ecology can be applied to lands and centres under the stewardship of religious communities.

Many other congregations—particularly women's communities—have developed similar initiatives

both in Canada and around the world. *For more examples, see [tiny.cc/LS-examples](http://tiny.cc/LS-examples).*

By adopting an approach informed by integral ecology, these centres often also create a closer connection with the surrounding community—something that revitalizes their own vision and mission informed by integral ecology, these centres often also create a closer connection with the surrounding community—something that revitalizes their own vision and mission.



**SAVING SEEDS, REGENERATING LAND AND CULTURES**



differences from its ancient ancestor, teocinte.

Seeds, then, represent a unique intermingling of the wisdom of plants and humans. Many Indigenous cultures have bred a wide diversity of crops uniquely adapted to specific soils and climates.

and growing traditional seeds, then, is essential to both ecological and cultural resilience.

In 1999, the Sisters of Providence started an Heirloom Seed Sanctuary at their motherhouse in Kingston, Ontario. The project sponsored community events like seed exchanges while creating an impressively diverse collection of heritage seeds.

Over millennia, people have selected seeds and cross-bred different plants to create the diverse food varieties we know today. For example, corn—bred over millennia in Mexico—has thousands of genetic

Over the past century, however, more than three-quarters of food plant varieties have disappeared. Each variety lost represents a loss of resilience. Monocultures are more vulnerable to severe weather and diseases. Saving

In 2017, the sanctuary donated its seed collection to two organizations that carry on its work: The Kingston Area Seed System Initiative and Ratinenhayen:thos, a Tyendinaga Mohawk community group.

– continued on page 6

Image Credit: Wisahkotewinowak

Image Credit: Wisahkotewinowak



cultural regeneration. Wisahkotewinowak began with a small garden in 2014, but has now grown to include food, medicine, and teaching gardens spread between Waterloo, Guelph, and Cambridge. Indigenous youth interns work in the gardens during the summer.

Growing traditional seeds is a key aspect of Wisahkotewinowak. For example, the initiative has planted, grown, and shared seeds of traditional tobacco originally found in an archaeological dig in the Niagara region.

While employing traditional methods like the “three sisters” combining corn, beans, and squash, Wisahkotewinowak also experiments with new ways of growing sustainable and resilient food. Both food and seeds are shared with the local community.

Dave believes that Wisahkotewinowak also

helps urban Indigenous persons find ways to form a responsible relationship with the land itself, noting that “as the gardens grew,” the group’s understanding of food sovereignty also increased.

“In order to garden... you need some idea of land sovereignty.... land that we control.” Food and seed sovereignty therefore depend on returning land back to Indigenous control—specifically, land to grow food. Wisahkotewinowak has been negotiating with municipalities and other institutions to increase their access to land.

“We are saying, we want to be responsible for land. Part of our identity, and part of understanding who we are, is that idea of responsibility. And understanding who we are, is really understanding our responsibilities. I think that’s what we’re seeing.”

*Thanks to Dave Skeen for his generosity in sharing his reflections on seeds, land, and food.*



## BLACK CREEK COMMUNITY FARM



Hidden behind a newly grown food forest, the Black Creek Community Farm (BCCF) is Toronto’s largest urban farm, operating in the northwest corner of the city near one of its most diverse and disadvantaged communities.

The Jane-Finch community faces numerous systemic barriers and one of the highest rates of food insecurity in the city.

A 2009 study found that the community pays about 7% more for fresh produce than other Toronto neighbourhoods.

Black Creek Community Farm seeks to address food insecurity by growing and distributing healthy, sustainable food. The farm includes a community-supported



Image Credit: Black Creek Community Farm

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agriculture project offering food on a sliding scale, a senior's programme to help address isolation, and a children's programme to promote ecological awareness. Community members can also grow their own food on garden plots.

"The farm is like an anchor for community transformation," notes Leticia Deawuo . "It

is addressing food security issues by supporting people to garden across Jane-Finch, but it also raises the level of the conversation about food justice and food sovereignty in this neighbourhood."

For more information, see <http://tiny.cc/blackcreek>



Image Credit: Black Creek Community Farm

## TREATY LAND SHARING NETWORK



Land is fundamental to Indigenous ways of life. Yet, in Saskatchewan, most land south of the treeline is privately owned. Reserves make up only 2% of the land, insufficient for Indigenous Peoples to practice their cultures or traditional livelihoods. Only 10% of the native prairie remains.

Yet, the intent of the original treaties signed was that Indigenous Nations would share land with settlers, not cede or surrender it to exclusive private ownership.

The Treaty Land Sharing Network seeks to live out the spirit of the treaties by connecting farmers, ranchers, and others stewarding the land with First Nations and Métis people requiring safe access to land to practice traditional ways of life.



Joel Mowchenko is one such farmer, who's land that has been in his family for a century. Sharing his land, in consultation with local Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers, is about honouring an historical agreement with Indigenous Peoples:

"This is not us being overly generous or altruistic or anything like that. This is us saying First Nations people

have treaty rights to access the land and to benefit from the resources on the land."

Because of this initiative, Indigenous persons have greater access to the blessings of the land across the province for places of ceremony, gathering traditional foods, hunting, and honouring sacred places.

See: <http://tiny.cc/landshare>



Images Credit: Valérie Zink & The Treaty Land Sharing Network



**LAUDATO SI'**  
Action Platform  
**ECOLOGICAL  
SPIRITUALITY**

*At the heart of Laudato Si' is the call for ecological conversion, a change of heart. Ecological spiritual practices can help us listen to the cry of the Earth and be inspired by the wisdom of other creatures to care for all of creation.*

## **THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES: HEALING OUR ECOLOGICAL RELATIONS**



**J**im Profit, the late Canadian Jesuit, explored how the four-stage dynamic of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, leads to “a deeper experience of ecological sin” while also nurturing our “experience of God in creation.”

He observed, “we are not to relate to the created world or to God as something ‘out there’, as something completely different from ourselves, but with the intimacy of a dynamic, personal relationship that has an intrinsic worth independent of any utilitarian worth.”

### **1. The Experience of Ecological Sin**

The ecological crisis is the manifestation of a deeper spiritual crisis, what Profit refers to as “a dysfunctional relationship between us, God, and the rest of creation.”

The first stage of the Exercises provides a prayerful space

to grow in awareness of our participation in ecological sin, both as individuals and as part of society, and to experience deep sorrow for personal and collective injustices—including ecological destruction—within the embrace of a loving Creator.

### **2. Growing in Intimacy**

We are then invited to grow in intimacy with the Creator incarnate within creation. We may experience the Creator through the beauty of creation—a garden, lakeside, forest, or mountain—to pray and recollect.

We experience the Creator contemplating the lilies of the field and the dying of a grain of wheat. In so doing, we experience the healing presence of creation and its capacity to regenerate itself and our spirits.

### **3. Suffering with Creation**

The Exercises then lead us into the experience of destruction and death in our world. Our Creator labours and suffers for us within Creation.

Here we become prayerfully attentive to the cry of the Earth itself through the suffering of the Creator incarnate... in

growing pollution, parched farmlands... and the pain these inflict on the poorest and most vulnerable. We seek the grace of sorrow and compassion for all these injustices and sufferings.

### **4. Experiencing Resurrection**

The Exercises conclude by asking us to pay attention to the new life springing up around us: In the resilience of people in difficult circumstances, in new life sprouting from a forest fire liberating nutrients from fallen seeds... From all that we experience from the great cycle of new life, destruction, death, and new life, there is joy to be felt, in life coming from death.



This is a spiritual dynamic that allows us to experience the sacred relationality within Creation, allowing for the healing of our broken relationship between ourselves, our Creator, and creation. In so doing, we can move from being paralyzed by a sense of guilt and despair towards the experience of living with hope and healing.



## LISTENING TO THE VOICES OF CREATION



The 2022 Season of Creation calls us to lovingly listen to the voices of creation. On the one hand, we need to hear the cry of the Earth, “as forests crackle, animals flee, and people are forced to migrate due to the fires of injustice.”<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis reminds us that in so doing we hear a kind of dissonance, “an anguished plea, lamenting our mistreatment of our common home.”<sup>2</sup>



attention or your curiosity? It could be a leaf, a blade of grass, a tree, an insect, a squirrel, a bird, running water, or even a stone.

Once you find a creature that attracts you, spend time with it. Engage it with your senses (sight, sound, smell, possibly touch) without interfering with it.

Attempt to perceive it as if you had never seen anything like it before. For example, if it were an ant, try to let go of any preconceived notions you might have of ants.

At the same time, though, we can listen to the “sweet song in praise of our beloved Creator,”<sup>3</sup> opening ourselves to the beauty, wonder, and intricate interdependence of living beings. This feeds our souls and fills us with hope and care.

Theologian Raimon Panikkar wrote that “the wisdom of the Earth... discloses itself unto us once we... stand-under the spell of what she is revealing to us.”<sup>4</sup> This wisdom is vital for regenerating and healing the web of life.

The following practice is a simple way to hear, sense, and connect to the voices of creation:

Find a quiet place outdoors and take a moment to close your eyes and focus on your breathing. Pay attention to any sounds you hear...



Then, become aware of smells... Also, become aware of the sense of touch, including sensations in your own body, the feel of the breeze, the temperature of the air, the sun shining on you...

Simply perceive it as it reveals itself to you. Imagine what it might feel like to be this creature.



Then, open your eyes and begin to explore the area around you. Is there something that captures your

After some time perceiving, ask yourself: “What is this creature communicating to me? What is it teaching me?” You might want to sketch it, take its photo, write about it, or simply reflect on what its wisdom calls you to be or do.



Image: Cezanne's Apples (detail)



**LAUDATO SI'**  
Action Platform  
**BUILDINGS AND  
TRANSPORTATION**

*In Canada, about 3/8 of greenhouse gas emissions are associated with buildings and transportation. If we include emissions from the fossil fuel industries that power these; however, that figure rises to nearly 2/3 of emissions. Changing transportation systems and creating energy-efficient buildings is therefore essential to addressing climate change.*

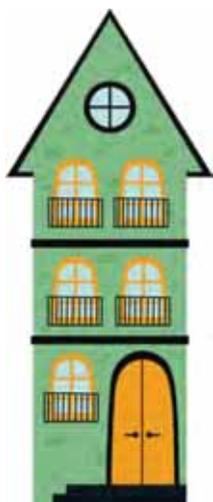
**NET ZERO BUILDINGS**



In Canada, residential and commercial buildings account for roughly a quarter of energy usage and 1/8 of greenhouse gas emissions. Yet, with current technology, it is possible to construct net-zero buildings that generate as much energy as they consume, often for little additional cost.

Not only are these buildings more ecologically friendly, in the longer term they can actually save money while providing greater indoor comfort.

Net-zero buildings use energy efficiency measures to reduce energy consumption such as high-performance envelopes, air barrier systems, daylighting, sun shading devices, energy-efficient windows and glazing, passive solar heating, natural ventilation, and water conservation.



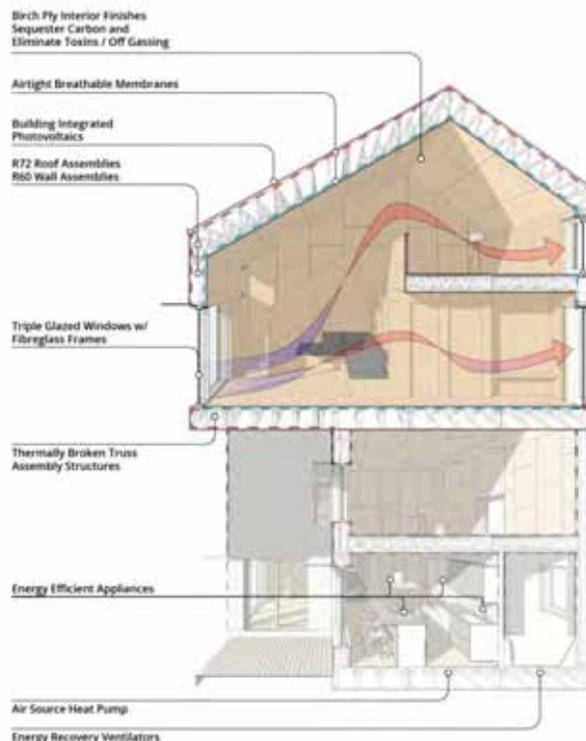
Once these measures have been implemented, renewable energy technologies are then used to meet the remaining energy needs including photovoltaic solar panels, solar water heating,

and even wind turbines.

Toronto Metropolitan University's Architectural Science Department has designed an 1100 square foot, two-story ZeroHouse. Constructed entirely of non-toxic materials that store carbon, rather than emitting it. The house is built without creating landfill wastes and costs no more than a standard house of the same size.

The Canadian Home Builders' Association is also building seven demonstration buildings consisting of over a hundred residential units in four provinces, covering all of our major climatic zones. These homes reduce or eliminate energy bills, create more comfortable homes with few drafts and hot spots, improve indoor air quality, and increase resale value.

Given that net-zero buildings are technologically feasible, affordable, and provide a host of benefits, upgrading provincial building codes to



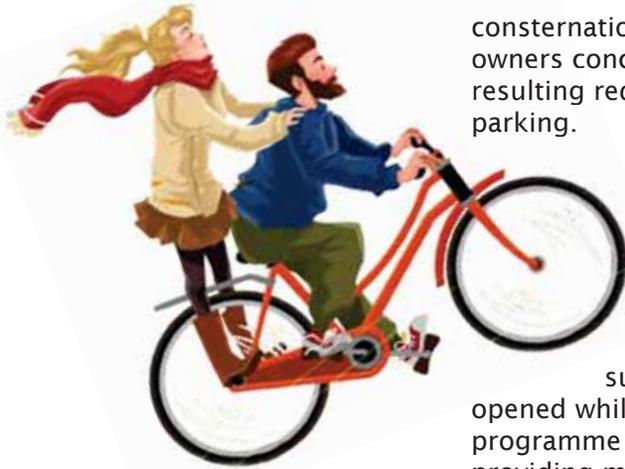
require that all new buildings be constructed to net-zero standards is a key strategy for reducing energy use and greenhouse gas emissions.

The European Union now requires that member states ensure that all new buildings consume nearly zero net energy. Canada should move to do the same.

*We are grateful to Tansin Rahman, our summer intern, for her contributions to this article.*



## THE EXHILARATION OF CYCLING



*To ride a bike is to come as close to flying by your own power as humans ever will.*  
—Jody Rosen

During the COVID-19 pandemic, an increasing number of people experienced “flying” on their bicycles. People took to their bicycles due to wide-spread nervousness in taking public transit. Bicycle delivery services also took off. In the process many discovered cycling as a great way of getting outdoors and feeling alive in the midst of the pandemic.

In response to the cycling boom, many cities opened new, dedicated cycling lanes as well as temporary cycling routes.

During the first summer of the pandemic, Montréal created 327 km of new pedestrian and bicycle paths, in addition to the more than 900 km already in existence.

Covid 19 also helped initiate a 3-phase implementation of new bicycle lanes throughout the city of Regina on an experimental basis... to the delight of cyclists, but to some

consternation for many home owners concerned about the resulting reductions in street parking.

In Toronto, an east-west dedicated cycling lane paralleling much of the Bloor-Danforth subway line was opened while the “Active TO” programme closed streets, providing more space for cycling and walking.

To help make these initiatives more permanent, over a hundred Canadian leaders across multiple urban sectors signed the “2020 Declaration for Resilience in Canadian Cities,” calling on civic leaders to use the pandemic as an opportunity to move toward more accessible and sustainable cities.

Bicycles are the most efficient form of transportation in existence. They take up far less road space than cars and provide an opportunity for healthy exercise and contact with nature. The UN Environmental Programme notes that cycling reduces the risk of diabetes, cardiovascular disease, depression, and some forms of cancer.

New, electric, power-assisted bikes are also making cycling more widely accessible to an aging

population. With the addition of a bicycle trailer, it is quite possible to carry groceries and other mid-sized items.

Yet, without dedicated, protected cycling lanes, bicycling can also be dangerous. Dedicated cycling infrastructure is therefore essential to promote the wider adoption of cycling.

Unfortunately, as the pandemic has waned, many people have returned to using their cars.

Promoting bicycle-friendly cities and towns beyond pandemic times, integrated with public transit, pedestrian-friendly neighbourhoods, and good inter-urban rail, is an essential component of a genuinely sustainable transportation system. At the same time, it enables more people to experience the joy, freedom, and exhilaration of “flying” on a bicycle.



Image Credit: Trevor Scott, sj

## FAITHFUL FOOTPRINTS



Faith communities can play a critical role in caring for our common home by sharing resources, fostering interfaith collaboration, and inspiring each other to take action on current social and ecological issues.

The United Church of Canada provides two examples of how we can use and adapt religious buildings for sustainability.

The church's Kindred Works programme is seeking ways to redevelop many of its properties to provide housing to 34,000 people over the next 15 years, at least a third of which will offer below-market rates for lower income people.

The United Church has also committed to reducing its GHG emissions by 80% by 2050. The church's Faithful Footprints programme is encouraging congregations to reduce their buildings' ecological footprint by offering grants, tools, and inspiration.

Since the programme's launch in 2018, almost 300 properties have become more efficient, with some transitioning to renewable energy.

The Faithful Footprints programme seeks to inspire other faith communities to take similar actions. From replacing windows, insulating walls, installing electric heat pumps, or weather-stripping doors, the possibilities are endless.

Faith & the Common Good's Greening Sacred Spaces programme offers guides and advice to diverse faith groups including energy audits, case studies, workbooks, a monthly newsletter, and advice on financing the greening of any sacred space.

With funding opportunities from provincial grants, local programmes, or congregational donations, faith buildings of

all kinds can join the mission and find ways to reduce energy consumption and GHG emissions.

See: [tiny.cc/greenspace](http://tiny.cc/greenspace)

Thanks to Aleyxa Gates Julien of Faith and the Common Good for her key contributions to this article.



Image Credit: United Church of Canada

### Open Space is a publication of the Jesuit Forum for Social Faith and Justice

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### Questions for Small Group Dialogue:

1. Based on what you have read, where do you feel called to ecological conversion?
2. Are there initiatives or practices that particularly resonated with or inspired you?
3. What are some key actions that you, and those you live and work with, would like to undertake to better care for our common home? Consider personal lifestyle changes, practices, community initiatives, and advocacy for systematic change.

For more information about the Forum dialogue process, see: [tiny.cc/forumprocess](http://tiny.cc/forumprocess)

For endnote references, see: <http://tiny.cc/refs-os15-1>