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LAUDATO SI' SCHOOLS' PROGRAMME PROPOSAL



**Report by Ruth-Anne Walbank
Laudato Sí Research Associate
St Mary's Twickenham**



St Mary's
University
Twickenham
London

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INTRODUCTION

In 2015, Pope Francis published his encyclical letter *Laudato Si'*, which identified the 'urgent challenge to protect our common home' and advocated for sustainable, ecologically conscious action from all peoples (1). Pope Francis particularly foregrounded young people as the next generation with 'a new ecological sensitivity and a generous spirit' which have simultaneously 'grown up in a milieu of extreme consumerism and affluence which makes it difficult to develop other habits' (2). As such, we face an 'educational challenge' to empower our young people in taking action grounded 'sound virtues' that encourage 'a selfless ecological commitment' (3).

This *Laudato Si'* Schools' Programme seeks to take the core principles of the Pope's encyclical letter into schools as an actionable series of workshops that promotes ecological conversions among our young people, empowering them to take action at local levels. This programme then creates a replicable model for other schools and dioceses to implement in their communities, encouraging our young people to live and embody *Laudato Si'*.

'Young people
demand change'

- POPE FRANCIS, *LAUDATO SI'* (13)

RATIONALE

From the Glasgow COP26 summit in November 2021 to Pope Francis calling for 'radical' action to offer future generations a 'concrete hope' on BBC Radio 4, the UK's cultural climate is hyperaware of ecological concerns. Equally, what the media has termed 'eco-anxiety' is on the rise (4). One survey from the charity *Global Action Plan* revealed that 77% of students report feeling anxious or nervous when thinking about climate change, and 40% of teachers felt a lack of engagement on environmental issues from senior education leaders (5). This project seeks to empower young people in taking positive action and develop school communities invested in tackling environmental issues.

The project combines twenty-first-century ecological research and criticism with Christian theology to embody the 'ecological education and spirituality' Pope Francis calls for in *Laudato Si'* to achieve this aim (6). While ecological studies provide the contemporary context for understanding what's happening to our environment, offering an engaging gateway for young people to enter the topic, the theological base offers the ethical framework for forming young people's core ecological values.

OBJECTIVES

The core objective for this project is to advocate engagement with *Laudato Sí*, encouraging young people to act as the driving force for change and action in their local communities. This project will culminate in a written report that gathers the data and outcomes from the project, alongside a resource pack for teachers and pupils that enables other schools and diocese to replicate the programme in their communities.

The four research questions that will guide this project are:

- Can we use *Laudato Sí* to inspire and motivate young people in KS3 to take environmental action?
- What is the impact of promoting environmental action on young people's perception of ecological crisis?
- What do teachers and policymakers perceive as the main barriers to implementing the principles of *Laudato Sí* in their schools, and what support do they need to overcome these challenges?
- What are the most effective strategies to improve young people in KS3's engagement with environmental action?

METHODOLOGY

This study combines quantitative and qualitative data gathering (also known as “mixed methods”) to provide a rich, comprehensive understanding of *Laudato Si'* in school life and youth-led environmental activism. The methods for collecting both data sets are as follows:

Quantitative

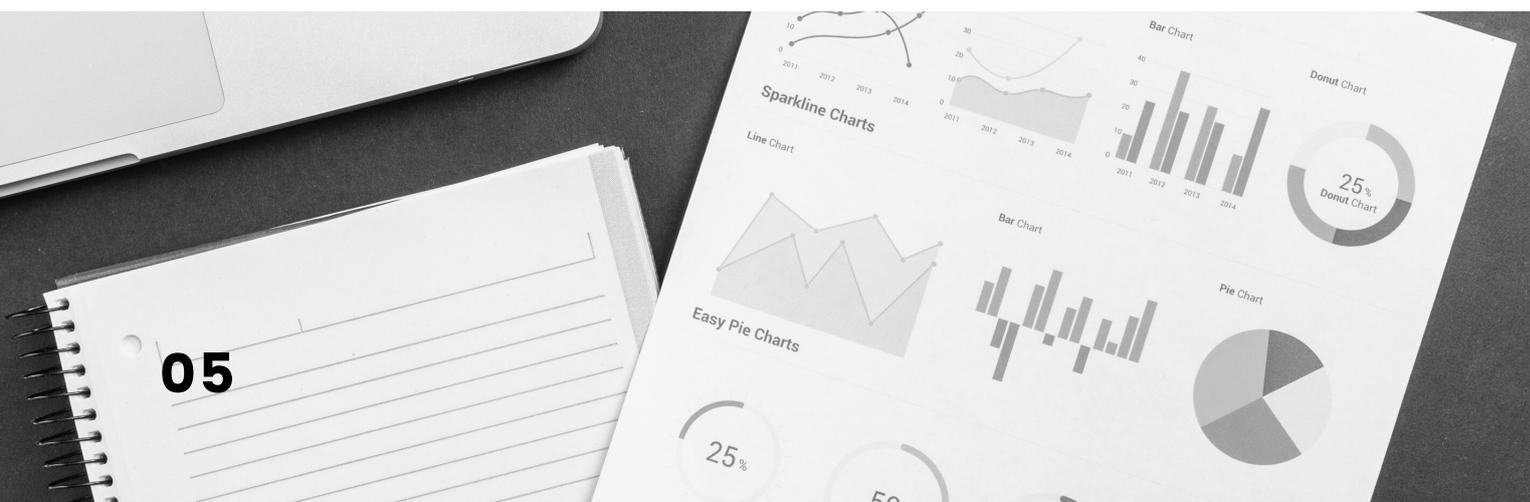
At the start and end of each school's programme, pupils will complete a survey that establishes the attitudes towards and perceptions of environmental issues, using rating scales and Likert scales. This survey will gauge their attitudes towards ecological problems, document their knowledge of *Laudato Si'*, and record their motivations for pursuing climate action. In repeating this survey after the programme, this research can gauge the programme's impact on the pupils in a comparative data set.

Additionally, this study will conduct a similar survey amongst staff and educational leaders, offering their perspectives on environmental issues and *Laudato Si'* from an institutional level, identifying the strengths and weaknesses of currently practised policies.

Qualitative

For each school, this study will conduct one focus group encompassing pupils engaging with the programme. We will speak to the same set of pupils before and after the programme, gaining further insight into their knowledge and understanding of environmental action in *Laudato Si'* to explore their perspectives in depth.

Furthermore, this study will conduct interviews with headteachers, subject leads, and diocesan leaders on a one-to-one basis to add to this material. The purpose of these interviews is to understand the school's role in promoting environmental action from an administrative level, strengthening this study's analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of current policies and practices.



THE PROGRAMME OUTLINE



For the Laudato Si' Schools' Programme, this study will run six one-hour workshop sessions in either year 7 or 8 classes across at least ten schools in the Salford Diocese. These sessions will occur between January and May in 2022. The goal is to empower pupils to live *Laudato Si'* through their daily school practices by designing a project that can positively impact the environment at a local level.

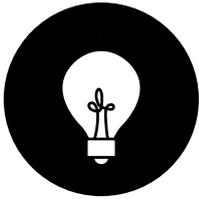
As ways to incentivise schools to participate in this project, the six-session programme could contribute towards their RE requirements for Section 48 inspections and help pupils contribute towards their Faith In Action awards. Another incentive may be to advertise this programme as a trial for approaching the "Season of Creation" portion of the upcoming RE curriculum.

Key Points:

- **x6 1-hour workshops**
- **Years 7 & 8 in KS3**
- **At least 10 schools across the Salford Diocese**

THE SIX SESSIONS

Here is an outline of what the six sessions may include:



No. 1 & 2. Engagement in the ecological

To re-engage students in ecological issues, inspiring an ecological conversion by evoking outrage at the current state of the world and optimism for the future.



No. 3. Planning the project

To transform that ecological conversion into ecological action, developing impactful, meaningful projects that benefit their schools' community and enrich their personal lives.



No. 4 & 5. Implementing action

To act in their school's community in ways that positively impact the environment, empowering young people through the tangible effects of their actions.



No. 6. Presentations and reflections

To celebrate the positive environmental impacts of their projects and reflect on their ecological mission going forwards.

1 & 2. ENGAGEMENT IN THE ECOLOGICAL

The project will begin with every student completing the quantitative survey, acting as the baseline data for the project's research. The first step of this project is to reengage pupils with ecology, combating some of the eco-anxiety identified previously and what ecological theory terms the "Disenchantment Thesis" (7). In achieving this aim, these first sessions engage with literature and media from contemporary culture to start a dialogue about climate change and environmental issues. Some potential texts to start the ecological conversation may include:

- ***The Girl With All the Gifts* by M.R. Carey:** This novel proposes a dystopian future where a fungal infection wipes out most of humanity. The narrative structure strongly resembles the Book of Revelation and raises questions about hope for the future.
- **"All the Good Girls Go to Hell" by Billie Eilish:** This pop song by the internationally famous singer has theological themes and environmental ones, with the lyrics referring to the California wildfires and the video parading Satan's fall from Hell.
- ***Dark Satanic Mills* by Marcus Sedgwick:** Taking inspiration from William Blake's Jerusalem, this graphic novel navigates the post-apocalyptic wasteland of Northern England following an ecological disaster. Its geographical focus and visual medium offer an engaging medium for students in Salford.
- ***Sweet Tooth* dir. by Jim Mickle:** This post-apocalyptic Netflix series, based on a comic book series, shows the world after a viral pandemic known as "The Great Crumble" and the emergence of an animal/human hybrid species. The TV series plays with ideas of nature, civilisation, progress, and preservation.

By engaging pupils in texts that imagine where climate change can take us, these initial sessions act as a starting point for promoting outrage at the current state of our planet.

However, as Tom Rivett-Carnac states in the podcast *Outrage + Optimism*, 'outrage almost becomes this fuel of momentum that can wake us up out of complacency, but we have to transform that into a productive view of the world which is where optimism comes in' (8). So, if contemporary texts are the starting point for provoking outrage, *Laudato Si'* becomes the path towards optimism for transformative change and meaningful action. Therefore, these opening workshops seek to inspire what Pope Francis terms 'an "ecological conversion"', where, 'Living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork is essential to a life of virtue' (9).

By the end of the second session, each pupil will have written a mission statement that outlines each pupil's environmental values and their goals for action. In writing these statements down, pupils can cement their environmental commitment, creating a long-term idea of the ecologically conscious life they want to lead that guides their short-term actions.

3. PLANNING THE PROJECT

The third session then moves to enacting environmental change, using the momentum of the pupils' ecological conversion and written mission statements. This section of the programme moves into living and embodying *Laudato Si'* in our daily lives; a call to action Pope Francis advocates in his letter:

A community can break out of the indifference induced by consumerism. These actions cultivate a shared identity, with a story that can be remembered and handed on. In this way, the world, and the quality of life of the poorest, are cared for, with a sense of solidarity which is at the same time aware that we live in a common home which God has entrusted to us. These community actions, when they express self-giving love, can also become intense spiritual experiences. (10)

The third session puts each class into small teams of no more than five students, asking them to develop an actionable project that will positively impact the environment, either in their schools or their personal lives. The projects will have short-term, achievable goals that empower the students to see the significance of their actions and impact their communities. Some examples of potential projects could include:



- Planting trees on school grounds and identifying the carbon offset they will have
- Calculating the group's collective carbon footprint and implementing ways to reduce it
- Starting a campaign in their school to encourage recycling
- Evaluating the environmental impact of the group's diet and challenging themselves to go vegan for one month
- Creating a piece of art out of waste materials to protest plastic waste
- Researching the environmental impact of the school's uniforms and proposing sustainable alternatives
- Implementing a litter picking initiative at school
- Planting wildflowers and native fauna on school grounds or at home to promote biodiversity
- Participate in a wildlife survey like the RSBPs big garden birdwatch
- Fundraise for CAFOD or other charities working to combat climate change.

4 & 5. IMPLEMENTING ACTION

In sessions four and five, the pupils use this time to implement their projects. They can work on their projects outside of these sessions, and this formal session acts as a check-in point to receive support from staff and gather their resources together ahead of the presentations in session six. These projects should all take place either at home or on school grounds, with each plan checked by the teacher and the project facilitator to ensure it's suitable and actionable within the timeframe.

6. PRESENTATIONS AND REFLECTIONS

In the last session, each group will give five-minute presentations on their projects, including:

- What their project involved
- Why their project was important
- Its impact on their lives and their local community

This final session offers the pupils the opportunity to reflect on their experiences and celebrate their successes. The session will also facilitate personal reflection on each pupil's mission statement from the third session.

The last part of this session will be to complete the final survey, which includes the same quantitative questions from the original survey alongside some qualitative questions to reflect on their projects.



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- (9) Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, para. 217.
- (10) Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, para. 232.