

# BALLARAT COLLOQUIUM ON POPE FRANCIS ENCYCLICAL *LAUDATO SI'* ON CARE FOR OUR COMMON HOME

On Tuesday August 25, the Catholic Diocese of Ballarat hosted the first national colloquium on Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, on Care for our Common Home, sponsored by Catholic Mission and the Catholic Education Office.

The aim of the day was to present a theological perspective of the encyclical, a practical perspective from a collective and individual praxis and what action can be taken in our own context for responding to Pope Francis' call to address the very real ecological issues in our world today.

Bishop Paul Bird welcomed those present to the Colloquium, with a particular welcome to keynote speaker Rev Dr Denis Edwards, Jacqui Remond, Director of Catholic Earthcare and Lana Turvey, Catholic Mission's National Program Manager for Mission Formation and Education Programs for Adults who facilitated the day.



Sue Searls, Lana Turvey, Bishop Paul Bird, Jacqui Remond and Rev Dr Denis Edwards

Rev Dr Denis Edwards OAM is a lecturer at the Australian Catholic University, Adelaide, a resident priest in Tranmere parish in South Australia and author. A few of his books are: *Ecology at the Heart of Faith* (2006); *How God Acts: Creation, Redemption and Special Divine Action* (2010) and *Jesus and the Natural World* (2012), a spiritual resource that the Catholic Education Office provided a copy to all our diocesan schools in 2012.



Denis shared that in reading *Laudato Si*, one gains fresh insights into the relationship between God and the planetary community of life on earth. He felt renewed in hope through the writing of this encyclical, which he expressed he "took joy" at the beauty of Francis's vision and felt "sobered by the challenges" we face. He also commented that he felt summoned again to see his life as an ecological vocation. He stated

that the encyclical begins from the "reality" we face today. He then shared his reflection on this reality with the three chapters relating to: the "gospel of creation"; an analysis of the "deep human roots" of this reality and the vision of "integral ecology". Denis then expressed that in the final two chapters of the encyclical, Pope Francis is about "action" that can be taken up at the political and personal level.

Denis stated that *Laudato Si* begins with a clear view of what is happening in our planet. Our planet earth, shared by humans and other creatures, is a home for future generations that we are meant to care for and protect, but have treated with violence. Pope Francis offers a very careful analysis of the major issues that we face today reflected upon this reality. He further presented a perspective of the "Universal Communion of Creation". Pope Francis offering us a new theology that involves three aspects: "Intrinsic value"; the revelation of God through "other creatures" and "sublime communion", that we cannot see nature as something separate from



ourselves. “Environmental, economic and social ecology are closely related” We are part of nature. LS 139 “When we speak of the ‘environment’, what we really mean is a relationship existing between nature and society which lives in it. Denis also spoke of “Cultural Ecology”, “Ecology of Daily Life”, “Justice between Generations”, “Ecological Education and Spirituality”, an individual movement to a “change in lifestyle” being moral, not simply economical, “Ecological Conversion”. This is but a brief snapshot of *Laudato Si* that Fr. Denis shared.



Jacqui Remond, John Meneely, Sarah Page, Rev Dr Denis Edwards, Sue Searls and children from St Francis Xavier Primary School, Ballarat East

A great highlight of the day was a presentation by St Francis Xavier Primary School from a practical perspective. A group of eight Year 3 and 4 students, accompanied by Ms Sarah Page their environmental teacher, presented their outstanding activities the school has in place to care for the environment.

They have been environmental practitioners since 2005 where they first began to grow their own food. This small beginning further developed into a wonderful program that now has a perma patch, farm animals and pets (the guinea pig population grew from three to ten and the students discovered a few new things). There are now more native animals and birds seen at the school due to the development of a wetlands area and the planting of many native trees and plants. They have a no plastic policy and recycling bins in every classroom as well as bins for food scraps which can be fed to the chooks. They have student teams responsible for ensuring lights, heaters, air-conditioners and computer monitors are turned off when not in use, and ensuring taps are not left running. The students, through the guidance of their teacher, have taken on the responsibility of the ecological sustainability in their own school.

In addition, there was a presentation by ECOS, presented by Sandra Dillon on their vision “to foster and encourage communities to understand and embrace the ecological at a local, national and world level”. The presentation demonstrated the journey in understanding how parishes interpret and implement *Laudato Si*. A number of relevant websites and groups who work towards ecological sustainability were focussed on in this presentation.

An individual perspective was offered by Joe Boin who reminded us that it is important that each of us is aware that to achieve ecological sustainability, we need to reduce our ecological footprint to avoid the further loss of ecosystems and species. If each person makes a little difference, then this difference by 10 billion people will change the world. Joe shared with us how he and others have achieved this change in their own homes and lives.

The afternoon’s program consisted of workshops facilitated by Lana who guided us through group discussions on how education, parishes and the Diocese might see the way forward in implementing the encyclical. After a brief personal reflection guided by Jacqui, we formed table groups to respond to the following questions:

- What are the opportunities and challenges for our response to *Laudato Si* and caring for our common home?
- What changes might be needed to overcome the challenges and take up the opportunities in Parish or school?
- What additional resources or networks are available to make this ecological conversion happen within the Diocese of Ballarat?



As it turned out, not all people could attend the whole day, but the small group discussions by those who remained had powerfully and hopefully generative conversations about the future for the Ballarat Diocese.

*Sue Searls, Catholic Mission  
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