



Caring for our Common Home

Foreword

The environmental crisis is one of the most serious global challenges of the 21st century. I am writing this in the early days of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, thus at a time of multiple challenges and great danger for the whole world community: nonetheless, and however these tragic events unfold, there is no escaping the gravity of the climate crisis. There are those who would try to deny or minimise it, but their voices bring to mind for me the words spoken by scientist Valery Legasov at the end of Chernobyl, the recent TV miniseries which dramatizes the 1986 nuclear plant disaster: "[The truth] is always there, whether we see it or not, whether we choose to or not. The truth doesn't care about our needs or wants, it doesn't care about our governments, our ideologies, our religions. It will lie in wait for all time."

In a final incisive remark, Legasov then observes that the disaster at Chernobyl brought about a critical change in his own attitude: "Where I once would fear the cost of truth, now I only ask: What is the cost of lies?" But we know the cost of lies. We have been left in no doubt that we risk leaving the world – God's creation, God's gift – uninhabitable if we fail to acknowledge and act on the ecological emergency facing humankind. Extreme weather events, a depleted fresh water supply, drastic food shortages, and widespread population displacement are just some of the devastating consequences of our failure to act. "We can't just continue living as if there was no tomorrow," Greta Thunberg said recently, "because there is a tomorrow."

Caring for our common home is a task for all of humankind. We must be careful, however, that the broad and abstract reference of the term 'humankind' does not obscure the obligation that each one of us must feel to take specific and concrete action in our own lives. This is what Pope Francis is referring to in his landmark encyclical *Laudato Si'* when he calls for a change in lifestyle, particularly a rejection of consumerism. There is no alternative. In her beautiful poem 'For the birds', Irish poet Moya Cannon begins with an epigraph from Rainer Maria Rilke – "You must change your life" – and then she begins:

And how we resist it, as though all change
had designs on us, yet for the birds too,
as for insects and glaciers,
for leverets and children
change we must.

Care of the earth is one of the Universal Apostolic Preferences (UAPs), or priorities, of Fr Arturo Sosa, the Jesuit Father General, and it is also embedded in the Irish Province Strategic Plan for 2021-2026. It is for this reason that the JCFJ's Caring for our Common Home is such an important policy document. The deep thought and clarity which it displays, thanks to the assiduous work of its author, Dr Ciara Murphy, makes it invaluable for the province, but equally noteworthy is the methodology which she has employed. The document is the fruit of extensive consultation and conversation with Jesuits, lay colleagues and volunteers in the various works and communities across the province. An old Irish proverb comes to mind: 'Chionn beirt rud nach bhfeiceann duine amhain' (Two people can see what the individual cannot). The truth of this is apparent here. Both the vision and the practical proposals in this policy document are all the richer for having their roots in a culture of consultation and listening. The Irish Jesuit Province is committed to its implementation.

Around the time that the JCFJ came to me regarding this consultative process they also proposed that, if possible, a tree would be planted in the grounds of each of our Jesuit works. It was gratifying to see this suggestion welcomed so readily throughout the province. We have much to learn from trees. They purify the toxic carbon dioxide we emit and turn it into the life-giving oxygenated air we breathe. And, as recent scientific studies on forests have revealed, it appears that they do so not only as separate organic entities but also by creating ‘communities’ and working together to ensure the benefit of all. They are intimately linked together by fungal tips on their extensive root systems, and these tips can perform many communal functions, including sending messages underground across the forest floor, warning other trees of imminent danger and giving assistance to trees that are ailing or dying. Similarly, given the truly daunting scale of the ecological emergency we face, we can only help the healing process by joining together as a community committed to protecting the earth, our common home, and caring for the most vulnerable on this lovely planet.

I want to express my deep thanks to Dr Kevin Hargaden, Director of the JCFJ, and once again to Dr Ciara Murphy for this fine piece of work, aware that the task of implementation lies ahead. It is through initiatives like this that we are enabled to see that it is still possible to take practical steps in caring for our common home. There is no alternative. Moya Cannon concludes the poem referenced above as follows:

We know it's not too late, but almost,
the cost already runs too high –
we, who still have a choice,
must change our lives.

Policy statement

The Irish Jesuit Province, recognising the importance of Caring for our Common Home, are committed to walking the “path to renewal” together (Laudato Si’ §202 [hereafter: LS]), and will work in partnership with Jesuits and lay people, together with their communities, to achieve this. We recognise that Mother Earth is a gift which must be treasured and nurtured and that Caring for our Common Home stands as a Universal Apostolic Preference of the Jesuits globally and one of the five objectives outlined in our Provincial Plan, 2021-2026.

We also acknowledge that in this climate and biodiversity emergency the most vulnerable are impacted first and most harshly. Those in a position to do so have a responsibility to take action to Care for our Common Home, both by reducing our own negative ecological footprint as well as helping others, through our work, to have a positive impact on our natural environment.

The Jesuit apostolic body (including clergy, religious, staff and volunteers) have a responsibility to Care for our Common Home in their Province-based activities. This will be facilitated and encouraged by the Province through various initiatives including guiding documents, resources, and support.

Commitments

After extensive consultation throughout the Province and its works, the Irish Jesuits commit to:

Auditing and assessing their environmental impact



The Jesuit Province commits to conduct an audit to establish a baseline of the ecological impact of the Province. This work will allow us to concentrate our efforts where they are most effective, informed by hard data. Continuous assessment will also allow us to identify the most effective measures and the areas where more work is needed.

“Our goal is not to amass information or to satisfy curiosity, but rather to become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it.” (LS19)

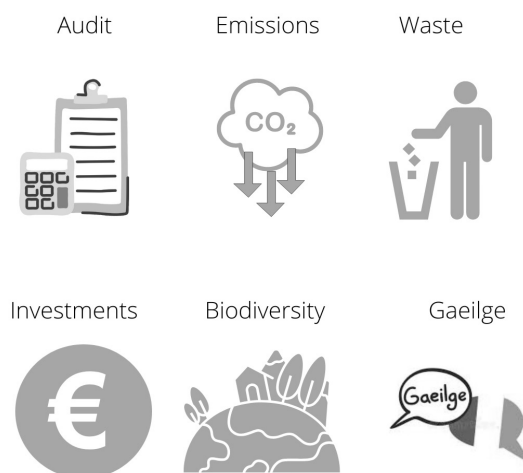


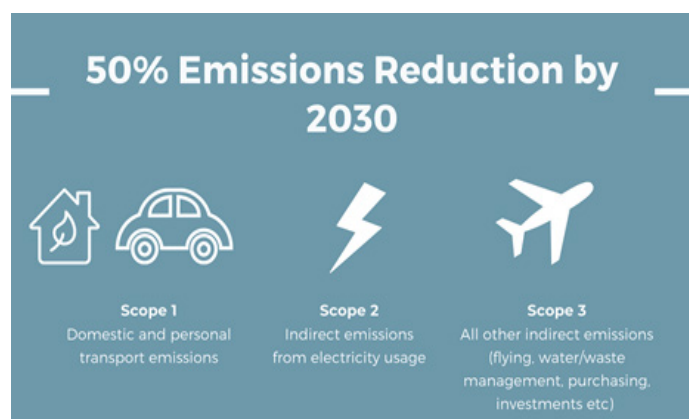
Figure 1: Caring for our Common Home Commitments

Reduction of emissions by 50% by 2030 with the aim to be net-zero by 2050



The Jesuit Province commits to an absolute reduction in emissions, which a vital component of Caring for our Common Home. The concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere is so dangerously high that every tonne that is not emitted matters. With that in mind, we need to take targeted action which will deliver overall emissions reductions of 50% by 2030 including:

- reductions of emissions from heating, cooking, and domestic services;
- reductions of emissions related to private transport;
- reduce our electricity usage and decarbonising our electricity supply;
- reductions of emissions associated with purchasing, food, internet usage and the other day-to-day aspects of our life and work.



Significantly reduce waste

Food waste is a significant global issue.



“We know that approximately a third of all food produced is discarded, and ‘whenever food is thrown out it is as if it were stolen from the table of the poor’” (LS50).

Food waste is not just an inequality issue but it is also one of the largest contributors to global climate breakdown. Growing, processing, and transporting food uses significant resources. If food is wasted, these resources are wasted too. In Ireland, we are generating over one million tonnes of food waste each year. Food that is directed to landfill also causes significant problems as it breaks down, producing methane, a potent greenhouse gas, in the process. The process of growing and producing food also has a significant impact on biodiversity and water quality.

Tackling food waste is therefore not just a social justice issue but also one of the most effective ways to reduce emissions, improve water quality and improve biodiversity.

Taking this into account the Jesuit Province commits to:

- Halve food waste by 2030;
- Eliminate entirely food waste going to landfill;
- Increase proportion of organic waste (including food, flowers, and garden waste) composted on site.

The linear economy with the ‘take, make, use, dispose’ model generates a lot of waste.

“In many parts of the planet, the elderly lament that once beautiful landscapes are now covered with rubbish.... These problems are closely linked to a throwaway culture which affects the excluded just as it quickly reduces things to rubbish.” (LS21/22)

Consigning material to the landfill means that all of the resources and energy that went into making that material is also wasted. Reducing the amount of materials we consume, reusing what we have, and recycling where possible lessens not only the burden of waste ending up in landfill but also curtails the associated emissions and resources needed to consume such products. Consequently, we aim to:

- Significantly reduce single use packaging/items by 2030 (disposable cups, plates, cutlery, plastic bottle use, food packaging);
- Reduce the amount of material being sent to landfill by 30% by 2030.

Assess the alignment of our investments and purchases with our mission



The work we do as a Province is funded partly by our investments. The importance of responsible investments cannot be overstated. However, considering the investment power that the Province has, there is growing recognition that aligning the investments held to the Province's values can be an extension, and amplification, of its work. As a Province, we commit to examining the different investment paths that may align with our faith.

Similarly, the purchases we make as a Province should be in line with the values we aspire to embody in our work. There is a:

“great need for a sense of social responsibility on the part of consumers. ‘Purchasing is always a moral – and not simply economic – act’” (LS206).



Aligning Provincial investment strategies can be a flexible process composed of a number of different approaches based on particular needs:

- Consciously investing in line with stated values;
- Taking an active role in corporate direction as shareholders;
- Divestment from extremely polluting firms or companies that violate human rights;
- Communicating regularly about progress.

Significantly improve biodiversity in the lands controlled by the Jesuit Province



We are currently at the beginning of the 6th Mass Extinction – the first caused by a species – and are very much in a biodiversity crisis. Creatures are going extinct at a rate between 100 to 1000 times faster than one would expect based on natural background extinction rates.

“The earth’s resources are also being plundered because of short-sighted approaches to the economy, commerce and production. The loss of forests and woodlands entails the loss of species which may constitute extremely important resources in the future... It is not enough, however, to think of different species merely as potential ‘resources’ to be exploited, while overlooking the fact that they have value in themselves.” (LS 32/33)

This crisis demands a meaningful and widespread response. In the Jesuit Province, we commit to:

- Increase the amount of area dedicated to biodiversity within the Province, including areas of organic food production;
- Reduce the practices that are harmful to biodiversity including reducing toxic chemical use, use of peat compost and certain ground maintenance;
- Aim to purchase and consume food which has the least detrimental impact on biodiversity.

Integrate preserving and promoting Gaeilge into Caring for our Common Home



The continued commitment of the Province to the Irish language, through An Timire and through Irish education

in Jesuit schools, could integrate with our burgeoning environmental efforts. As a Province we commit to explore the interconnections which exist between ecology and the Irish language and promote the increased proliferation of the Irish language within the Province. Finding new words for the world we inhabit gives us a new perspective. Rediscovering the old words that were built up by generations in dialogue with the island we inhabit promises to doubly do so.

Foundations

In laying out these commitments, we recognise that great work and reflection is already in process in each of these areas in different ways throughout the Province. This is to be expected, because our work proceeds in dialogue with the diverse and rich voices of the Christian tradition, which offers so many ways into thinking creatively about caring for the home we have been gifted. Specifically, in developing and implementing this Caring for our Common Home policy, the Irish Jesuit Province is guided by the following foundations:

Laudato Si

Through the publication of *Laudato Si'* in 2015, Pope Francis called each and every one of us to Care for our Common Home. This urgent appeal includes the entire human family, but has specific significance for the global Catholic family. *Laudato Si'* shows us how, as Christians, we have:

“ample motivation to care for nature and for the most vulnerable of their brothers and sisters. If the simple fact of being human moves people to care for the environment of which they are a part, Christians in their turn ‘realize that their responsibility within creation, and their duty towards nature and the Creator, are an essential part of their faith’” (LS64).

Universal Apostolic Preferences

The Universal Apostolic Preferences are the fruit of a process of discernment lasting almost two years. The Preferences give a horizon, a point of reference, to the whole Society of Jesus. The Preferences are four areas vital for our world today, which the Society of Jesus will pay special attention to across this decade. The 4th UAP is Caring for Common Home. Consequently, the entire global Jesuit community is committed to this path of ecological conversion. This UAP, while distinguishable from other issues, is deeply interconnected with the others: ‘Showing the way to God’, ‘Walking with the excluded’, and ‘Journeying with youth’. Caring for our

Common Home must weave into every aspect of our lives if we are to experience an ecological conversion.

Part of the Strategic Plan

Over the course of 2020 and 2021, a Province Apostolic Plan was developed to animate the work of the Province to 2026. This comprehensive plan maps out key actions that should be taken across the Province to ensure the work within the Province remains meaningful and sustainable. The importance of the 4th UAP, Caring for our Common Home, is highlighted within this plan with the development of this policy and the appropriate implementation actions outlined:

“JCFJ will lead the Province’s approach to ecological justice in conducting a Province wide ecology audit, and a co-creative process to develop a Province ecology policy and practice rooted in Ignatian spirituality and theological reflection. In tandem we will continue to develop our grassroots ecology work through our schools, Eco-Congregation in our parish and the ACRE project in Northern Ireland. We will also seek to collaborate with those writing on the spirituality of ecology.”

International and national law and obligations

1. The Paris Agreement is a legally binding international treaty on climate breakdown. It was adopted by 196 Parties, including Ireland, at COP21 in Paris, on 12 December 2015 and entered into force on 4 November 2016. Its goal is to limit global warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius, preferably to 1.5, compared to pre-industrial levels. To achieve this long-term temperature goal, countries aim to reach a global-peak of greenhouse gas emissions as soon as possible to achieve a climate neutral world by mid-century. Every facet of society is needed to contribute to this goal if it is to succeed.
2. The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 was signed into law in July 2021. This Bill commits Ireland to achieve Net-zero by 2050, with an interim target of a 51% reduction by 2030. This equates to a 7% reduction in emissions annually. This ambitious goal will inevitably lead to policies and regulations in Ireland, aiming to reduce emissions, which will impact the Jesuit Province. Emissions from food cultivation, transport, energy production, and our built environment will need to be reduced and this is something the Province will need to face in the coming years.

Governance and Implementation

The Province Operational Committee, who will coordinate the implementation of the Province Strategic Plan, will have ultimate oversight of the implementation of the Caring for our Common Home Policy.

The Committee will establish a Caring for our Common Home working group which will have responsibility to develop and drive the implementation Strategies and Plans, including an initial audit. The working group will draw upon and engage with the pre-existing interest groups in the development and implementation of these plans.

The composition of the group will reflect a wide range of skills and responsibilities within the Jesuit Province. External members, who have experience in religious ecological projects will also be invited to join this group. This group will thus be fully representative and capable of establishing a Province-wide culture of creation care.

The working group will be supplemented by the establishment of support groups, which will offer space for peer-to-peer learning and support in different aspects of policy implementation e.g. land management for biodiversity.

Both the implementation plans and the policy document will undergo periodic review and refinement to ensure that higher ambition can be accommodated and that implementation is flexible. Implementation plans will be reviewed annually with the Caring for our Common Home policy document reviewed every three years.

Implementation of this policy will be guided by the Laudato Si' Goals and in conjunction with the Laudato Si' Platform and we will continue to interact with the Global Catholic Climate Movement, the Laudato Si' Research Institute at Campion Hall, ECO-Jesuit, and other partners to ensure that we are drawing on the best practice and most creative responses:

1. Response to the cry of the earth
2. Response to the cry of the poor
3. Ecological economics
4. Adaption of simple lifestyles
5. Ecological education
6. Ecological spirituality
7. Community engagement and participatory action

DELIVERING THE CARING FOR OUR COMMON HOME POLICY

Irish Jesuit Province

