St Mary's University Twickenham London

Understanding Catholic parishioners' responses to the ecological crisis

Report prepared by the Guardians of Creation Project for the Catholic Church in the UK

Laudato Si' Research Institute

Diocese of Salford

The Ecological Conversion Group

The Guardians of Creation Project

This document is one of five reports in a suite of guidance and analysis issued by the Guardians of Creation Project for developing transformational responses to the ecological crisis in Catholic dioceses. Each of the five reports deals with a separate element of the diocesan response to the ecological crisis.

The first report, ***Guidance on developing strategy for decarbonising Catholic diocesan building stocks***, gives advice on formulating and implementing a strategy in the diocese for reducing the carbon footprint of the diocese's buildings.

The second report, ***Guidance on Catholic diocesan carbon accounting***, gives advice on measuring, understanding, and reporting the diocese's carbon footprint.

The third report, ***Developing whole-school approaches to sustainability in Catholic education***, gives advice on formulating and implementing school-level and diocese-level strategies for responding to the ecological crisis through Catholic education.

The fourth report, ***Educating and empowering Laudato Si' Champions in Catholic education***, offers a template approach to delivering teaching and learning around Catholic responses to the ecological crisis in secondary schools.

The fifth report, ***Understanding Catholic parishioners' responses to the ecological crisis***, investigates the experiences, beliefs, and behaviours of Catholic parishioners in their own responses to the ecological crisis.

The Guardians of Creation project has been developed collaboratively with the Diocese of Salford as a pilot study for England and Wales. The principal participating institutions are the Diocese of Salford, St Mary's University, and the Laudato Si' Research Institute at Campion Hall, University of Oxford.

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Report version 1 | March 2023

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1. Introduction

1.1 Executive summary

To be effective, institutional responses to the climate crisis must take into consideration the environmental attitudes of its members. This is also true in the case of the Catholic Church where the success of sustainable strategies on the diocesan level depends to a large extent on the willingness of parishioners to align their behaviour with and to take ownership of Catholic ecological teaching. It is, therefore, crucial for Church authorities responsible for implementing environmental action plans to understand the perceived barriers to ecological behavioural change found among parishioners, and to devise ways of supporting sustainable lifestyles among Catholics.

This report contributes to a better understanding of parishioners' environmental attitudes by offering a wide-ranging summary of the barriers to, as well as conditions and effects of ecological behavioural change identified by UK Catholics. In addition, this report makes data-driven recommendations for how the Catholic Church can effectively support the ecological conversion of her members. As such, the report constitutes a valuable resource for the diocesan curia – we hope that our findings will illuminate, inspire and inform aspects of diocesan environmental strategies.

We are also certain that this report will be of interest to Catholic organisations, networks, and groups, as well as to individual parishioners concerned with effective environmental action in the context of their Church. To help parishioners become more engaged, we conclude this report with an overview of ecological activities which can be taken on a parish level.

1.2 Data

Source of data	Number of participants	Characteristics of participants	Date
Survey – Salford Diocese	254	152 females; 102 males. Mean age: 45-54.	Spring 2021
Two deanery workshops	31	Cross section of lay parishioners and clergy.	Autumn / Winter 2022 One workshop duration: 4h
Two roundtable discussions	25	Academics, behavioural change experts, members of faith-based and secular ecological organisations.	Autumn 2022 One roundtable average duration: 1h 45min

All the participant contributions included in this report have been anonymised.

1.2.1 Survey

In the spring of 2021, the Diocese of Salford distributed a questionnaire to its parishioners with the aim of understanding their beliefs and behaviour concerning the ecological environment, and to assess which policies to implement. The Salford sample is constituted by 254 participants (152 females, 102 males; mean range age 45-54 years). The great majority of these participants are white (85% of all participants, rising to 93% of those who did not leave the ethnicity question blank), with a very limited representativeness of other ethnic groups and minorities. The vast majority declare concern or high concern about the climate and ecological crisis. In addition, many declare a very good level of comprehension of ecological issues in a Catholic context by showing high or very high consideration of the importance of caring for the environment in the Catholic faith and as part of their religious practice.

Respondents were asked to identify practical actions and behaviours in their everyday life in relation to environmental protection. There were two questions about whether parishioners thought that the diocese should take the lead, specifically in relation to other parts of society and in the community. Finally, participants were asked to identify initiatives, actions, or proposals of interest to them in relation to the care of the environment.

1.2.2 Two deanery workshops

In the Autumn and Winter of 2022, we recorded two deanery workshops which were run by The Ecological Conversion Group as part of their Journey to 2030 project. The aims of the workshops were to introduce the tenets of integral ecology and to provide participants with tools to carry out ecological activities in their parishes. The workshops were advertised by deaneries. [1]

The workshops consisted of an exercise 'Let us Dream' which required participants to work in groups to imagine, discuss, and draw a positive vision of their future community. In addition, participants were encouraged to reflect on the existing ecological and social activities in their parishes, to identify any areas for future developments, based on the needs of people and the planet, locally and globally, and to suggest possible ways of collaborating with other parishes across the deanery.

Each workshop lasted around 4 hours. Overall, 31 people attended; the attendees included lay members of the parish, as well as priests and sisters. The groups were varied in terms of both gender and age, although the participants were predominantly middle-aged or older.

1.2.3 Two roundtable discussions

In the Autumn of 2022, we organised two roundtable discussions. Participants we recommended on the strength of their expertise in behavioural change and/or ecological organisations, mostly faith-based but also secular. There was an audience present, recruited from ecologically active members of the Church, who were informed that they will have a chance to ask questions at the end of the roundtable.

Overall, 25 people attended. The average duration of one roundtable was 1 hour 45 minutes.

The discussion was semi-structured, and it centred on the relationship between behavioural change and habit. We shared the main question as well as several possible sub-questions for discussion in advance of the session.

The main question:
What are the potential factors which aid and/or disturb the formation of habits, leading to more sustainable lifestyles?

Sub-questions:
What language can effectively help/prevent the formation of habits?
What is the role of others in habituation?
Are emotions part of our habitual behaviour?
What is the relationship between habit and virtue?
What resources are needed to support/disturb habituation?
How is habit structured by time and space?

It is noteworthy that although participants joined the roundtable with pre-assigned roles of "expert" and "audience member," which corresponded to a designated character of and time for contribution (the experts were to share their thoughts for most of the session; the audience was to ask questions at the end of the session), during the first roundtable discussion, it was an audience member who decided to answer the opening question from the host. As a result, the distinction between "experts" and "audience members" collapsed, creating a more *democratic* discussion where everyone shared their thoughts during the time initially assigned to "experts." In consequence, we decided to abandon the distinction between "experts" and "audience members" during the second roundtable.

1 For more information on The Ecological Conversion Group and the Journey to 2030 project see: https://theecg.org/ & https://journeyto2030.org/

1.3 Methodology and theoretical approach

1.3.1 Synodality as a method

Throughout our research, we were guided by the main tenets of synodality.

We can summarise our methodological approach by relating it to "synodality as the form, the style, and the structure of the Church" listed in the *Preparatory Document* published by the Synod of Bishops to support the Synodal Process.

First, we offered the space for members of the Church "to express themselves and to be heard," "recognising and appreciating the wealth and the variety of the gifts and charisms that the Spirit liberally bestows for the good of the community and the benefit of the entire human family."

Second, we attempted to explore "participatory ways of exercising responsibility… in the effort to build a more beautiful and habitable world." This included "examining how responsibility and power are lived in the Church as well as the structures by which they are managed."

Thirdly, since this report examines the motivations, perceived difficulties, and conditions for behavioural change towards more sustainable lifestyles among UK Catholics, it accredits "the Christian community as a credible subject and reliable partner in paths of social dialogue." It also contributes to the regeneration of the relationship between the Church and "civil society organisations, popular movements, etc.," concerned with ecological behavioural change.

Lastly, this report aims to "foster the appreciation and appropriation of the fruits of… synodal experiences" on the "regional, national, and local levels." [2]

1.3.2 Laudato Si' as a lens

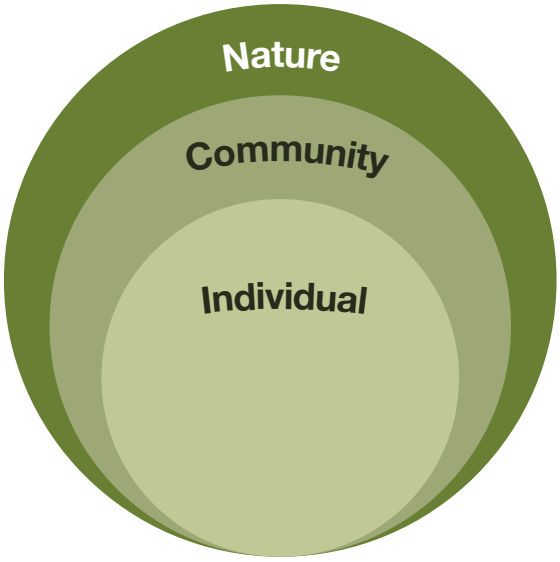
Pope Francis emphasises the importance of behaviour throughout the encyclical. Firstly, the continuity between Pope Francis's teachings and the teaching of his predecessors is affirmed in terms of our behaviour towards the environment: "Pope Benedict asked us to recognise that the natural environment has been gravely damaged by our irresponsible behaviour." (§6) Secondly, Pope Francis makes clear the link between vicious actions and environmental problems: "when there is a general breakdown in the exercise of a certain virtue in personal and social life, it ends up causing a number of imbalances, including environmental ones." (§224)

Importantly, *Laudato Si'* thinks of behaviour in terms of **integral ecology**, which involves "taking time… reflecting on our lifestyles and our ideals" (§225), and which situates behaviour on the intersection between **individuals, communities, and the natural world**.

2 Synod of Bishops, *Preparatory Document*, 2021, pp.3-4

"When we speak of the 'environment', what we really mean is a relationship existing between nature and the society which lives in it. Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live. We are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it. Recognising the reasons why a given area is polluted requires a study of the workings of society, its economy, its behaviour patterns, and the ways it grasps reality." (§139)

"…we cannot presume to heal our relationship with nature and the environment without healing all fundamental human relationships. Christian thought sees human beings as possessing a particular dignity above other creatures; it thus inculcates esteem for each person and respect for others." (§119)



Integral ecology offers a useful framework for analysing our data. One of the significant consequences of this theoretical approach is turning away from viewing ecological behaviour as a category which applies exclusively to an individual, towards a perspective which recognises the societal and environmental conditions of action. This shift echoes recommendations found in recent psychological literature.[3]

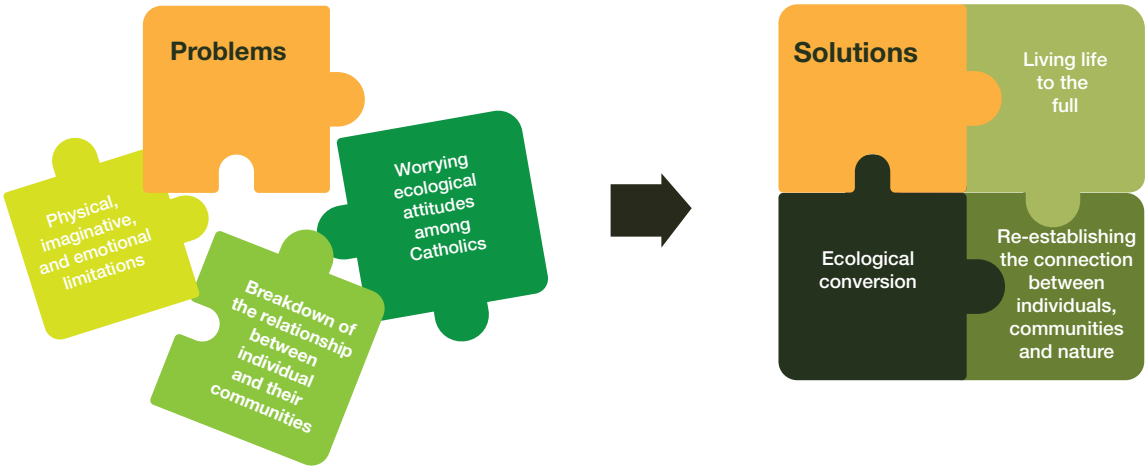
Framework:

Behaviour
Integral ecology
Individuals, communities, the natural environment

3 Lorraine Whitmarsh, Wouter Poortinga, Stuart Capstick, "Behaviour change to address climate change," *Current Opinion in Psychology*, vol. 42, 2021

1.4 Overview of findings

Laudato Si' offers two concepts which aided our understanding of problems and solutions found in our data. **The technocratic paradigm** (a set of beliefs and practices underlying unsustainable lifestyles), helps us to identify the problems which emerge from our data, such as the perceived **physical, imaginative, and emotional limitations; breakdown of relations between individuals and their communities** (including family and parish), **and worrying ecological attitudes among members of the Church.**



Ecological conversion, which in our data has been understood as involving **the re-establishment of the link between individuals, community, and nature**, and the sense of "**living life to the full**," can be seen as offering the initial **solutions** to the issues generated by the question of sustainable behaviour in the context of the Church.

1.4.1 Problems

1.4.1.1 Physical, imaginative, and emotional limitations

Laudato Si' identifies the "technocratic paradigm" as responsible for the reproduction of our unsustainable lifestyles.

Pope Francis makes it clear that the technocratic paradigm "tends to dominate economic and political life" in the form of privileging profit over the well-being of people. (§110) Importantly, **the technocratic paradigm creates "a framework which ends up conditioning lifestyles and shaping social possibilities along the lines dictated by the interests of certain powerful groups." (§107)** Consequently, "Our capacity for making decisions, a more genuine freedom and the space for each one's alternative creativity are diminished." (§108) In the words of the theologian Carmody Grey:

> **"The technocratic paradigm refers to a distinctively modern culture of control and utilitarian manipulation of the world. It is closely connected to the 'distorted anthropocentrism' which sees the world as revolving around human need, desire and preference alone. The internal logic of the technocratic paradigm is power: the power to shape the world at will, a will which is accountable to no-one. 'Creation' is seen simply as an object for our use."** [4]

In our data, the technocratic paradigm was expressed through the various **physical, imaginative, and emotional limitations**. On the one hand, choices were seen to be limited by **costs**, while decisions were often motivated by the **easiest, most convenient option**. On the other hand, participants noted **a lack of imagination** and admitted to **going with a default reaction** which resulted in a **decreased capacity to respond** and a **diminished feeling of hope**. These feelings result in noticing the **oppressive character of the world**. The latter is viewed as "chaotic, confused, difficult," and "suffocating."

4 Carmody T.S. Grey, "Time and Measures of Success: Interpreting and Implementing *Laudato Si'," New Blackfriars*, vol. 101(1091), 2020, pp. 15-16

Physical, imaginative and emotional limitations
Costs
Choosing the easiest, most convenient option
Lack of imagination
Going with the default reaction
Decreased capacity to respond
A diminished feeling of hope
The oppressive character of the world

1.4.1.2 Disintegration of community

The focus on the relationship between individual behaviour and society, found in integral ecology, has been reflected in our data negatively, as a reported **breakdown of community structures**. Workshop participants spoke about **communities not knowing how to love each other**; a **lack of compassion** was also observed. Idealised images of community in the media were contrasted with real life where things can go "terribly wrong." A group of workshop participants questioned **if there have ever been flourishing communities**.

Breakdown of community structures
Not knowing how to love each other
Lack of compassion
Have there ever been flourishing communities?

The breakdown of community structures can be further specified in terms of **issues located on the family and parish levels**.

The participants viewed families as lacking harmony, honesty and trust, often due to outside influences. Consequently, **family members became increasingly distant** and often did not speak with each other. This lack of family cohesion was illustrated by the image of the conflict between Cain and Abel, suggesting that, in the words of one participant, "we've always been at each other's throats." People were seen as **not having the "tools" necessary to rebuild family relationships**. As one workshop participant pointed out: "The older you get the less you believe that the family will come together again."

Family
Lacking harmony, honesty and trust
Family members becoming increasingly distant
People not having the tools necessary to re-build family relationships

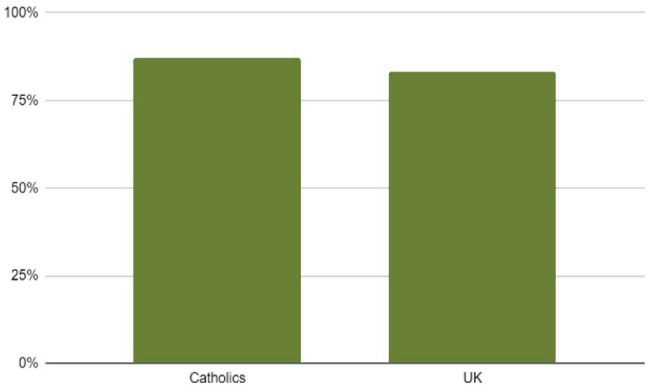
Although participants viewed community centres, monasteries, and other religions as offering optimistic microcosms of community life, this positive assessment, worryingly, did not apply to parishes. Participants report **not knowing the parish**: specifically, **being unsure about the geographical area the parish covers, and not knowing who the parishioners are**. Consequently, there is **a lack of awareness about the skills and talents** which can be found within the parish. The possible reasons for this situation have been linked to, on the one hand, **administrative changes** (e.g., merging two churches into one), and, on the other hand, a perceived **lack of time to engage with parish life**. It was noted that the latter condition results in **small groups of active parishioners – often women – taking on most of the responsibilities**.

Parish
Not knowing the parish and parishioners
Lack of time to engage with parish life

1.4.1.3 Ecological attitudes of parishioners

Integral ecology places the individual in relation to both the community and this community's relation to nature. The connection between these three elements can be found in the study of the environmental attitudes of Catholic parishioners. Taking as the sample 254 parishioners in Salford diocese, we found that 87% of respondents were "very concerned" or "quite concerned" about the climate and ecological crisis. This is 4% higher than the UK average of 83%.[5]

Very concerned and quite concerned



However, as the findings suggest, the above-the-average concern with the environmental crisis is characterised by three problematic attitudes:

1. **Ecologically active participants decouple private faith and organised religious practice.**
2. **Parishioners who believe that the diocese should take a lead in society were less likely to engage in ecological activities.**
3. **Those in positions of authority displayed fewer environmental behaviours.**

5 BEIS, *Public Attitudes Tracker: Net Zero and Climate Change Summer 2022, UK*

1.4.1.3.1 Decoupling of private faith and organised religious practice

The number of ecological activities that parishioners perform is not affected by their belief in the importance of care for the environment in the Catholic faith. It was the reported importance of care for the environment in *one's own faith* that was a significant determinant of parishioners' ecological action. In other words, faith matters to the ecological behaviour of ecologically engaged Catholics, but not necessarily the Catholicity of their faith. We interpret that there may be a kind of decoupling occurring in the experience of participants, where faith is somehow being separated into private and institutional categories vis-a-vis ecological action and attitudes.

The difference between one's faith motivating action, and the institutional religious practices can be captured by two categories: "*fides quae creditor*," or faith which is believed, and "*fides qua creditur*," or faith by which one believes. While the first type of faith refers to a belief in the Catholic doctrine, the second one names the personal experience of faith. **While the difference between these two relations to one's personal faith and to the Church doctrine tracks the lived experience of Catholics, a separation between these relations** (where the Church doctrine plays little to no role in motivating ecological action) **may appear problematic, especially from the point of view of the Church**.

1.4.1.3.2 An expectation of leadership and ecological (in)action

Parishioners who expected the diocese to take the lead in society on environmental issues, themselves displayed a lower level of ecological activity. We can suggest two hypotheses to explain this relation. First, it is possible that whilst these parishioners are concerned about the ecological crisis, they feel that the burden of taking action should not fall on them individually, but rather that it should fall on larger actors like the dioceses, or society as a whole. Second, this relationship could reflect a high degree of trust in the diocese, and the institutions of the Church more broadly. These parishioners might perceive the diocese as better able to act on ecological issues than the parishioners themselves. **While the expectation of leadership from larger actors, and the trust in the diocese to assume a leading role, may be welcomed by the Church, when linked to the ecological inaction among parishioners, these factors can be seen as contributing to a problematic relationship between individuals and the natural world.**

1.4.1.3.3 Authority and inaction

The findings suggest that **those participants who are in positions of authority, typically teachers and priests, are less ecologically active than those who are not**. This could be because those in positions of authority feel they already fulfil their social obligations, or because priests and teachers are already involved in so many faith-based activities that they don't have the time or energy to support any further activities. These conclusions seem to echo the findings of a recent study into the ecological attitudes of clergy in a U.S. diocese, which suggest that few priests and deacons engage in substantial ecological activities.[6] These findings resonate with the perception of parishioners: our data found that **priests were the second least important source of influence on ecological issues, their mean ranking scoring above advertisements only**. Having said that, for those who do draw inspiration from their priest, the inspiration that they draw is sizeable.

1.4.1.4 A problematic narrative

Overall we can suggest the following, rather problematic narrative. Some parishioners appear to be attributing the onus of ecological action onto the diocese rather than themselves, yet, holding a more symbolically central position in the diocese is negatively correlated with ecological action. In other words, **parishioners seem to look to Catholics in authority for ecological leadership; however, those in authority seem to be unable to offer it**. We can refer to this relationship as a "stalemate."

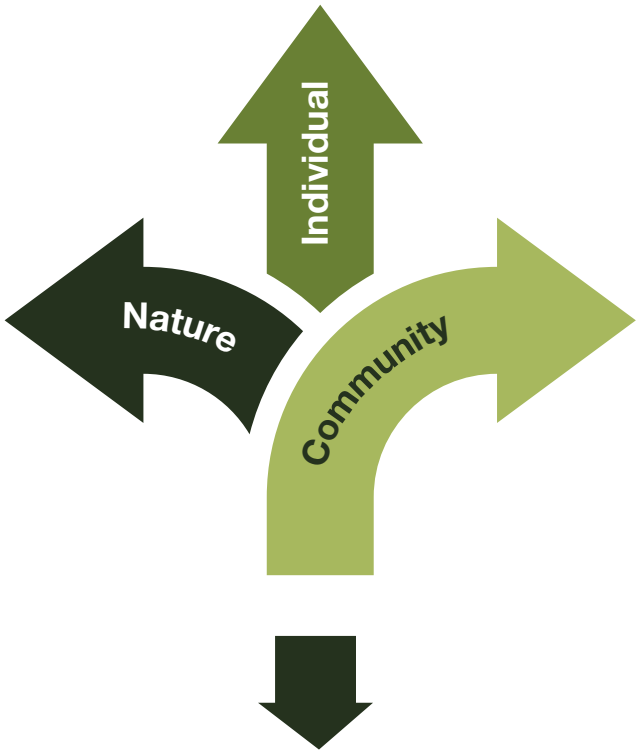
In addition, unlike the parishioner who places a greater onus on the diocese, there appears to be another kind of parishioner who may take ecological matters more into their own hands. This parishioner might take the position that **even if the institution of the Church may not motivate their ecological action, their personal experience of faith can**.

If we now situate this dynamic against the backdrop of the physical, imaginative, and emotional limitations experienced by parishioners, and the reported sense of the breakdown of community structures, we find ourselves in the following position:

On the one hand, ecologically active Catholics must be motivated by their own individual faith, because **social forms of behavioural motivation** – which could come from the family, the parish, or the local Church authorities – **are ineffective**, either because they are felt to be disintegrating, or, in the case of figures of authority, they are unable to lead by example. On the other hand, and for the same reasons, those Catholics who are inactive – either because they feel physically, imaginatively, and emotionally limited, or because they expect the diocese to take the lead – may struggle to find the right type of social support enabling them to become more ecologically motivated.

6 Dominic Wilkins, "Catholic clerical responses to climate change and Pope Francis's *Laudato Si'*." *Nature and Space*, vol. 5(1), 2022

The framework offered by integral ecology – which emphasises the interconnectedness of individuals, community, and the natural world – enables us to represent the problems we identified as **a breakdown of the links between individuals and the community** (e.g., in the case of ecologically active Catholics not motivated by their Church's teaching, and ecologically inactive Catholics expecting leadership from figures who are unable to offer it); **and individuals and the natural world** (e.g., in the case of ecologically inactive parishioners and ecologically inactive figures of authority). In the accounts of participants, this two-fold breakdown of the relationship between community and nature was described as "**a loss of experience:**" as it was pointed out, **we are missing out on the experience of reality, which also consists of being connected with others and the rest of creation**.



1.4.2 Solutions

What can be done to reconnect individuals, communities, and the natural world in a way which would motivate sustainable lifestyles? Here, *Laudato Si'* again offers a useful concept – **ecological conversion** – which encapsulates the solutions we can suggest based on our data, consisting of:

- **Overcoming limitations through an increased sense of agency.**
- **Re-forming the connection with others and nature through a realisation of the power of daily actions.**
- **Counteracting the loss of experience by "living life to the full."**

1.4.2.1 Ecological conversion

Quoting Benedict XVI, Pope Francis writes: **"'The external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast'. For this reason, the ecological crisis is also a summons to profound interior conversion."** (§217) He then expands on this point:

> **"It must be said that some committed and prayerful Christians… tend to ridicule expressions of concern for the environment. Others are passive; they choose not to change their habits and thus become inconsistent. So what they all need is an 'ecological conversion', whereby the effects of their encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them." (§217)**

The passage above clearly speaks of the breakdown of the link between the individual and the natural world, manifesting itself as ecological inaction. Importantly, Pope Francis also emphasises the social aspects of ecological conversion, i.e., the importance of re-establishing the link between the individual and the community. "The ecological conversion needed to bring about lasting change is also a community conversion." (§219) **It is individual action embedded within the community structures, which enables us to effectively care for our common home:** "In this framework, along with the importance of little everyday gestures, social love moves us to devise larger strategies to halt environmental degradation and to encourage a 'culture of care' which permeates all of society." (§231)

We can, therefore, define ecological conversion as a commitment, inspired by faith, to change our lives so as to help heal the threefold rupture caused by sin, with God, with other human beings, and with the natural world.

1.4.2.2 Agency and influence

During one of the roundtable discussions, an expert pointed out that **in our everyday life, we may exhibit more agency, and more power to influence our surroundings than we realise**. What's important is that **our actions have an impact on the choices of others** – and, conversely, **the choices of others influence our actions**.

> **"It's a matter of all of us because you as a mother, as a friend, as a colleague, as a sister, we are all choice architects. So the way we present things, the way we talk about things to the peers that we surround ourselves with – that's going to manipulate them or guide them on nudge them in a specific direction. So I think it's very important to remember it's not only the responsibility of people like me, because behavioural design is my trade. It's all of us because we do all design behaviour of others. The way I as a mother present carrot or candy to my kids – that designs their set of choices and determines how they are basically going to do in life."**

This suggests that our **daily actions have the power to both reshape and re-establish our connection with others**. This power of daily actions is echoed in *Laudato Si'*: as Pope Francis writes, "An integral ecology is also made up of simple daily gestures which break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness." (§230)

The fact that our behaviour shapes our surroundings by influencing the decisions of others enables us to harness the ecological potential of our agency: **our daily actions can be directed to the goal of re-establishing the link between communities and nature**. To do so successfully, however, our behaviour must be motivated by the desire to act virtuously.

In our data, **virtue was articulated in relation to habits**. On the one hand, **habits were seen as making us choose to act without much reflection**, often in a way which may not be conscious of the ecological effects of our actions. On the other hand, participants pointed out, virtue requires a process of **good habituation**. To achieve it, one expert suggested **developing routines by following the guidance of others, until this guidance is internalised and turned into a sense of inner purpose**. Then, this purpose, combined with skills one has learnt along the way, will enable one to "produce something very creative and very free and very beautiful." The key shift here is that **good habits are developed consciously, with a sense of meaning and purpose**, and this sense of ownership, in turn, enables us to act virtuously. Interestingly, a participant mentioned praying regularly as good habituation, which helps to solidify a virtuous frame for thinking and acting.

1.4.2.3 Living life to the full

Ecological conversion, leading to an increased sense of agency supported by good habituation towards virtuous action, has two interrelated effects. First, **it helps to overcome physical, imaginative, and emotional limitations by expanding the availability of choices and experiences**. Second, the expansion of choice and experience presupposes **a re-establishing of a link between individuals, community and nature**. Our ecological activity is both inspired by, and inspirational for others. Overall, ecological conversion makes possible "**living life to the full**" – an experience of ourselves at one with creation and our fellow creatures.

Importantly, **the notion of "fullness" of life was linked to "having enough."** This insight is, again, echoed in *Laudato Si'*:

> **"We need to take up an ancient lesson, found in different religious traditions and also in the Bible. It is the conviction that "less is more"… 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. This implies avoiding the dynamic of dominion and the mere accumulation of pleasures… Such sobriety, when lived freely and consciously, is liberating. It is not a lesser life or one lived with less intensity. On the contrary, it is a way of living life to the full." (§222-223)**

2. Ecological conversion – conditions

2.1 When the penny drops: the diversity of ecological conversions

Throughout our research, ecological conversion has been described as an "**experience**" an "**encounter**" characterised by "**facing up to the truth**," "**having our hearts broken**," and "**repenting**." One participant found parallels between ecological conversion and overcoming addiction. Interestingly, and in contrast to these rather grand terms, ecological conversion was also described in a more everyday sense as **a moment when the penny drops**. This suggests that ecological conversion can be thought of as **a transformative experience with differing degrees of intensity**.

In addition, one participant, when reflecting on their ecological journey, pointed out that ecological conversion may happen **multiple times, throughout one's life**: "I can actually think of very different moments though my life where the penny dropped in different ways… suddenly the penny dropped about plastic waste, or suddenly the penny dropped about travel."

Our data, therefore, suggest moving away from conceptualising ecological conversion as a radical, one-off event, paradigmatically illustrated by the experience of St Paul on the way to Damascus. Rather, **we should think of ecological conversion – or ecological conversions – as referring to a range of experiences, which differ in terms of their intensity and type, and which also include multiple micro-events taking place on an everyday basis**. In the words of *Laudato Si'*: "An integral ecology is also made up of simple daily gestures which break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness." (§230) **These experiences, in turn, constitute a transformative process which, accumulatively, can result in a profound change in a person.**

In Section 4 below we explore in more detail how the Catholic Church can support ecological conversion among her members.

2.2 Bringing about ecological conversions

The fact that we can speak of multiple ecological conversions taking place across one's life, suggests a need for a range of diverse conditions capable of producing penny-dropping moments. This was reflected in our data, where the required diversity of conditions fell into three categories: conditions related to personal motivation; conditions related to the community; and conditions related to communication. Effective communication, insofar as it makes possible the mutual influence of individuals and groups, could be seen as constituting the bridge connecting personal commitments and community life.

Ecological conversions: conditions

2.2.1 Personal motivation

Participants pointed out the importance of **internal, intrinsic motivation**. In the words of one expert: "your own idea is always more inspiring and motivating than somebody else's." This type of motivation **helps individuals to understand the reasons behind their actions, and the goal they aim for**. Another participant called achieving these types of personal goals "a kind of private victory."

In our data, personal motivation could be further divided into the following categories:

2.2.2 Community

A glance at the above table demonstrates that **personal motivation is firmly situated within the context of community** – this is most obvious in the cases of "duty to others" and "work," however, one's values, interests, and financial incentives also involve a reference to one's community, even if only minimally.

As our data reveals, the **community is seen to have the power to support effective behavioural change in an individual**. Others can **motivate us by sharing our commitment to change, acting as role models, generating a sense of purpose through shared activities, and offering inspirational visions of the future**.

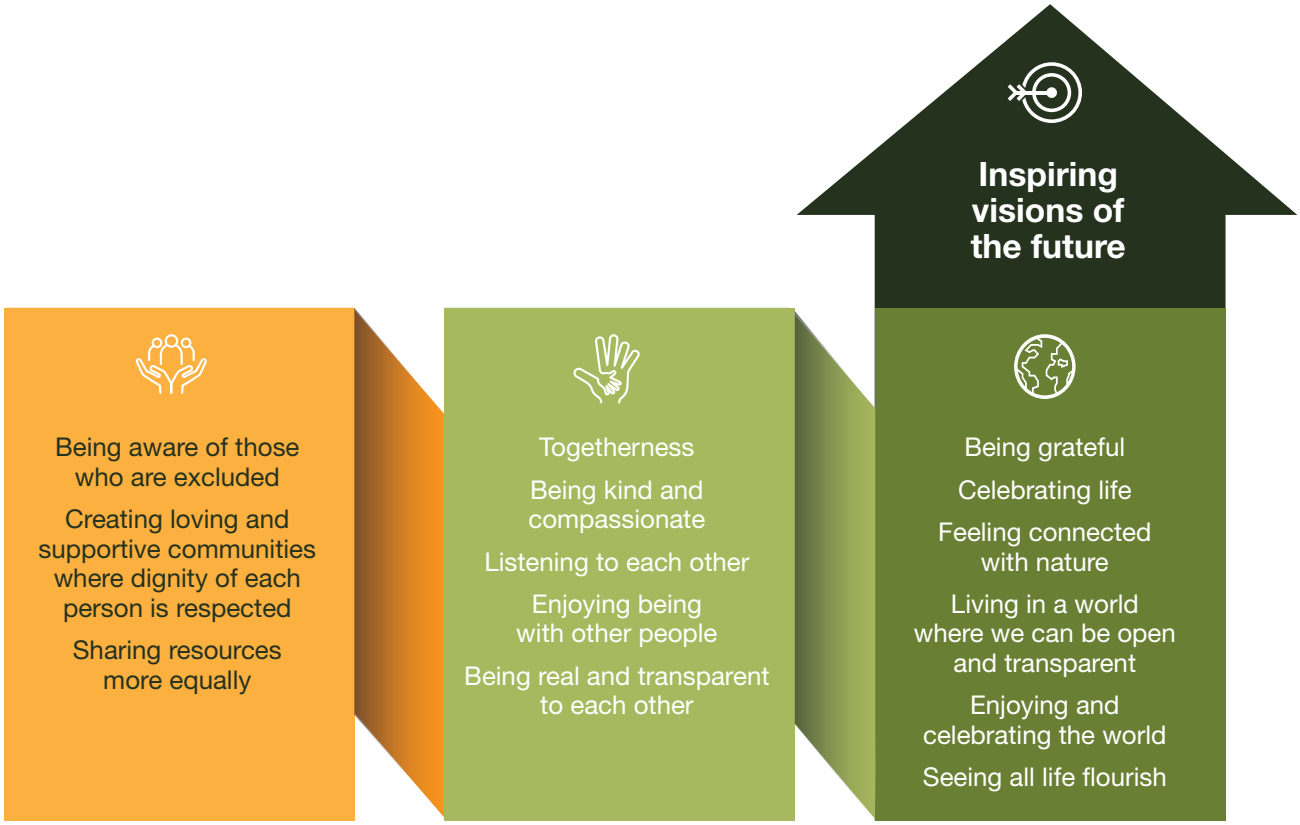
The role of others in supporting individual behavioural change
Sharing motivation and commitment to change
Acting as role models
Generating a sense of purpose through shared activities
Offering inspirational visions of the future

As one participant noted, loving communities can help people overcome addiction. Another participant made a similar observation: "you know what's the best way to stop smoking? Find your best friend, who also wants to stop smoking and promise each other that you'll stop smoking." We can suggest a similar impact of our peers in the context of ecological behavioural change. **The loving support of others, combined with a commitment to change shared between individuals, can help us to remain motivated, and to turn our new ecological behaviour into a virtuous habit.**

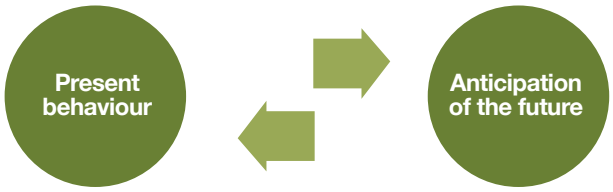
Our data also shows the importance of role models. One expert noted that households switching to renewable energy are often inspired by their neighbours. Other participants observed that more "distant" figures could also act as effective role models in terms of ecological behavioural, e.g., King Charles III, or St Francis of Assisi. This suggests that **role models can be found both in an immediate community, as well as in national and historical communities**. (For a table summarising the sources of influence on parishioners' ecological views, see section 4.3 below).

As one participant observed, communities also offer us a sense of purpose through shared activities. We can, therefore, suggest that **engaging in collective activities enables us to find, clarify, or solidify our inner motivation for behavioural change**. (We list possible ecological activities in the final section of this report). Importantly, **our communities can generate inspiring visions of the future, which can further contribute to the purposefulness of our actions by offering a long-term sense of direction**.

In our data, **the positive visions of the future consisted of social and natural elements** and thus could be read as answers to community and nature-related problems identified in the previous section. We can note recurring references to enjoyment/ celebrations, suggesting that an **inspiring future cannot be separated from the feeling of joy**.



It is noteworthy that participants enacted aspects of the positive vision of the future community during their workshop activity (they enquired about the health of family members of their fellow participants, and discussed the difficult situation of other members of their wider community), as if beginning – or continuing – to instantiate their hopeful ideas about the future built around listening and compassion already in their present situation. This event, in turn, suggests that, in addition to our present situation motivating particular ideas about the desired future, **the anticipation of the future can have a direct impact on present behaviour**. This observation is particularly relevant in the context of sustainability: a clear vision of a sustainable future, where both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor are responded to, can have a direct influence on the type of ecological actions we take in the present.



2.2.3 Communication

What became clear in our data is that **effective communication is context specific**. In the words of one expert "there is no one, universal way of communicating sustainability, climate change…and how to change habits in that regard." **It is therefore paramount to understand our audience** – whether it's a community or an individual. As one participant put it, the point is to inspire a feeling in our addresses "that they can take action that makes sense to them."

Therefore communication, to successfully appeal to the specific context of the audience, should take different forms and draw on a range of rhetorical resources.
This was reflected in our workshops and roundtables, where participants presented their ideas by incorporating – both deliberately and spontaneously – diverse ways of communicating into their spoken contributions.

Church members concerned with communicating effectively can use the following table, and the more detailed exploration of each category below, as guidance:

Forms of communication	Rhetorical resources
Speech	Appealing to values
Writing	Appealing to emotions
Narratives	Using examples and analogies
Images	Drawing on tradition
Symbols	Treating others with dignity
Statistics and matter-of-fact communication	Bridging the political divide
"Gamification"	

2.3.3.1 Forms of communication

Throughout our sessions, participants recognised **the importance of verbal narratives. Stories and storytelling were viewed as an effective way of creating engagement** – as one participant observed, "we are still a storytelling human race." Furthermore, **telling stories was seen as creating intergenerational conversations**.

Some participants prepared visual aids to illustrate their points during our sessions. This was unprompted, and it attested to the felt need to supplement verbal communication about ecology with images. The importance of visual aids was also explicitly extrapolated beyond the context of our sessions: **images were recognised as useful in influencing ecological choices and communicating environmental initiatives**. One expert discussed using **visual triggers**, which could help people make more sustainable choices by making ecological options more aesthetically appealing. Another participant mentioned the inspirational effects of seeing **satellite images** of land before and after reforestation – the images provided a **visual narrative**, which told a hopeful story of natural regeneration.

One of the exercises during the workshops included drawing a future community. We found that **participants frequently resorted to symbols, which enabled them to figuratively represent more abstract ideas**. Often, natural, religious, and social imageries were intertwined. For example, to represent recycling and regeneration – a process of coming back to life – participants drew an empty grave and a cross on both sides of a natural landscape. Participants also relied on natural images without an explicit religious connotation. For instance, one group drew a moon casting a shadow on an otherwise luminous community, which represented those excluded from society.

Matter-of-fact communication – including statistics – was also recognised as effective in the context of sustainability.
One expert recalled being told by a friend: "you are responsible for disposing of everything that comes into your house." She then commented: "it was so simple and factual… For me, that really stuck." Another expert discussed how statistics about the uneven exposure of certain groups to the dangers of natural disasters generated a profound conversation among young people. The significance of statistics was also recognised on an institutional level. As one expert noted regarding the role of matter-of-fact communication in his institution, "size-based targets" and "science-based analysis" result in "a very clear picture… and that picture is really helpful psychologically." It should be noted that matter-of-fact and statistical communication were applauded by invited experts, which may indicate a certain bias – the experts were more likely to operate with statistics in their everyday work. However, the examples provided – ranging from a conversation with a friend, through discussion with young people, to institutional communication – suggest a wide application of matter-of-fact climate communication.

Interestingly, our data reveal that **environmentally-oriented games or competitions can also function as successful means of communication**. As it was observed, the effect of the "gamification" of climate communication is that sustainable choices become "fun," while generating community involvement. For example, one expert spoke of a competition where individuals score goals for their teams by doing ecological actions. A game like this has two results: firstly, it offers the competitors an opportunity to think creatively about the array of ecological activities available to them; and secondly, it provides an additional source of motivation – the desire to win the competition – for carrying out these actions. Although "gamification" of communication can be seen as the opposite of its matter-of-fact counterpart, one expert noted how statistics can also be turned into a game: making a choice based on numbers can be compared to a "sudoku" – it becomes a "kind of a game" where one tries to, for instance, adjust percentages of emissions across one's institutions to meet a sustainable goal.

2.3.3.2 Rhetorical resources

Participants recognised **the effectiveness of appealing to the audience's values**. Values were seen by one participant as "moving the heart" more successfully than facts or admonitions. This is because, as the participant put it, "value is what you hold dear and what you cherish" – consequently, an appeal to value can provide a powerful source of motivation for environmental action. **Stirring emotions in the audience was also viewed as a significant aspect of ecological communication.** Participants recognised the significance of joy, which corresponds to a) our earlier observation regarding the importance of this affect for inspiring visions of the future, and b) the appeal of "gamification." One participant noted that anxiety may also be a useful feeling "because it tells us that there's something wrong." However, he also emphasised that "anxiety itself becomes a problem when there is no useful outlet for it."

Throughout our sessions, **participants employed examples and analogies to better understand the question of sustainability**. Participants discussed the environmental impact of everyday activities like daily showers or going to the gym with friends, as well as trying veganism in January as part of the Veganuary campaign. It is noteworthy that **many of the analogies used were extremely negative**. A participant suggested **parallels between the addiction to drugs and alcohol on the one hand and reliance on fossil fuels on the other**. An expert brought up the example of energy companies' policies implemented in response to the power outages caused by the **2022 Fukushima earthquake**. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the most common analogy was the **COVID-19 pandemic**, which revealed the possibility of a radical societal change motivated by the imminent threat; the priority of some actions over work (e.g., it was possible to leave work to get vaccinated); and the improved air quality.

While it is understandable why participants may note resonances between, on the one hand, addiction, natural disasters, and the experience of the pandemic, and, on the other hand, the ecological crisis, it can be suggested that **the choice of analogies indicates a dominance of negative over positive assessments of the current situation**. This was also observed by a participant who reported a perceived resistance in the diocese to sharing positive stories: "it's like pulling teeth… huge apathy, anger and a desire not to communicate – except if it's negative." **The predominance of negative narratives, in turn, confirms the need for positive and joyful visions of the future highlighted above, capable of counteracting the catastrophic evaluation of today's environmental problems.**

Participants emphasised the wealth of the Catholic tradition, portraying it as a pre-existing resource of use in confronting the ecological crisis. Interestingly, two interpretations of the tradition emerged. On the first reading, suggested by an expert, "Catholic tradition is essentially agrarian" – the Bible was written in and for an agrarian society, and various movements in the history of Catholicism, such as the Franciscans, lived "close to the land." The agrarian character of the Catholic tradition can inform contemporary discussions related, for example, to sustainable food production. On the second reading, proposed by a participant, "the Catholic model has actually been an urban and immigrant one." The participant pointed out how poor and immigrant Catholic communities would come together to build schools and churches – attesting to the power of community action in an urban setting. **These two interpretations of the tradition – as agrarian and urban – shouldn't be thought of as mutually exclusive; rather, they identify two aspects of the history of Catholicism which, when situated in the context of climate communication, can provide a helpful resource for engaging with rural and urban themes and audiences.**

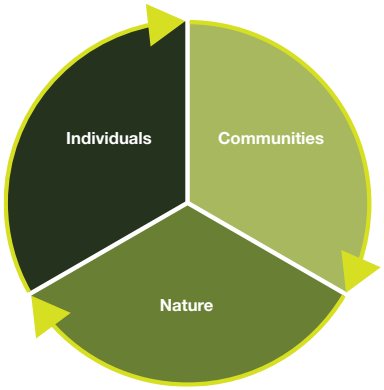
One participant suggested that the language "used by progressive activists is actually highly alienating to the majority of the population." One of the problematic aspects of the language of environmental activism is that it seems "universally middle class" – this created "a big class issue." The solution was seen to consist of **treating those with "bad habits" as people with dignity and bridging the political divide between progressives and conservatives who care about climate issues**.

3. The effects of ecological conversion

Our data identify three interrelated effects of ecological conversion:

3.1 Discerning connections

Increased consciousness of environmental issues was linked to a realisation that one isn't capable of enacting change on one's own. In other words, **the awareness of the dangers related to the loss of connection with nature** was coupled with a **renewed appreciation of the importance of community and collective action**. In short, ecological conversion enables us to discern the **interconnection between individuals, communities, and the natural world**.



3.2 Taking ownership of one's context

The awareness of connections between individuals, communities, and nature may offer a general framework for ecological behaviour. However, **for environmental activities to get off the ground, they must reflect the local context and align with the ideas, values and goals of individuals and the community they are part of**. As one expert put it, "you know your context. You know your reality… you are the expert in your life and in your community life." Or, in the words of *Laudato Si'*: "Today, however, we have to realise that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach." (§49)

Taking ownership of one's context requires two types of engagement:

Understanding locally available skills, talents, and knowledge
Getting to know one's community to identify people's talents and knowledge
Reflecting on one's own skill set and its usefulness for a given environmental project

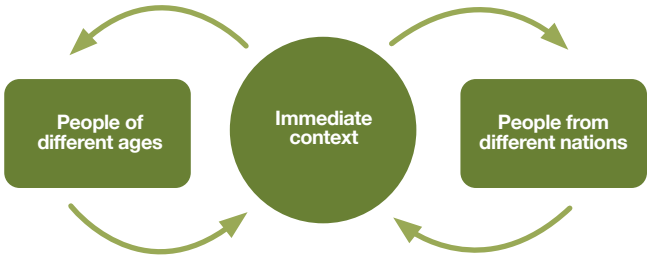
Recognising the importance of place and belonging
Understanding the character of our surroundings, including access to nature
Getting to know local cultures

3.2.1 Spaces for dialogue

One way to combine these two categories is by creating what one expert called "**spaces for dialogue**". Firstly, insofar as such spaces centre on *dialogue*, they enable listening, self-expression, and communication – with participants' emphasis firmly placed on listening. Secondly, insofar as these are spaces, they aim to bring together the local community by offering a spatial setting – a particular place (e.g., an appropriate room in a building belonging to a parish) in which ideas can be exchanged and relationships formed.

3.2.2 International and intergenerational perspectives

Although "spaces for dialogue" are reflective of a local community, they should be informed by **an international outlook** and an **intergenerational perspective**. Assuming these points of view have two effects. Firstly, **they enable us to transcend our immediate context** by revealing the interconnection between our community "here and now" and communities that are separated from us both spatially (in the case of other nations) and temporally (in the case of other generations). Secondly, **they encourage us to include people of other nationalities and different ages within our immediate context** – thus avoiding the dangers of parochialism. These conclusions echo the insights found in *Laudato Si'*: "Inequity affects not only individuals but entire countries; it compels us to consider an ethics of international relations." (§51) "The notion of the common good also extends to future generations… We can no longer speak of sustainable development apart from intergenerational solidarity." (§159)



As one participant pointed out, to generate optimism and provide inspiration for local action, **it is important to find out about successful environmental initiatives across the world; as well as to learn from different nationalities and cultures which often make up parishes**.

Engaging with young people was seen as a priority throughout our data. Young people were seen as influential agents of change (as one participant observed, children often encourage family members to try new things), **whose possible future was directly linked to the effects of the environmental crisis, and the actions of adults**. One participant suggested that "the most important thing we can do is to give our youngsters both hope and good habits." To do so, we can:

- encourage young people to pursue green careers
- educate and inspire young people through sustainable art
- provide young people with a hands-on experience of nature
- attract young people to parishes and engage with them after confirmation

It was also noted that older generations shouldn't think of social media as the only way to reach young people.

3.2.3 Climate activism

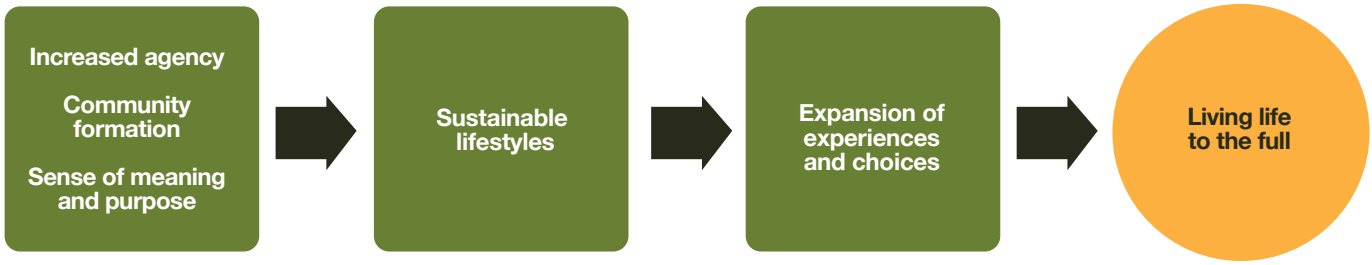
Taking ownership of one's context can result in effective climate activism. As our data shows, understanding the needs of one's community can motivate proposing, participating in, and coordinating volunteering programmes. Furthermore, since local initiatives often benefit from the support of other like-minded groups, one can become engaged with regional social action networks and/or coordinate activities on a deanery level. Groups understanding the local context can also successfully lobby local and national authorities. As Pope Francis observes: "Society is also enriched by a countless array of organisations which work to promote the common good and to defend the environment, whether natural or urban… These community actions, when they express self-giving love, can also become intense spiritual experiences." (§232)

3.3 Living life to the full

Ecological conversion, and the concomitant discerning of connection and taking ownership of one's context, can lead to several interrelated outcomes.

Firstly, **individuals who become ecologically active, increase their sense of agency**. Secondly, since **context-ownership** is associated with actively (re-) forming communities (e.g. through "spaces for dialogue," volunteering, or group actions), it **can help to address the disintegration of community structures reported by the participants**. Thirdly, **individual and collective action can endow behaviour with a renewed sense of purpose and meaning**.

Overall, the ecological conversion can result in **overcoming perceived limitations** – whether they are physical, imaginative, or emotional – and in **bridging the separation between individuals, communities, and the natural world**. In so doing, ecological conversion produces motivation (both internal and external) and support for **ecological behavioural change**, which, when habituated over time, can turn into a virtuous and sustainable lifestyle. Consequently, we can witness **the expansion of available choices and experiences,** enabling **"living life to the full"**.



3.3.1 Having enough

In our data living more fully was linked with the importance of **having enough**. The idea here is that, in the words of one participant, "having more than enough of most things doesn't give us happiness." Consequently, participants spoke about the significance of ascetic practices, such as fasting, and linked them with the environmental discourse of "cutting down" or "reducing" unsustainable behaviour. The goal of these practices is not to miss out on things, but to become open to greater experiences. These insights are echoed by Laudato Si' – Pope Francis describes those who live life to the full in the following way:

> **"They experience what it means to appreciate each person and each thing, learning familiarity with the simplest things and how to enjoy them. So they are able to shed unsatisfied needs, reducing their obsessiveness and weariness. Even living on little, they can live a lot, above all when they cultivate other pleasures and find satisfaction in fraternal encounters, in service, in developing their gifts, in music and art, in contact with nature, in prayer. Happiness means knowing how to limit some needs which only diminish us, and being open to the many different possibilities which life can offer." (§223)**

3.3.2 Future effects of our actions and theological virtues

One of the worries found in our data refers to **not knowing the future effects of our actions**. What we consider to be good in the present, may turn out to have unwanted negative consequences. As one participant pointed out: "we are in this situation not because people 100 years ago started off by saying: 'we are going to create a world that's horrible for us in the next 100 years,' quite the opposite." Conversely, another participant suggested that behaviour we neglect as insignificant, or we suspect is harmful, may result in positive outcomes (the example given here was the role of Gollum in the story of *The Lord of the Rings*).

However, as was suggested, **the anxiety stemming from the uncertainty about the future result of our actions could be counteracted with faith, hope, and charity**. These can be cultivated with the help of activities listed in Section 5.

4. Ecological conversion and the Catholic Church

How can the Catholic Church effectively support ecological conversion?

It can do so by playing an active role in helping to overcome limitations; supporting the (re-)formation of communities; and addressing the problematic ecological attitudes among her members.

4.1 Helping to overcome limitations

Our survey revealed that the top difficulty in taking care of the environment among parishioners is that "it costs too much."

Difficulties in taking care of the environment:

Difficulty	Importance (5 highest, 1 lowest)
It costs too much	2.996
I do not know where to start	2.480
I do enough already	2.377
I do not have the time	2.371
I do not understand what to do	2.314
It has nothing to do with my faith	2.096

Data suggests that parishioners view the Church as having the capacity to address the central problem by removing the financial burdens experienced by parishioners. This can be done by offering funding to help with "big changes," by distributing funds via diocese to help support parishioners with ecological activities, and by co-ordinating procurement of goods needed for local groups to secure lower, wholesale prices.

In addition to financial help, **the Church can also support parishioners in the journey through ecological conversion by,** first**, clearly communicating how Catholic values align with environmental action,** and, secondly, **demonstrating the interconnection between personal faith, the doctrine of the Church, individuals, communities, and the natural world**.

As one expert observed, what explains the longevity of Catholicism is that "the Church is an expert in communication." This expertise was linked with the recognition of traditional analogue and relational forms of communication, contrasted the secular and commercial fascination with "the new stuff." The suggestion, therefore, was to rely on "what we know works."

Additionally, **the Church can use her influence to lobby authorities and other organisations on causes articulated by Catholic ecological groups**.

4.2 Supporting the (re-)formation of communities

Survey participants chose "**being more aware of the community benefits**" as the most important help they can receive to care for the environment. Furthermore, they also recommended an "**environmental education programme across diocesan parishes and schools**" as the top ecological priority of the diocese.

What help would parishioners like to receive:

Help to Care more for the Environment	Importance (5 highest, 1 lowest)
Being more aware of the community benefits	4.065
Information about how to care for the environment	4.055
Being more aware of the environmental benefits	4.004
Community eco-projects/events	3.915
Learning from others such as friends and neighbours about their environmental actions and activities	3.881
Purchasing eco-products through the community	3.849
Support through local eco-groups/committees	3.687
Special liturgies and homily themes on caring for the environment	3.551
Applying for the Live Simply award	3.371

Respondents' beliefs as to what the eco-priorities for the diocese should be:

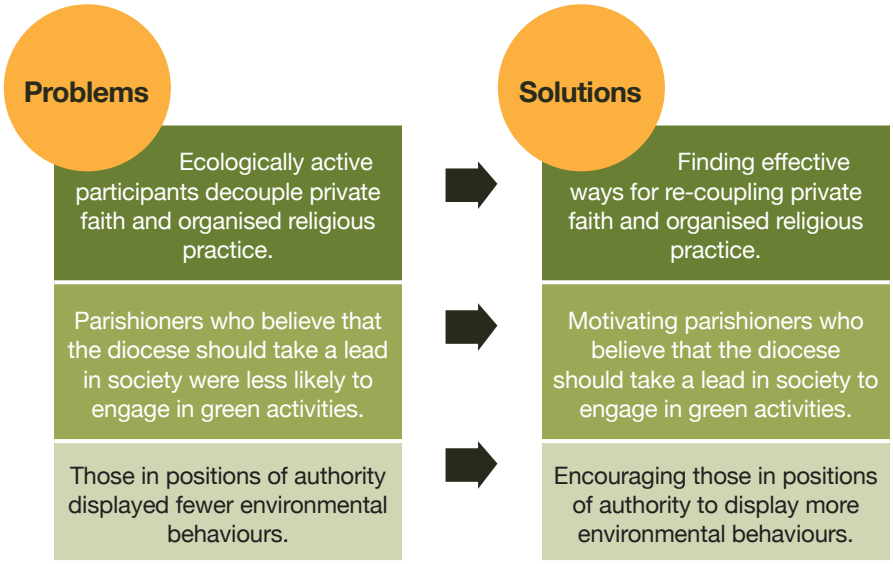
Eco-Priority of Diocese	Importance (5 highest, 0 lowest)
Environmental education programme across diocesan parishes and schools	2.205
Setting a target to reduce carbon emissions	1.791
Installing solar panels on churches and schools	1.264
Planting trees across diocesan parishes and schools	1.071
Seeing more greenspaces for wildlife	1.039
Curriculum related environment programme	1.016
Growing more local food	0.783
Working with local councils to provide facilities to support sustainable living (cycle routes, recycling, etc)	0.626
Setting up eco-groups/ committees	0.614
Sacramental programmes to include the environment	0.508
Providing electric vehicle charging facilities	0.402
Supporting community energy, such as developing renewable energy schemes that the community can buy shares in	0.343
Working across the Catholic church to share learning	0.327
Engaging in interfaith networks for shared learning	0.319
Providing facilities to support cycling	0.295
Supporting local businesses	0.295
Hosting eco-events and exhibitions	0.110

This is an opportunity for the Church to play an active role in helping her members discern the connections between individuals, communities, and nature – which would include a clear message of the community benefits of environmental action – and to communicate a positive vision of the future by various educational and ecological activities. This renewed awareness fostered by the Church would contribute to parishioners' intrinsic motivation for ecological action, strengthen existing community ties, and inspire the formation of new groups. Furthermore, education activities run by the Church can help to reduce the excessive workload experienced by teachers.

We can also suggest that **the Church's infrastructure (buildings, land, networks) can be used for the creation of "spaces for dialogue."** Importantly, for the Church to foster relationships with the place and the people, she should too engage in the dialogue with parishioners – **i.e., the Church, in the spirit of synodality, should listen to the voices of her members, and create possibilities for more regional decision-making**. This will allow parishioners to take ownership of their context.

4.3 Addressing problematic ecological attitudes

The problematic ecological attitudes of Catholics can be addressed by three corresponding solutions:



We would like to suggest that these solutions are part of the same process.

Those in the position of authority will display more environmental behaviour if ecologically engaged Catholics are encouraged to take up lay leadership positions within the Church. This way, the gap between the private faith and institutional faith can be bridged, since **personal motivation will coincide with institutional action**.

Furthermore, the presence of ecologically active leadership within the Church will offer **institutional role models** for ecologically inactive Catholics, demonstrating not only that the diocese can take the lead on environmental questions, but also **making clear that a wider and diverse involvement from the Church members is required** – thus offering an opportunity for getting involved within the structures of the institution. **This process should also be coupled with further ecological training for those already in a position of authority**, which may include instructions on how to inspire others by effectively communicating one's sustainable lifestyle choices.

Our recommendation resonates with suggestions found in the data. Participants voiced concerns related to the diminishing number of priests and limited access to those in posts. In addition, participants reported that often parish priests do not seem to be behind ecological actions. Consequently, the table below shows, **parishioners do not think of parish priests as a significant source of influence on their ecological views**. Parish priests are seen as less influential than celebrities or work colleagues, and only more influential than advertisements.

Sources of influence of parishioners' ecological views:

Influence	Importance (3 highest, 0 lowest)
Academics and scientists	1.836
Pope Francis	0.886
Media	0.602
Government	0.449
Family members	0.421
Teachers/school	0.268
Church groups	0.189
Work colleagues	0.189
Local government	0.161
Friends	0.134
Celebrities	0.102
Parish priest	0.071
Advertisements	0.051

The solutions suggested were, first, **to offer a wide range of ways (both formal and informal) in which parishioners can become involved in parish activities; second, to build confidence in the ability of laity to take up leadership roles in the parish, which, if needed, may include developing a collaborative ministry between clergy and parishioners; and third, to offer additional training opportunities for clergy**. These solutions will result in the overall flourishing of the parish.

5. Examples of ecological activities

5.1 Not knowing where to start

When asked about the difficulties in taking care of the environment, survey participants identified **"not knowing where to start" as the second most pressing barrier to ecological behaviour** (directly after financial costs). To address this problem, this report concludes with examples of activities, mentioned by parishioners during data collection, which, we hope, could inspire individuals, community groups, and parishes.

5.2 Identifying gaps

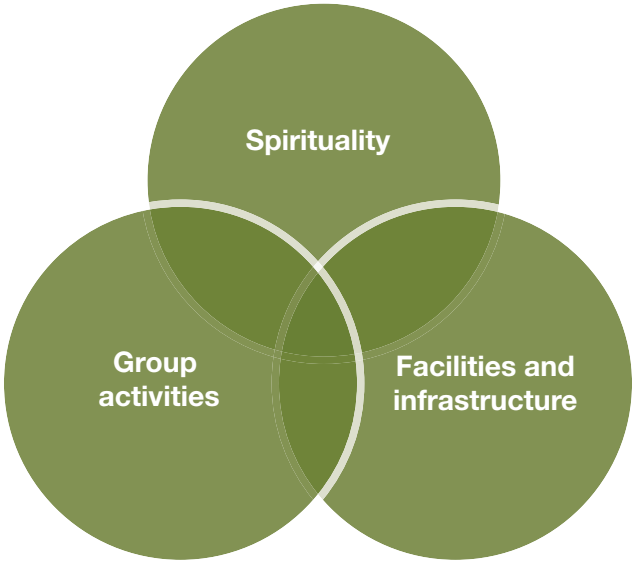
Parishioners already perform many activities which demonstrate their care for the environment. However, as the table below indicates, not all environmental activities are done with the same frequency across the diocese. **An important task, therefore, is to find ways of supporting those activities which require encouragement in each parish.**

Activities performed by parishioners to care for the environment:

Activity	Frequency (254 highest, 0 lowest)
I recycle	236
I reduce food waste	194
I shop locally	188
I reduce single-use plastics	175
I use less energy	160
I fix things / reuse materials	160
I use reusable items	155
I buy Fairtrade products	127
I garden for wildlife	114
I buy eco-products	108
I use local products	85
I use public transport	70
I purchase green energy	65
I walk to school / work	64
I grow food	58
I donate to environmental charities	51
I share eco-ideas	48
I am member of an environmental group	21
I travel by bike	18
I have solar panels	15
I am member of a Live Simply team	12
I use a hybrid car	11
I use an electric car	3

5.3 Examples of parish activities

We divided our examples into three categories: activities related to spirituality; group activities; activities related to facilities and infrastructure. However, it should be noted that the three types of activities are interconnected: while group activities often require a well-maintained infrastructure, facilities can be efficiently managed by well-organised groups; both, moreover, can offer an opportunity for spiritual growth.



5.3.1 Spirituality

Participants saw the possibility for spiritual growth in the mass as a form of reflection on, and preparation for ecological action – especially, in the exploration of Biblical texts during mass, which could speak to our environmental concerns. Participants also noted the importance of engaging with, and finding inspiration in the lives of saints. Organising prayer groups, or saying a prayer before and after meals, were also viewed as significant.

This is also noted by Pope Francis, who writes:

> **"That moment of blessing, however brief, reminds us of our dependence on God for life; it strengthens our feeling of gratitude for the gifts of creation; it acknowledges those who by their labours provide us with these goods; and it reaffirms our solidarity with those in greatest need." (§227)**

5.3.2 Group activities

Straightforward and relatively simple actions – **such as asking people how they are doing** or **having coffee after mass** – were seen as an important aspect of community building. In addition, **putting on regular events (e.g., coffee mornings, film screenings)** could be a way of getting more people involved. Audience members would initially attend without any prior or future commitments; however, over time they may become more active, especially if they begin to know the group better.

Participants also spoke about **finding creative ways to appreciate nature** – green spaces were described as "a melting pot… bringing everyone together." For example, groups can: **find places in urban settings where an encounter with the natural world is possible; grow flowers and plant trees** (this could be an opportunity to teach children about flowers, plants, and trees, and about the importance of ecosystems); **build and maintain community gardens** (a group spoke about their "dementia garden" used by people from local nursing homes). **Community gardens could also become sites for nature-related art activities.**

It is essential to keep parishioners informed about the activities taking place. Participants suggested issuing a **regular newsletter**. Others mentioned having **easily accessible information sheets in the reception area of the church,** and **an updated website signposting people to sources of help and support**. Communities should also find ways for **sharing inspiring stories from across the country and the world**, e.g., by sharing informative images and videos between parishioners.

To engage young people, parishioners could organise sports tournaments, "bring a pet to mass" days, or arts and crafts activities (e.g., making bird boxes or small models from recycled material, getting children to sculpt a bigger piece together). **These events could be led by post-confirmation teenagers, who otherwise may be less inclined to participate in parish events.**

The Church often offers volunteering opportunities for her members. These can include **outreach in the local community; working with other charities; running a food kitchen for the needy; calling or visiting those who are lonely; having a bereavement group; and collecting donations**. An important aspect of volunteering reported by our participants was **helping refugees** (e.g., organising English classes, using Church buildings as temporary housing).

Parishioners can also become activists – either by forming a new local group or joining an existing social action network (or both). In such cases, it is important to reach out to other like-minded individuals to **create connections** (e.g., starting a WhatsApp group for local Catholic activists), **come up with ideas**, and **coordinate initiatives** (e.g., social supermarkets). Another possible way of engaging in activism is through **lobbying local and national politicians**. All of the above activities can **scale up the impact of one's action from local to regional, national, or international levels**.

5.3.3 Facilities and infrastructure

Parishioners involved in maintaining Church facilities can make some small yet important daily steps towards sustainability. For example, **natural products can be used for cleaning; heating can be reduced, and blankets provided; old light bulbs can be replaced with more energy-efficient alternatives; various products** (including, for example, candles) **can be recycled and reused**.

Parishes can also grow their own food (growing food vertically was mentioned as an option for parishes with limited access to land); **catering for parish events could be vegetarian or vegan;** people could **bring their own cups to events to minimise waste; food sharing could be initiated to avoid wasting leftovers**.

To reduce pollution, parishioners can be encouraged to walk or cycle to mass, use public transport, or organise car sharing.

Deaneries could coordinate **educational programmes to help parishioners understand how to carry out audits of buildings to decrease emissions. When buildings are refurbished, it is worth suggesting installing solar panels or heat pumps**.

6. Conclusions

This report aims to broaden the understanding of Catholic parishioners' responses to the ecological crisis. To do so, it draws on data collected during workshops, roundtable discussions, and a large survey.

Our data revealed a sense of "a loss of experience" reported by participants and generated by the breakdown of the connections between individuals, communities, and the natural world. We suggested that these problems can be counteracted by ecological conversion, which results in "living life to the full," and the re-establishment of the link between individuals, communities, and nature.

This report made several recommendations regarding how the Catholic Church can support the ecological conversion of her members, and it concluded by offering a summary of ecological activities which can be taken on the parish level.

Appendix: Environmental issues of importance to parishioners

Environmental Issue	Ranking (1 highest, 15 lowest)
Air pollution	3.311
Climate change	3.390
Loss of greenspace	5.878
Waste	6.307
Water pollution	6.444
Flooding	6.555
Depletion of natural resources	6.917
Habitat destruction	7.252
Loss of trees and woodlands	7.555
Lack of access to locally grown food	8.142
Pesticides	8.591
Species loss	8.654
Fuel poverty	9.791
Wildfires	11.327
Loss of peatlands	11.681

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Recognitions

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Acknowledgements

Workshop and roundtable discussion participants
We would like to extend our profound thanks to every participant who contributed to this report. Thank you for your enthusiasm, honesty, and thoughtful engagement with the project.

Diocese of Salford
We would like to thank the Diocese of Salford for their support throughout the writing of this report.

Project Advisory Group
We would like to acknowledge the contributions of all those who have participated in the project's advisory group. The advisory group has included, but is not limited to:

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Report version 1 | March 2023

The Guardians of Creation Project