

**Environment**

Co-creators and stewards of God's creation

**TARGET AUDIENCE**

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**Overview**

This Object informs students about some of the most pressing environmental issues human beings are currently facing. It teaches them the significant obligations Christians have to care for the earth and their responsibility to act in rectifying the destruction that has been caused, as well as limiting future degradation.

The multimedia element for this Object is a slide show of ten facts about the environment depicted with visuals and graphics. Clicking through the screens provides the students with a brief overview of some of the issues and the implications of leaving these unaddressed.

**Teacher Background**

Teachers are encouraged to review the 'Living a Eucharistic Life' section of the DVD Rom *Become One Body One Spirit in Christ* to deepen their understanding of: the call to 'go forth' and live the mission of the Gospel in our daily lives; how we are called to live our Catholic and Christian faith; and the meaning of the Eucharist in our lives.

In particular, the following aspects of *Become One Body One Spirit in Christ* provide entry points and context for this Learning Object:

- Within the pathway 'Believe, Pray, and Act', watch the video 'Handing on the Good Earth'.

*Where appropriate, use this material with the students.*

**Supporting Content**

*This text supports the focus of the multimedia element.*

Christians' respect and care for the earth and all its creature derives principally from the first chapter of the Book of Genesis. This chapter describes God as creator of the whole universe, a process in which humans are invited to participate as co-creators and stewards of God's creation. To be human, therefore, is to have the privilege of being a co-creator with God, but also the responsibility of respectful care for God's gifts, which are to be shared by all.

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### Supporting Content

Integral human development is closely linked to the obligations which flow from man's relationship with the natural environment. The environment must be seen as God's gift to all people, and the use we make of it entails a shared responsibility for all humanity, especially the poor and future generations (Pope Benedict XVI, 2010).

The current ecological crisis is a moral crisis facing all of humanity.

The ecological crisis is a moral issue... Respect for life and for the dignity of the human person extends also to the rest of creation... we cannot interfere in one area of the ecosystem without paying due attention both to the consequences of such interference in other areas and to the well-being of future generations (Pope John Paul II, 1990).

Respect for nature and ecological responsibilities are key aspects of the Catholic faith. We are to ensure that the integrity of creation is upheld. We are to nurture a new global solidarity, which includes solidarity with the natural world in all its diversity – animals, plant life and the earth itself.

As humanity has become aware of the conditions that threaten the world's environment, and as communities have begun crafting solutions to environmental problems, a growing body of Catholic theology and social teaching has emerged to address environmental concerns. This theology and teaching can only be understood in light of long-standing Catholic traditions concerning creation, redemption, and the role of humanity in these processes. The Catholic tradition shows that humanity has a unique set of responsibilities. It is essential, for example, that we respect creation and exercise stewardship over it.

Saint Francis of Assisi is the patron saint of animals and ecology; known for his love of creation and its Creator. St Francis, like today's environmentalists, saw himself as part of the ecosystem, not as a proud master over and above it. He addressed creatures as 'sisters' and 'brothers', as his equals, not as subjects to be dominated. He saw himself as a simple servant and caretaker of creation. We should likewise see ourselves as stewards within creation, not as being separate from it.

*The Canticle of Creation* by Saint Francis of Assisi  
 Most High, all-powerful, good Lord,  
 Yours are the praises, the glory, the honour and all blessing,

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**Supporting Content**

To you alone, Most High, do they belong,  
and no one is worthy to mention your name.

Praised be you, my Lord, with all your creatures,  
especially Sir Brother Sun,  
who is the day and through whom you give us light.  
And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendour;  
and bears a likeness of you, Most Holy One.

Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars,  
in heaven you formed them clear and precious and beautiful.  
Praised be you, my Lord, through Brother Wind,  
and through the air, cloudy and serene,  
and every kind of weather,  
through whom you give sustenance to your creatures.

Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Water,  
who is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.

Praised be you, my Lord, through Brother Fire,  
through whom you light the night  
and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.

Praised be you, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth,  
who sustains and governs us,  
and who produces various fruits with coloured flowers and herbs.  
Praised be you, my Lord, through those who give pardon for your love,  
and bear infirmity and tribulation.  
Blessed are those who endure in peace  
for by you, Most High, shall they be crowned.

Praised be you, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death,  
from whom no one living can escape.  
Woe to those who die in mortal sin.  
Blessed are those whom death will find in your most holy will,  
for the second death shall do them no harm.

Praise and bless my Lord and give him thanks  
and serve him with great humility.

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### For Reflection and Discussion: Ideas for Use

Select one or more of the following activities for students to complete.

- 1 **Invite students to explore the following and report back to class:**
  - Describe five psalms that deal with creation
  - What do they say about creation and about God? Give examples.
  - What do the psalms reveal about their author?
  - Write a brief psalm of praise to God for creation.

The psalms can be made into a booklet and used in a prayer service.
- 2 **Invite the students to explore and explain the following:**  
Consider the principles of Catholic Social Teaching and discuss how they apply to the principle of 'Caring for God's Creation'. In what ways do you care for God's creation in your everyday life?
- 3 **Invite the students to explore and explain the following:**
  - What does it mean to say: we are co-creators with God?
  - How did St Francis of Assisi view creation and his role in it?
  - How can we say that the ecological crisis is a moral challenge to Catholics? How should we respond?
- 4 **Invite students to choose one of the following tasks and to report back to class on it.**
  - See the greenhouse effect in action and learn more about the science behind global warming with the [Interactive: The Greenhouse Effect](#)'.
  - Take the [Global Warming Quiz](#)'.
  - The [Environmental Facts](#)' page lists 21 simple ways you can help your environment. Read them and see how many you could practically incorporate some of them into your life. Discuss this as a class.
- 5 **Invite students to explore ways to become involved in Catholic Earthcare. There are many initiatives on the Earthcare website including the Assisi initiative which constitutes the Australian Catholic Bishops' sustainability initiative.**

### Teacher Professional Development Resources

[Catholic Earthcare Australia](#)

[The John Ray Initiative](#) – connecting Environment, Science and Christianity