



LITURGICAL PRESS

Lent

4.2

Caring for Our Common Home

A Seven-Week Catholic Faith Formation Program

Inspired by Pope Francis

**Protecting God's Creation
Embracing Gospel Justice
Nurturing Christian Simplicity**



IMAGINE EARTH divided equally among all of us. Each person would receive 4.2 acres. Now imagine that everything you need—food, energy, home, clothing, appliances, gadgets—must come from those 4.2 acres. But it takes 17.2 acres per person to maintain the average American lifestyle. Inspired by Pope Francis, Lent 4.2 is a new way of observing Lent that helps us care for God's creation by taking steps toward using only our fair share of its resources. Moving in the direction of 4.2 is essential for anyone walking in the footsteps of Jesus today.

"Human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbor and with the earth itself."

—Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*

"As individuals, as institutions, as a people we need a change of heart to preserve and protect the planet for our children and for generations yet unborn."

—United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Renewing the Earth*

Lent

Lent is an appropriate time to reflect on the impact our lives have on the world and other people with whom we share it. This year we look at how our daily and habitual choices affect creation, as well as consider what lifestyle changes are being required of us. With Lent 4.2, the foundational Lenten practices of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving can be engaged in new and meaningful ways.

PRAYER—Lent 4.2 leads you into prayerful gratitude for the gift of life in all its forms. It stirs a spirit of penance for the ways God's planet has been misused. Through quiet listening you can awaken to the sacred voice of God speaking through creation.

FASTING—Lent 4.2 brings contemporary meaning and value to fasting. It suggests practical ways in which you can abstain from habits of consumption that harm God's creation and spawn injustice. You will learn to fast in ways that can actually make a difference in the well-being of our world.

ALMSGIVING—Lent 4.2 offers suggestions for making small but significant lifestyle changes that express care for creation and concern for the common good. It offers you opportunities for getting involved and making a difference.

CONVERSION—The ultimate goal of Lent is "metanoia"—a conversion of heart—leading the Christian community into a deeper baptismal commitment to walk in the footsteps of Jesus by living in harmony with God, creation, and the entire human family.



Earth is our home. It is holy ground.

From the beginning, God declared it very good.

Today there is a growing awareness that God's creation is being damaged and its resources are not fairly shared.

"God destined the earth and all it contains for all people and all nations so that all created things would be shared fairly by all humankind under the guidance of justice tempered by charity."

—Second Vatican Council, *The Church in the Modern World*

Lent 4.2

is a seven-week faith formation program of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving to heed the call of Pope Francis to care for our common home.

Protecting God's Creation • Embracing Gospel Justice Nurturing Christian Simplicity

Each week you will learn about the significant issues facing our human family, what the church is saying about them, and how you can take practical steps to make a difference in our world.

Caring for creation and living more simply are an essential part of faith for those who follow in the footsteps of Jesus today.



"I am convinced that we can make a difference. . . . Now is the time for courageous actions and strategies, aimed at implementing a 'culture of care' and 'an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature.'"

—Pope Francis

Address to US Congress, Sept. 24, 2015,
citing his encyclical *Laudato Si*

How Much Are We Using?

Humans are using more resources than Earth can provide. We are in global ecological overshoot. According to the Global Footprint 2015 report, the amount of acreage it takes to support the average lifestyle varies greatly from country to country.

Congo – 2.5	China – 6.2	Brazil – 7.0	Peru – 5.1
Germany – 10.8	India – 2.2	France – 10.3	Egypt – 4.3
Thailand – 4.7	Haiti – 1.3	Israel – 11.7	Vietnam – 3.4
Mexico – 5.9	Japan – 9.4	Canada – 16.2	United States – 17.2

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Our Common Home



One of the major causes of injustice in our world and damage to God's creation is the pattern of human consumption.

If the productive land and sea of Earth were divided equally among the over 7 billion of us living on the planet, each person would be entitled to 4.2 acres. From that 4.2 acres we would have to find everything needed to support our life: the food we eat, the material for our home, energy to heat and cool it, water for our lawn and toilets, a place to dispose of our garbage, wood for our furniture, plastic for our kitchen utensils and children's toys, fibers for our clothes, metals to manufacture our appliances and cars, fuel for our transportation, as well as everything else we use and purchase. 4.2 acres would be each person's fair share of Earth, our common home.

Through a measuring tool called Global Footprint, we can determine how much acreage is used by an individual, an industry, or a country. According to a 2015 report (www.footprintnetwork.org), the amount of area it takes to support the average personal lifestyle varies greatly from country to country.

In the United States, the average person's lifestyle requires 17.2 acres—not only for personal consumption, but also because of the available infrastructure, food choices, travel options, medical advantages, and daily conveniences. A typical Canadian uses 16.2 acres. If a fair share is 4.2 acres, it means others must do with less so that we in affluent nations can maintain our style of living. This disparity gives new meaning to the biblical admonition: "Thou shalt not steal."

If everyone consumed at the current US and Canadian levels, it would require several more planets. But there is only one.

In *Laudato Si*, his encyclical on caring for creation, Pope Francis calls for an "integral ecology," which includes both people and the planet. A spirit of solidarity with Earth and concern for the entire human family motivate us, he says, "to care for our common home."

How can we protect Earth and assure that all people have what they need for a full life? The pope encourages us to "develop a different lifestyle and bring about significant changes in society."

Do more than give up chocolates.
This Lent, practice simplicity.



Christian Simplicity

Anyone following in the footsteps of Jesus today cannot ignore the excessive consumption habits of our country. How can we share our planet in a way that enables every person to live with dignity?

Simplicity has been a foundational Christian virtue from the beginning. Jesus suggests that too many possessions—or too much attachment to possessions—can distract us from the reign of God (Luke 6:20-25). He cautions against becoming slaves to our belongings (Luke 16:13-15). Accumulating too many things can result in anxiety (Matt 6:26-34).

The biblical warnings about overconsumption are not legalistic threats, but guidelines to freedom and spiritual fulfillment (Matt 19:21-23). Choosing simplicity can help us reorient our hearts and find a treasure that will never perish (Matt 6:20).

Simplicity means setting limits that reflect the values of our faith by not being excessive or wasteful in using God's creation. Pope Francis challenges us to transform the way we understand and relate to Earth. He

speaks about cultivating a "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." It is a call to conversion. The way we consume must

change, insists the pope, so we can respond to "both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor."

Inspired by Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato Si*, the Lent 4.2 program helps you become better informed on the issues of consumption and learn to live more simply. Each weekly handout offers practical steps you can take to make a difference in the world and protect God's creation for generations to come. Lent is a great time to start.

"The idea of infinite or unlimited growth . . . is based on the lie that there is an infinite supply of the earth's goods, and this leads to the planet being squeezed dry beyond every limit."

—Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*

Simplicity is a value among Christians who want to live differently than the standards set by a consumer culture. This means taking only what you need—not wasting or taking in excess. It leads to a life that is outwardly modest, inwardly rich, and socially just.

This Lent, consider the challenge Pope Francis puts before us. Be part of the Christian simplicity movement. Learn what personal habits harm God's creation. Try setting limits to your consumption. Examine your purchasing patterns. With each dollar you can make choices that are socially and environmentally responsible.

Each week of Lent you will receive a handout like this that highlights an area of consumption. They offer practical suggestions for embracing Pope Francis's call "to grow in solidarity, responsibility and compassionate care."

Moving the average American lifestyle from 17.2 acres to 4.2 acres will not be easy. No one can change everything at once. Don't take on more than you can handle, but each week you can do something to abstain from thoughtlessly consuming or taking too much. It's about a shift in consciousness.

Sure, they are small steps. But small steps can build momentum for widespread change.

Action Steps

Small Steps

- ☐ Replace incandescent light bulbs with energy-efficient LED bulbs. They emit the same amount of light, but use at least 75 percent less energy and last 25 times longer.
- ☐ Abandon the throwaway mentality. Use glass cups, cloth napkins, reusable shopping bags, and rags for cleaning. Avoid wasteful disposables that end up in garbage dumps.
- ☐ Use a refillable mug. Getting your daily coffee or tea in disposable cups generates about 22 pounds of waste per year.



If There's Only One Thing You Can Do . . .

Give Up Plastic and Paper Bags—Opt for Reusable Bags

As a sign of repentance, Old Testament prophets would wear sackcloth and ashes. On Ash Wednesday, receive ashes. But instead of wearing sackcloth, get in the habit of carrying reusable (sack) cloth bags when you go shopping. Twelve million barrels of oil are used to make over 100 billion plastic bags for the United States each year. No wasteful plastic or paper bags this Lent . . . and beyond.

Inner Simplicity

- ☐ Abstain from overscheduling your life. Do this by planning ahead to eliminate unnecessary actions.
- ☐ Reduce exposure to advertising. Notice how advertisements bombard you, stirring up the desire to buy.
- ☐ Get away. Consciously connect with God's natural world at least once during the week.
- ☐ Give your time by working in a soup kitchen, caring for the homeless, or volunteering at an organization to help those in need.

Outer Simplicity

- ☐ Cut back on personal consumption. Adopt a less-is-more attitude throughout Lent. Ask yourself: Do I need it? When a desire for something arises, wait a couple days to make sure it's not an impulse buy.
- ☐ When you need to purchase, consider shopping for used items. So much can be found at local thrift stores, Craigslist, the Freecycle Network, or used products on Amazon or eBay.
- ☐ Notice when you toss something away. Where is away? It's going somewhere on the planet. This Lent reduce consumption; reuse whatever you can; and learn to recycle. Otherwise it goes into a landfill.

Prayer

*Blessed Creator,
you have breathed your Spirit
upon this land and entrusted to
us a responsibility to care for it.
Teach us to always use the things of
this Earth with care, not negligence,
with gratitude, not arrogance,
with simplicity, not excess.
Guide us in the ways of
Christian simplicity.
Amen.*

Steps Continued

1. Prayerfully read Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home*. It offers a great Lenten reflection. The US Catholic bishops have produced a helpful study guide.
2. Watch *Journey of the Universe*, an Emmy award-winning documentary available on DVD. Learn about the only planet on which you will live. Why is caring for creation important?
3. Read Duane Elgin's essay "Choosing a New Lifeway, Voluntary Simplicity."
4. Studies consistently conclude there is no connection between happiness and material possessions. Watch "The High Price of Materialism," an online video by the Center for a New American Dream.

All this and more available online at lent42.org.