



Connecting Communities Through Integral Ecology (Laudato Si') in the UK

By Cecilia Skordilis

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Dr Cecilia Skordilis is a Reader at the Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences at the University of Manchester, UK.

Cecilia carries out impactful research which strongly links environmental sciences with sustainability in education through her initiatives of Communities of Practice (CoP) in higher education i.e. the Women In Environmental Sciences (WiES) and Connectivity and Inclusivity (C & I) in higher education. She was a Co-Investigator on the NERC's Engaging Environments programme (2019-2023). Cecilia is an ecologist with an extremely diverse professional background.

Having completed a BSc. degree in Biochemistry at Bayero University in Kano, Nigeria, she then spent several years in industry, environmental regulation and consulting working for various organisations focused on environmental sustainability and development and, was a lecturer in environmental sciences at the National Open University of Nigeria before joining the University of Manchester.

Cecilia's interests are in understanding and managing water quality and ecology of urban watercourses. She has also carried out many public engagement activities within the UK and abroad. Cecilia is a member of the Board of Trustees for the British Ecological Society, a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy and a Fellow of the Institute of Teaching and Learning. Cecilia is the convener of Connecting Communities Through Integral Ecology.



Revd Dr Peter Rožič SJ, MAIBP is the Founding Director of the Integral Ecology Research Network (IERN) at the *Laudato Si'* Research Institute (LSRI), Campion Hall, University of Oxford, UK.

Revd Dr Peter Rožič SJ's work sits at the intersection of theology, ecology and policy, with a particular emphasis on global partnerships (especially Global South contexts), and on linking research with practice and formation. The Integral Ecology Research Network (IERN) serves as a platform bringing together academic, faith-based, and practice-oriented actors that could help situate the work structurally.

Current projects and partnerships include the Integral Ecology Summer School, the Down-to-Earth Dialogues, the Henri de Laulanié Prize, and collaboration with Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) on a Digital Integral Ecology Library. He works with Jesuit and global South partners to combine practical pilots, ethical governance and formation for long-term, justice-centred and spiritual change.





Dr Emma Gardner is Head of Environment at the Diocese of Salford, UK.

Emma has worked in the environment field for more than 25 years. She has worked on sustainability projects across the world for a range of organisations. Emma joined the Diocese in November 2020 from the University of Manchester where she was Head of Environmental Sustainability for 8 years.

Emma works closely with Bishop John to lead on transformational change in keeping with Pope Francis's *Laudato Si'* Encyclical. She provides strategic leadership and direction to support the delivery of environmental practices, programmes and activities across the Diocese, schools, parishes and beyond – including a programme to meet the Diocese's 2038 carbon target.

Emma also manages the development and maintenance of the *Laudato Si* Centre, the Flagship Centre for the Diocese and is responsible for developing and nurturing a range of partnerships to support environmental research, communication, education, and business operations.

Emma is the project manager for the interdisciplinary Guardians of Creation Project, working with St Mary's University, and chairs the Greater Manchester inter-faith Environment Group, with members attending a private audience with Pope Francis in 2023 where three regional commitments to care for our Common Home were made.



Ms. Emily Cahill is the *Laudato Si'* Centre's Environment and Learning Officer. BA(QTS), and a master's degree in teaching and Learning.

Emily spent the majority of her career in education before bringing her skills and experience to the *Laudato Si'* Centre in 2023. With over 15 years of teaching experience, she also served as a Headteacher in the Diocese of Shrewsbury for four years, where she led on Religious Education and championed the role of outdoor learning within the school environment.

Emily is also a qualified inspector for the Catholic Schools Inspectorate in England and Wales. Since joining the Diocese of Salford, she has worked as part of Dr Gardner's Environment Department to develop programmes for schools, parish communities, and wider audiences at the *Laudato Si'* Centre.

She is passionate about the environment and believes in the power of nature to help people of all ages connect more deeply with their faith.





Dr Finlay Malcolm is a researcher based in the Department of Religions and Theology at the University of Manchester.

Finlay recently completed a major Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) project, 'Religion, Theology and Climate Change' (2022-25), exploring the creative theologies emerging from Christian environmental advocacy and activist groups in the UK. Using findings from the project, he is currently seconded to the Roman Catholic Diocese of Salford, delivering training to clergy and parishioners, helping them to connect their faith to care for God's creation. Finlay's work demonstrates how academic research can inform pastoral practice, spiritual formation, and community action. This approach presents care for the environment as an essential expression of Christian discipleship and moral responsibility, rather than a separate concern.



Sister Alicia Pérez is a Faithful Companion of Jesus (FCJ) currently serving at Manchester Universities Catholic Chaplaincy.

Sister Alicia has a PhD in Computer Science (machine learning) from Carnegie Mellon University, USA and a master's degree in Pastoral Ministry from Boston College, USA. She has taught in universities in USA, Spain, Argentina and Bolivia. Sister Alicia is a member of the Care for Our Common Home team of the FCJ Sisters in the Area of Europe.



Sister Joan Kerley, FMSJ is an American member of the Missionaries of St. Joseph and currently serves as her Congregation's Social Justice Coordinator

Sister Joan supports Associates and Sisters across the UK, Ireland, Kenya, Uganda, and Ecuador in implementing the seven goals of *Laudato Si'*. Sister Joan works closely with the *Laudato Si'* Centre in Salford, UK, delivering programmes on the spirituality and vision of Pope Francis' encyclical, and is a member of the UK *Laudato Si'* Animator's Group.

Previously, she served for 12 years on her Congregational Leadership Team and worked at Le Moyne College, Syracuse, as Director of Service Learning following a role in Campus Ministry before coming to England in 2011. A trained spiritual director and pastoral counsellor, Sister Joan has led the Spiritual Exercises in Daily Life (aimed to integrate faith into everyday routines without leaving work or family commitments) and continues to offer spiritual accompaniment and guided prayer to local groups and communities.

She holds a master's degree in religious studies from Fordham University and is a retired fellow of the American Association of Pastoral Counselling.





Sister Franca Edet, DC is prominent member of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul.

Sister Franca who is originally from Immaculate Conception Parish in Nigeria, grew up in the Catholic faith at St. Mary's Pro-Cathedral before joining the Daughters of Charity, becoming a full member in 1974. She went on mission to the United Kingdom with the Province of Rosalie Rendu in February 2016. Her vocation has been shaped by a deep integration of spirituality, education, and service in the belief that all gifts are meant for the common good of creation.

Sister Franca's early ministry focused on education, particularly among children and young adults with hearing impairments and special needs. Through her work with the Christoffel Blinden Mission of Germany (1983–1999), as a visiting teacher, she trained teachers across West and Central Africa in sign language, as a means of total communication among children with severe hearing impairment and empowering marginalised communities.

In leadership roles in Nigeria and the United Kingdom, at provincial and local levels, Sister Franca expanded the mission of the Vincentian

Charism, initiating and opening new communities in Northern Nigeria and across West Africa.

At the Institute For Formators (IFF) in Jos, Nigeria, Sister Franca engaged and contributed to the formation of religious leaders, equipping priests and sisters from various dioceses and Religious Congregations, with the skills to nurture future generations to become skilled formators in their formation houses.

Her efforts strengthened communal structures and promoted shared responsibility, key aspects of building sustainable and inclusive communities. Sister Franca is currently serving as the main representative of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul NGO at the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland. In this role, she advocates for those most affected by poverty, ensuring their voices are included in the global debates.

Sister Franca holds a master's degree in development studies from Kimmage Development Study Centre, Dublin; a bachelor's degree in special education from the University of Jos, Nigeria and, a higher diploma in the education of persons with hearing impairment from the University College, Dublin, Ireland Sr. Franca is a Fellow of Centre for Women, Faith and Leadership from the Institute for Global Engagement in California, United States of America.

As a Christian, Sr Franca believes that all gifts received has been endowed for a purpose; and whatever is acquired under the universe be it big or small, if not used for the common good, is a waste and a big injustice to all of creation.





Dr Ania Grobicki, co-founder of the Climate and Spirit Group

Dr Ania Grobicki holds a PhD in Biochemical Engineering from Imperial College, London, as well as a bachelor's degree in chemical engineering from the University of Cape Town, South Africa. Passionate about integral ecology, climate adaptation, sustainable agriculture and water, she has worked worldwide in academia, in consulting, and in international organisations for the past 35 years.

From 2009 to 2015 she headed the Global Water Partnership, an intergovernmental organization and a global network of water organisations, based in Stockholm, Sweden. She then served as Deputy Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, an international convention based in Switzerland which brings together 170 countries to preserve wetland environments. In 2018 Ania joined the Green Climate Fund (GCF) in Seoul, South

Korea, first as Deputy Director for Adaptation, and subsequently as the Deputy Director for External Affairs of the organization.

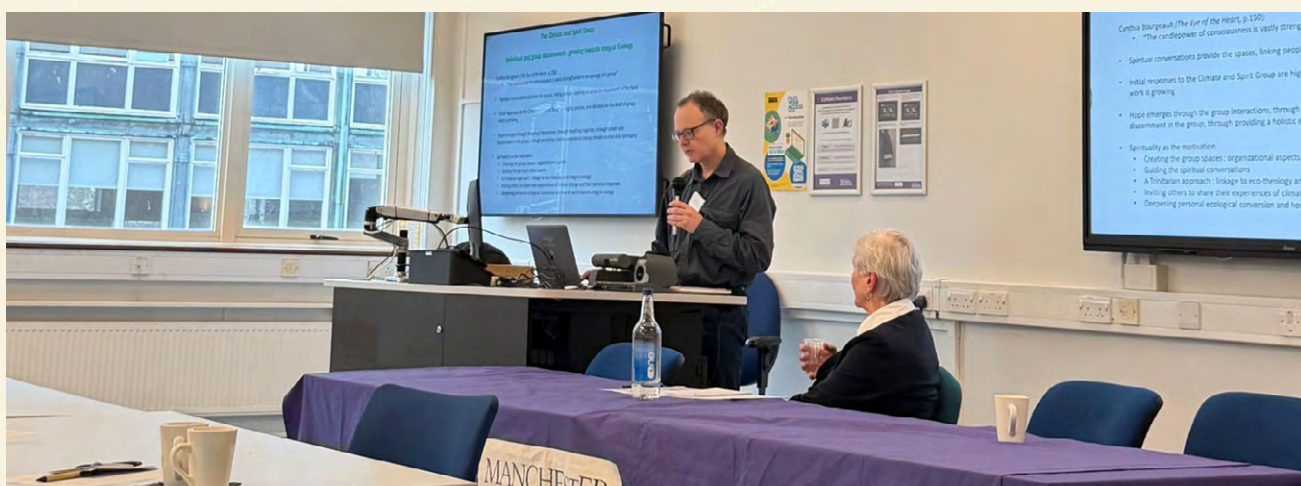
GCF is the major financial mechanism for the UN climate convention (UNFCCC), helping to finance climate mitigation and adaptation projects in developing countries.

In 2022, Ania started her own business in France, as a Board director, advisor and consultant to a number of companies and organisations. For the past four years she has served as the Senior Water Advisor for the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization.

She is also an independent Board Director of a private sector company, AFC Capital Partners (ACP), for which she chairs the Climate and ESG Committee, and serves on the Investment Committee.

ACP works together with the Africa Finance Corporation (a international financial institution) to make African infrastructure climate-resilient, through an innovative \$500 million fund, the Infrastructure Climate Resilience Fund. Ania also serves pro bono as a Trustee and Chair of the Programme Committee for a UK-registered charity called Dig Deep, raising funds to support safe drinking water supply and sanitation in Kenya.

Ania has written many papers, reports and publications on science and technology policy, water resources and earth systems, and is Coordinating Lead Author of UNEP's 6th Global Environmental Outlook. Recently she has published a paper and a book review on integral ecology in *The Way Journal*.





Brother Geoff te Braake SJ, co-founder of the Climate and Spirit Group

Geoff te Braake, a Jesuit brother, born and brought up in southern Africa where he studied business computing and was introduced to Ignatian spirituality. He moved to England in his mid-twenties and later heard a calling to religious life and joined the Society of Jesus in 2010. He did a BA Philosophy and Theology at Heythrop College and began training and practising as prayer guide and spiritual director.

During his years at Manchester University Catholic Chaplaincy, he studied an MSc Sustainability and Adaptation at the Centre for Alternative Technology. He is now based at St Beuno's Jesuit Spirituality Centre in north Wales.



Fr Dushan Croos SJ, is the lead Catholic Chaplain at the University of Manchester.

An alumnus of the University of Manchester, Fr Dushan joined the Chaplaincy team in September 2023, as the lead Chaplain, after working with Young Adults in London and other University and school Chaplaincies.



“The main idea of this project is that environmental care, social justice, and spiritual renewal are closely connected and cannot be separated. The conference and workshop showed that *integral ecology* is not only about the natural environment alone, but also a shared vision that brings together science, faith, and everyday human experience. At its heart is the idea of *ecological conversion*—a personal change in values that leads to action in communities.

By bringing together people from universities, faith groups, and community organisations, we learnt about the important work of integral ecology carried out in different settings and places e.g. within Greater Manchester and at the University. These activities would not only serve to motivate others to act for the environment but, would strengthen existing work and encourage collaboration. As we strive to connect communities through integral ecology, we aim, through this work, to promote a healthy environment, spiritual renewal and a sustainable future for all. “

Dr Cecilia Skordilis

Convener, Connecting Communities Through Integral Ecology

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarises the conference talks, panel discussion, and the Climate and Spirit workshop. Contributions from academics, faith groups, and local communities showed how integral ecology can help build more environmentally aware and responsive societies. While the Christian faith encourages care for creation, participants highlighted the need for greater support from churches to turn ecological values into practical action. The discussions also highlighted the importance of stronger collaboration and connection between academic researchers and local communities to enable meaningful change on the ground.

The conference concluded with an ecological Mass at the Holy Name Church on Oxford Road, reminding participants that the Earth is a sacred gift from God and we are stewards of “our common home”.

This study also contributes directly to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The report provided key takeaway messages from the events and proposed a call to action.

The keynote speech by Revd Dr Peter Rožič, the Director of Integral Ecology Research Network (IERN), highlighted the importance of internal conversion as a foundation for personal and societal transformation, alongside the role of scientific insight and social action. It examined the relevance of Integral Ecology to the conference theme and outlined the work of the

Integral Ecology Research Network in relation to the “Connecting Communities through Integral Ecology” initiative. The keynote speech aligned with **SDGs 13, 4, 16, 17** and **11**.

An overview of the *Laudato Si'* Centre promoted education, wellbeing, and inclusion through nature-based programmes supporting schools and vulnerable groups. The Centre’s work aligns with **SDGs 3, 4, 10, 13**, and **15**. Advancing the Vision of *Laudato Si'* and Integral Ecology in the Salford Diocese, UK shared the integration between theology with lived practice, framing environmental care as integral to salvation and ecological conversion. This work aligns with **SDGs 4, 13**, and **16**.

Overview of the presentation from the University Chaplaincy integrated worship, reflection, and sustainability practices, promoting ecological awareness and community engagement while recognising the sacredness of creation. The chaplaincy’s work supports **SDGs 11, 12**, and **13**.



“Tread Softly, You’re Standing on Holy Ground” (Ex. 3:5): explored the seven *Laudato Si’* goals and described them as a “symphony of grace”. Their work aligns with **SDGs 10, 12, 13, and 15**. A gender-focused advocacy programme in some Nigerian schools showcased a need to empower girls and communities to promote clean environments and environmental stewardship. This work fosters lasting cultural change and aligns with **SDGs 4, 5, 10, and 13**.

The work of the Climate and Spirit Group supports a holistic, interdisciplinary approach linking climate action with education, wellbeing, justice, and collaboration. Their work aligns with **SDGs 13, 4, 3, 16 and 17**.

The panel brought together perspectives from education, faith-based institutions, NGOs, and community engagement. Institutional support and collaboration all align with **SDGs 4, 13, 11, 16 and 17**.

CONNECTING COMMUNITIES THROUGH INTEGRAL ECOLOGY

The conference on *Connecting Communities through Integral Ecology (Laudato Si’)* in the UK successfully met its objectives of exploring the intersections between science, theology, social engagement, and environmental responsibility. The conference was inspired by earlier discussions on theology and integral ecology held at Oxford in 2025 and forms part of ongoing efforts to develop dialogue between academic institutions and diverse integral communities. Acknowledgement was given to the Catholic Diocese of Salford for its active engagement in promoting environmental stewardship inspired by Pope Francis’s 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si’*.

OBJECTIVES

Over two days, participants were invited to a one-day **conference** and a one-day **workshop** including guest lectures, a panel session and spiritual conversations. The events

1. Brought together individuals and groups within the Church and academic communities who were interested in the theological and spiritual dimensions of environmental stewardship.



2. Raised awareness of existing environmental initiatives and promoted integration and collaboration.
3. Reflected on environmental challenges through the lens of faith, particularly through the work of the Climate and Spirit Group.

The talks were linked to the objectives as follows:

Objectives 1 and 2: Faith and ecology in dialogue- exploring shared values and building a collaborative network

1. Overview of the work of the Integral Ecology Research Network.
2. Overview of the work of the *Laudato Si’* Centre, networks and next steps.
3. Advancing the Vision of *Laudato Si’* and Integral Ecology in the Salford Diocese, UK.
4. University of Manchester Catholic Chaplaincy and Connecting Communities through Integral Ecology.
5. Advocacy training in Calabar, Nigeria: A gender-based response to climate action.
6. Tread Softly, You’re Standing on Holy Ground (Ex. 3:5): Integrating Spirituality and Ecology.

Objective 3: Seeing environmental challenges through the lens of faith

1. Climate and Spirit Group: Climate contemplation in action: inspiring ecological conversion through spiritual conversation.



TALKS

KEYNOTE SPEECH – AN OVERVIEW OF THE WORK OF INTEGRAL ECOLOGY, INTEGRAL ECOLOGY RESEARCH NETWORK

Revd Dr Peter Rožič SJ, Director of Integral Ecology Research Network (IERN), Campion Hall, University of Oxford, UK

<https://youtu.be/PmW4NaZGjH0>

Revd Dr Peter Rožič SJ introduced integral ecology as a practical and interdisciplinary framework for addressing contemporary environmental challenges. Drawing on the vision articulated in *Laudato Si'* by Pope Francis, Dr Rožič emphasised that ecological issues cannot be understood solely as technical or environmental problems. Also, the role of faith communities are often under-recognised actors in ecological transformation. Instead, ecological transformations they must be approached in connection with broader questions of justice, culture, governance, and spirituality.

A central theme of the lecture was the need to integrate scientific knowledge with ethical, social, and cultural reflection. While robust ecological data and scientific research remain essential, meaningful responses to environmental crises require dialogue between disciplines such as science, theology, policy studies, and the humanities. This interdisciplinary engagement enables a more holistic understanding of the relationships between human societies and the natural world.

The keynote also highlighted the importance of collaboration across sectors, including education, government, research institutions, and local communities. Integral ecology becomes meaningful when translated into practical action at the local level, where community initiatives—such as sustainability projects and shared environmental stewardship—can foster wellbeing, participation, and long-term change. Institutions, the speaker suggested, should support and amplify these existing grassroots efforts rather than imposing solutions from above.

Dr Rožič further explored the role of digital technologies and policy frameworks in supporting ecological action. Digital platforms and shared maps can facilitate knowledge sharing, public participation, and transparency, while effective policymaking requires clear, achievable goals and shared accountability between governments and communities. He proposed the creation of a digital map of Manchester including locations, descriptions and photos of ecological community projects.

In conclusion, the keynote stressed that integral ecology calls for cooperation and partnerships among scientists, policymakers, faith communities, and civil society, and that ethical clarity enables trust. The main lesson was that meaningful ecological transformation often begins with small, collaborative initiatives grounded in ethical responsibility, community engagement, and respect for both people and the natural environment.

OVERVIEW OF THE WORK OF THE *LAUDATO SI'* CENTRE, NETWORKS AND NEXT STEPS

Dr Emma Gardner and Ms. Emily Cahill

Ms. Emily shared experiences from an outdoor learning initiative working primarily with young children aged three to sixteen, as well as primary and high school students, local parishes and community groups. Established in 2017, the *Laudato Si'* Centre uses a natural field setting to foster children's engagement with wildlife, seasonal change, and the beauty of the natural environment.

Visitors from various countries have also been inspired by the site, which includes planted trees and spaces designed to encourage ecological awareness. The initiative is guided by three core values: learning, spirituality, and wellbeing, emphasising not only physical health but also emotional and spiritual development.

Through storytelling, observation, and simple encounters with nature—such as children discovering flowers or small creatures—the centre nurtures curiosity and appreciation for creation. These experiences help children recognise the natural world as a gift and encourage a sense of responsibility for caring for it.

Dr. Gardner and Ms. Emily's work also support schools by providing outdoor learning opportunities and practical ecological activities. Schools are encouraged to create small biodiversity areas, such as planting a one-metre square habitat or installing bird or bat boxes. These small actions aim to cultivate hope by showing children that everyone can contribute to caring for the environment.

Collaboration is central to the centre's educational project. Partnerships with parishes, community groups, and organisations such as the King's Trust and the Columban Missionaries help bring diverse communities together to support ecological education and practical environmental work. The initiative also extends to neurodiverse people and adults who may have limited access to nature, including offenders such as people convicted of arson, offering therapeutic experiences that highlight the healing and reflective potential of natural environments.

Looking ahead, the *Laudato Si'* Centre's project seeks to expand its facilities, including developing indoor spaces to complement outdoor learning. The presentation concluded by emphasising the importance of sharing faith through care for creation and fostering hope through collective action, echoing the message that meaningful change can begin with the commitment of even a single individual.

KEY MESSAGES

- Early childhood engagement with nature fosters curiosity, respect for the environment, and a sense of responsibility for ecological care.
- Small, practical ecological actions can empower communities and schools to take an active role in protecting the environment.
- Nature has therapeutic and restorative value, supporting emotional wellbeing and reflection for both children and adults.



ADVANCING THE VISION OF *LAUDATO SI'* AND INTEGRAL ECOLOGY IN THE SALFORD DIOCESE

Dr Finlay Malcolm

Dr Finlay Malcolm's presentation outlined a three-year research project at the University of Manchester exploring the relationship between religion, theology, and climate change, and its subsequent collaboration with the Diocese of Salford, UK to translate theological insights into pastoral practice. The research involved 319 survey responses, 62 interviews, and analysis of 35 theological concepts, examining how Christian theology can respond to the ecological crisis.

A key finding from the study showed that care for creation should be understood as integral to Christian salvation theology, rather than as a separate ethical concern. The project emphasised that the mission of Christ, which is to seek and save what is lost—can be understood as encompassing the healing and restoration of creation.

Drawing on insights from Pope Francis, Pope John Paul II, and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, the presentation highlighted theological themes such as the gift of creation, communion with God and all creatures, grace encountered through nature, ecological sin, and the need for ecological conversion, reconciliation and redemption.

The research also explored how environmental harm reflects a broken relationship between humanity, God, and creation, calling for conversion, liberation from patterns of domination and consumption, and the renewal of the Earth. These ideas align closely with the vision of integral ecology articulated in *Laudato Si'*, which emphasises interconnectedness between spiritual, social, and ecological wellbeing.

Building on the research, a follow-on project with the Diocese of Salford (October 2025–March 2026) aimed to support practical implementation was conducted. Activities included formation programmes for clergy and parishioners, collaboration with seminaries, and engagement with national environmental networks. A new three-week parishioner course and a formation booklet on salvation and creation care have been developed to help communities deepen theological understanding and take practical environmental action.

KEY MESSAGES

- Creation care is integral to Christian salvation theology and, is not merely an ethical add-on
- Theological themes highlighted include- Creation as a gift from God; Communion between humanity, God, and all creatures through creation; Grace is encountered through nature.
- There is a relationship between ecological sin and human responsibility; Ecological conversion, redemption and renewal of creation.
- Aside research, a follow-on partnership with the Diocese of Salford focused on translating theology into parish formation and action. Meeting with the clergy and members of church congregations.
- Practical resources include formation events, a parish course, and educational materials on salvation and creation care.

CATHOLIC CHAPLAINCY AND CONNECTING COMMUNITIES THROUGH INTEGRAL ECOLOGY

Sister Alicia Pérez, FCJ

Sister Alicia's presentation explored the role of the Catholic Chaplaincy at the University of Manchester in fostering community engagement and environmental awareness through the lens of integral ecology. The chaplaincy operates as part of a multi-faith pastoral and spiritual support network, providing a welcoming space for students to explore faith, build relationships, and engage in social and environmental initiatives.



A key theme of the presentation was the chaplaincy's role as a bridge between faith, academia and local action in response to contemporary challenges such as climate change, social disruption, and student wellbeing. Guided by the principles of *Laudato Si'* and the pastoral document, *Care for Our Common Home*, the chaplaincy promotes ecological responsibility through practical activities that combine spiritual reflection with community engagement.

Examples of initiatives included weekly litter-picking, the walking club where students appreciate nature, book clubs and informal gatherings where students can share meals and conversation. These activities aimed to create supportive "warm spaces" on campus where students can find friendship, guidance, and a sense of belonging. Sustainability practices have also been implemented within chaplaincy facilities, including improved energy efficiency measures and recycling initiatives such as reusing candle wax.

THE RIGHT TO LIVE IN A CLEAN, GREEN AND HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT: A GENDER-BASED RESPONSE TO CLIMATE ACTION TO ENSURE ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Sister Franca Edet, DC

Sister Franca Edet presented an overview of a three-day advocacy training programme held in February 2026 in Calabar, Nigeria. Her project focused on promoting environmental sustainability and climate action through a gender-based, rights-oriented approach. The initiative emphasised the right of all people to live in a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment, linking environmental responsibility with social justice and human dignity.

The training brought together participants from randomly selected secondary schools, with each school represented by five female students and one female staff member. To encourage intergenerational dialogue, the programme also included young Catholic mothers, as well as traditional leaders, government officials, teachers, and health professionals. This diverse participation aimed to strengthen community networks and encourage collaboration across social sectors.



The key themes addressed during the training included the relationship between human rights and the Christian faith, stewardship of the Earth as a shared home, environmental degradation, advocacy skills, and the social consequences of environmental decline. Also, attention was given to the link between environmental degradation, migration pressures, and the increased vulnerability of young girls to human trafficking.

As training participants were encouraged to develop practical advocacy skills, some students created short video messages promoting environmental responsibility, community cooperation, and care for the "Mother Earth".

They also committed to support cleaner and greener schools by engaging with their school and local authorities.

KEY MESSAGES

- A key lesson learnt from the presentation was that empowering young people—particularly girls—through education, advocacy, and community engagement can create long-term cultural change and strengthen environmental stewardship across generations.
- Intergenerational and cross-sector engagement are vital for environmental sustainability as the young and the old could learn from each other.
- Recognising that environmental decline contributes to migration pressures and increases the vulnerability of girls to risks such as human trafficking.

“TREAD SOFTLY, YOU’RE STANDING ON HOLY GROUND” (EXODUS. 3:5): – INTEGRATING SPIRITUALITY AND ECOLOGY

Sister Joan Kerley

Sister Joan Kerley’s presentation showed how spirituality and ecological awareness are closely connected. Using Bible images, Christian poetry, and the Franciscan tradition, she explained that looking after nature is both a spiritual responsibility and something we must act on in daily life.

Using D.H. Lawrence’s poem *God is Born* and the story of the burning bush in Exodus 3:5, Sister Joan explained that feelings of awe, wonder, and paying close attention to the world help people develop a deeper awareness of the environment. She also explained that every part of creation—from the universe to human life—shows the ongoing presence of God and connected this idea to the message of *Laudato Si’*, which encourages people to live simply, reflect deeply, and value all forms of life.

Based on the work of Daniel Horan, Sister Joan also described three ways people relate to the environment. These include by dominion – where humans see themselves as superior to nature; stewardship – humans care for the Earth responsibly as a duty from God and, kinship – where humans see all living things as connected and valuable. According to her, St. Francis exemplifies the kinship approach, developed through a life of prayer, discernment, and engagement with the poor and marginalised.

Sister Joan shared the practical lessons which emerged from the work of the United Kingdom’s *Laudato Si’* Animators and the Franciscan Missionaries of St. Joseph (FMSJ), demonstrating how spirituality informs action. Their activities align with the seven goals of *Laudato Si’* as follows:

2. **Response to the Cry of the Earth:** Sustainable gardening, composting, litter picking, rainwater harvesting, use public transport when possible.
3. **Response to the Cry of the Poor:** Supporting local food banks, fair trade initiatives, solar-powered irrigation for communities, and assistance to

marginalised groups; Assisting people with furniture and clothes in the UK.

4. **Ecological Economics** e.g. promoting socially responsible investments; giving tips about changing to banking sectors that are more ecologically friendly or energy saving
5. **Adoption of Simple Lifestyles:** Reducing consumption; recycling and adopting plant-based diets.
6. **Ecological Education:** Teach students about biodegradable composting; training entrepreneurship students to recycle waste products into marketable items; promoting sustainability and environmental cleanliness.
7. **Ecological Spirituality:** These could include organising retreats, prayer services and contemplative practices to cultivate environmental awareness and care. Also, through promoting *Laudato Si’* and *Laudate Deum* with Associates and within parishes.
8. **Community Involvement and participatory action to care for creation at the local, regional, national, and international levels:** Participating in advocacy, lobbying, ecumenical initiatives, and local-to-global environmental campaigns.

During the presentation, **Sr. Joan** noted that one of the challenges faced by animators in their zeal to apply these goals in their communities was a pervasive sense of isolation. This often stemmed from limited support within parishes, difficulties in engaging young people, and constraints on resources. These challenges were particularly pronounced for older sisters and for younger members with limited financial means.

Sr. Joan emphasised that, despite these obstacles, faith-inspired collective action—rooted in prayer and contemplation—is essential for sustaining long-term commitment to integral ecology. In conclusion, we learned that “there is a symphony of grace in every living thing”.

KEY MESSAGES

- Ecological care is inseparable from spirituality; a sense of wonder and sacredness motivates and sustains action.

- Kinship with creation encourages practices that value interconnectedness rather than domination.
- Practical ecological initiatives e.g. from gardening to advocacy—must be grounded in prayer, community, and reflection.
- Perseverance, even amid challenges, is essential; collective efforts allow God's presence and grace to be "born" continually in the world.

CLIMATE CONTEMPLATION IN ACTION: INSPIRING ECOLOGICAL CONVERSION THROUGH SPIRITUAL CONVERSATION

Dr Ania Grobicki and Brother Geoff Te Braake SJ, co-founders of the Climate and Spirit Group.

Dr Ania Grobicki and Brother Geoff Te Braake explored the intersection of climate action and spiritual reflection. Their work integrates ecological knowledge and scientific understanding with spiritual practices. This fosters awareness, hope, and community engagement in the face of climate challenges, and deepens individual and group ecological conversion through spiritual conversation.

Spiritual-ecological integration is cultivated through a process of reflection and dialogue, where ecological conversion emerges from spiritual conversations. Practices such as the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius, engagement with personal experience, prayer

and the use of scripture are thoughtfully adapted to nurture ecological awareness.

This fosters a sense of interconnectedness between humanity and the natural world, mediated through the participation of the Holy Trinity. The approach and activities of the Climate and Spirit Group reflect this integrated vision. Inspired by *Laudato Si'* and established in 2024, the group engages with climate change and environmental and social challenges that demand holistic responses.

Their work includes international online gatherings, one-day workshops held across France and the UK, and the development of educational materials covering topics such as earth systems, nature-based solutions, integral ecology, and spiritual practices. These workshops also address the emotional dimensions of the climate crisis, including anxiety, grief, and injustice, employing imagery to illuminate inequalities and sources of hope.

Practical examples play a key role in grounding this work. Initiatives such as the Great Green Wall of Africa serve as powerful symbols of hope and large-scale ecological restoration and water conservation. Observations from regions such as the Amazon, Brazil and Iran highlight the profound human and climate consequences of deforestation and depletion of freshwater environments. At the same time, recognising human beings as carbon- and water-based life forms reinforces an understanding of our deep dependence on and intrinsic connection with the biosphere and all of life on Earth.





Community and group dynamics are central to sustaining this engagement. Geoff emphasises the importance of small, confidential listening groups where participants can share reflections, pray, and enter dialogue with God. These spaces have been reported to foster a greater sense of optimism, hope, and belonging among participants. Looking ahead, there are plans to expand this work through more in-person workshops, sharing materials and increasing partnerships and collaboration, in order to strengthen outreach and impact.

Several significant challenges have been identified within this work. Foremost among them is the acceleration of climate extremes, particularly within the water cycle, driven by the combined impacts of climate change and land-use change.

Alongside this, the reality of global climate injustice and inequality remains evident, with the suffering of increasing numbers of people through conflict and climate change. A further challenge lies in the difficulty of translating spiritual insights into concrete forms of climate action—especially actions capable of addressing social and environmental issues in an integrated and meaningful way.

In response to an audience question on cultivating ecological sensibilities through the Spiritual Exercises, it was explained that this practice plays a vital role in shaping our personal awareness. Individual experiences are integrated with scripture, prayer and contemplation, in a way that is carefully adapted to each person's

background, perspective, and insights. This personalised approach allows participants to engage more deeply with both their inner lives and the wider ecological reality.

Emphasis was placed on the importance of sensory experience in this process. By engaging sight, sound, touch, emotion, and the individual's imagination, the Spiritual Exercises create vivid and lasting impressions that deepen one's understanding of ecological interconnection and the need to act as Christ in the world. In turn, this strengthens the sense of relationship between people and the natural world, fostering a more embodied and meaningful awareness of our place and role within it.

KEY MESSAGES

- Spiritual reflection can cultivate ecological awareness, interconnectedness, and resilience.
- Personal and sensory experiences are crucial in encouraging ecological conversion and developing lasting commitment to action for people, water and nature.
- Community engagement, both online and in-person, strengthens hope, solidarity, and collective climate action.
- Integrated approaches—combining knowledge, spirituality, and practice—are essential for addressing the complex challenges of climate change.

Panel Session Summary

The panellist included *Ms. Emily Cahill, Sister. Franca Edet, DC, Dr Malcolm Finlay and Fr. Theodoros Polyviou.*

<https://youtu.be/Efyeb42Tzm4>

The panel discussion addressed practical challenges and opportunities for promoting integral ecology within church communities, educational settings, and wider society. The panel reflected on the importance of engagement, resource development, and intergenerational participation in sustaining environmental awareness and action.

One recurring challenge highlighted was participation. Ms. Emily noted that schools sometimes face financial barriers to visiting the Laudato Si' Centre, particularly the cost of transport, which means that outreach activities are sometimes taken directly to schools instead. While the centre attracts visitors from across the region, including neighbouring cities, encouraging broader engagement remains difficult, especially as the centre currently operates only during weekdays. Another challenge is addressing climate scepticism among some groups, which can hinder wider dialogue on environmental issues.

Reflecting on parish-based initiatives, Dr. Finlay discussed the difficulties of implementing integral ecology projects within church communities. A key priority is equipping clergy with accessible resources that connect Catholic theology with environmental concerns inspired by Laudato Si'. However, many clergy already face significant pastoral responsibilities and may perceive environmental engagement as an additional burden rather than an integrated aspect of ministry. As a result, participation often comes from individuals already interested in environmental issues, raising questions about how to reach wider audiences.

Perspectives from clergy further highlighted cultural and pastoral dimensions of the discussion. Father Linus reflected on the theological foundations of ecological awareness. He observed that when thinking about ecology and faith, the theology of creation must be central. While creation is already embedded in theology, in many parishes the focus remains

mainly on Mass and services. He contributed that greater participation and engagement beyond the liturgy would be helpful.

Similarly, Father Theodoros emphasised the importance of reconnecting faith with the natural world, drawing on his own experience: He stated that growing up in Cyprus, the connection with nature was part of everyday life through outdoor learning. In the UK, the opportunity is often limited to Sunday services. He further stated that if religious leaders do not connect God with nature, they cannot pass this on to others. That connection must be nurtured and shared, especially with young people, so that the seed is planted for the future.

Funding and sustainability were also discussed. Ms. Emily explained that activities at the Laudato Si' Centre are supported through a combination of donations, voluntary contributions from visiting schools, and external grants. However, funding can be challenging because many grant schemes exclude faith-based initiatives.

The discussion ended with participants reflecting on how to keep conversations about environmental issues going, especially at a time when society and politics are becoming more divided. Sister Franca emphasised the importance of engaging younger generations, noting that educational outreach and school-based projects can empower children to carry environmental awareness into the future.

Overall, the panel highlighted that advancing integral ecology **requires sustained community engagement, better support for clergy and educators, and greater investment in youth-focused initiatives.** The discussion also underscored the importance of integrating ecological concerns into existing pastoral, educational, and community structures rather than treating them as separate or additional responsibilities.



Climate and Spirit Group Workshop

The **Climate and Spirit workshop** commenced with presentations by Dr Ania Grobicki and Brother Geoff Te Braake, which built on the foundation lecture delivered during the first day of the Conference on *Connecting Communities through Integral Ecology (Laudato Si')*. The workshop sessions explored global environmental challenges, focusing on diverse environmental challenges particularly on water issues and their effects on ecosystems, communities, and future generations. Participants also heard lived experiences, which helped bring the issues to life and made the challenges more tangible.

Through compelling examples, participants gained a deeper understanding of the impact of human activity on the environment. The presentations were followed by structured breakout sessions using the reflect–listen–reflect approach of spiritual conversation, where everyone had the opportunity to share insights, engage with diverse perspectives, and thoughtfully process their learning. The session concluded with closing prayers.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE CONFERENCE AND WORKSHOP

- a. **Reflection matters:** Taking time to reflect and pray helps one to process information and respond meaningfully to the complex environmental issues we face. Listening to others within the structured environment of a spiritual conversation within a group can also be both therapeutic and enlightening.
- b. **Humans are part of the ecological picture:** Addressing ecological crises requires keeping human experiences, needs, and responsibilities in view.
- c. **Value of grassroots and participatory initiatives:** Community-based action was highlighted as essential for long-term environmental sustainability. One video illustrated this through the story of villagers who chose to remain and rebuild their community in an African country rather than migrate abroad.
- d. **Companionship in the ecological journey:** Participants recognised the need for companions in the work of integral ecology and environmental protection. Sharing knowledge, supporting one another and working together are essential to protecting our environment. A reference was made to *Surprised by Hope: Further Meditations on Synodality* by Timothy Radcliffe, which reflects on new ministries such as ecological advocacy and stewardships where people can serve.
- e. **Reframe how we relate with nature:** Nature is a subject, not an object to exploit. The works of Elizabeth A. Johnson, including her books *Creation and the Cross: The Mercy of God for a Planet in Peril*, and *Women, Earth, and Creator Spirit*, emphasise respect, care, and partnership with the environment.
- f. **Bring hope and joy into action:** Protecting the environment is not only a duty but a shared journey that thrives on enthusiasm,

hope, and joy as well as prayer, as part of the vocation of integral ecology.

- g. **Value of gatherings:** Conferences and workshops such as these provide nourishment, engagement, foster new connections, and provide opportunities to renew commitment to environmental action.
- h. **Benefits of spiritual conversations:** Small group discussions gave participants the chance to share ideas, reflect on their experiences, and leave feeling encouraged and inspired.

Assessment and Participation Feedback

This section provides an overview of the data collected from the conference. It includes feedback provided by participants. Data collected from participants show a high level of satisfaction across the events. A breakdown of the survey results is available below:

100% of participants were either 'Extremely satisfied' (27%) or 'Very satisfied' (73%) overall with the conference.

93% of participants were either 'Extremely satisfied' (46.66%) or 'Very satisfied' (46.66%) with the Speakers at the event.

94% of participants either 'Strongly agree' (37.5%) or 'Agree' (56.3%) that the conference met their expectations, whilst the remaining 6.3% were 'Neutral'.

86.7% of participants were either 'Extremely satisfied' (13.3%), or 'Very satisfied' (73.3%) with the overall structure of the conference whilst the remaining 6.7% were 'Neutral'.

81.3% of participants were either 'Extremely satisfied' (37.5%), or 'Very satisfied' (43.8%) with the conference objectives whilst the remaining 12.5% were 'Neutral'.

94% of participants found the talks 'Extremely useful' (44%), 'Useful' (50%), whilst the remaining 6% were 'Neutral'.

100% of participants were either 'Extremely aware' (29%), 'Very aware' (29%), 'Moderately aware' (35%) whilst the remaining 6% were 'Slightly aware' of the knowledge and understanding regarding integral ecology.

100% of the participants demonstrated awareness of integral ecology, with 29% reporting being 'Extremely aware'; 29% 'Very aware'; 35% 'Moderately aware,' and the remaining 6% 'Slightly aware'.

100% of participants indicated plans to act following the conference. The intended actions are distributed as follows:

- 44% of respondents expressed their intention to engage in future collaborative efforts.
- 33% indicated they will actively support initiatives connected to this project.
- 22% plan to incorporate the principles of integral ecology into their own work, with details which were specified individually.



SELECTED PLANNED INDIVIDUAL ACTIONS FOR ADVANCING INTEGRAL ECOLOGY

- *I will continue with my work to raise awareness among young people.*
- *I will proceed with zoom virtual training with school clubs for Environment.*
- *Linking with the Laudato Si' movement and training as a Laudato Si' animator.*
- *Try to share ideas in all the groups I am involved -- I will integrate ecology in my studies.*
- *I will integrate integral ecology into my activities-- Promoting the work of CAFOD, encourage parishes to do something small and manageable.*

What participants said about the conference and workshop

- *Great to hear from a diverse range of speakers-not just academics.*
- *So good to hear a variety of speakers. Lots to think about and share with others.*
- *Great hospitality! Thanks for lunch and teas and coffees and for organising a very packed but rich day!*
- *Great to meet others interested in working in this area and to hear insights into the challenges and hopes for the future.*
- *This conference has just confirmed for me my kinship with the whole of creation as I acknowledge beauty in all of creation.*
- *There is no better way to understand the need for learning about climate change than listen to experiences of people from places where climate change makes life difficult.*
- *I really enjoyed the day, particularly meeting people, thank you.*
- *Thank you for an interesting day. I liked the fact that the lectures were more accessible and not only academic.*
- *Events such as these provide nourishment, engagement, foster new connections.*

- *Gratitude for the companionship of those with whom I may journey.*
- *Wonderful input-especially on water!*
- *The sharing group of spiritual conversation.*
- *Gratitude to knowing such beautiful people.*
- *Excellent space for reflection.*
- *Provided much food for thought.*

Next Steps/Call to Action

Following the author's reflections on the presentations, discussions and, feedback it is important to identify next steps following these events.

- The aim will be to strengthen our networks and collaboration by providing updates, share resources and collate stories on environmental initiatives and programmes following the events.
- Promote community-based ecological action. Encourage parishes, schools, and community groups to adopt practical initiatives—such as ecological gardens, sustainability practices, and local environmental projects—that embody the principles of Laudato Si'.
- Continue organising workshops, conferences, and small listening groups where participants can share experiences, reflect spiritually on ecological challenges, and support one another in practical action.
- Identify funding opportunities and partnerships that can sustain initiatives, such as the Connecting Communities through Integral Ecology (Laudato Si'), The LS Centre and related educational and research programmes.
- To sustain this network through continued engagement to ensure that the insights and commitments from the conference and workshop translate into long-term action.





Connecting Communities Through Integral Ecology (Laudato Si') in the UK

www.meri.manchester.ac.uk/wies