



CLASSROOM APPLICATION

Oneness with Creation

Activity Summary: In this activity, students will explore the article's assertion that we have a deep oneness with Creation—a theological truth foundational to *Laudato si'*. The activity utilizes the mind map technique for this exploration. The activity ends by praying "Canticle of Sister Sun and Brother Moon."

STEP 1

Ask students to find and read the conclusion of the article. Invite the students to share what they think the last sentence means: "The ability of *Laudato si'* to help us see ourselves as part of an earth community birthed out of deep time is a major step in this direction." This can help you assess how deeply they understand the article's primary concept.

STEP 2

Divide students into pairs or triads. Distribute large sheets of blank paper to each group, 11" x 17" would be ideal. Tell the groups that they will be using the sheets to create mind maps of one aspect of their connection to the "earth community birthed out of deep time." If the students are unfamiliar with creating mind maps, briefly review the process with them. You can find a handout describing the mind map process at www.smp.org/resourcecenter.

Note: Alternatively, the mind maps could be created and shared digitally.





CLASSROOM APPLICATION

STEP 3

Give the following directions:

First, ask each team to choose an activity everyone in the group is familiar with. For example, playing soccer or driving a car. Write the name or draw a symbol of that activity in the center of the paper.

Next, identify three or four things that are necessary to do that activity. For example, let's assume you had playing soccer at the center of the paper. Radiating from the center you might have: 1. Air (for breathing), 2. Food (for energy), 3. Soccer Ball, and 4. Tennis Shoes. Write the name or draw a symbol of these things and connect each with lines to the center.

Now, pick just one of those things and identify and connect objects from the natural world that are necessary to create them. For example, for tennis shoes you might write or draw these objects: 1. Rubber Tree (for the soles), 2. Cotton Plants (for the uppers and shoestrings), 3. Oil (for anything plastic or polyester), 4. Wind Turbines (to create the electricity for the factory).

***Note:** To keep this activity brief, only complete part of the map, exploring only one of the things connected to the central focus activity. If time allows, you could have students map out the other two or three things they identified coming off the central focus.*

Now, pick just one of those things and identify what aspects of creation are needed to bring that thing into existence. For example, a rubber tree would need fertile soil, water, and sunlight. Keep this process going for as many connections back as you can identify. Can you connect your activity with the very beginning of the solar system or even the beginning of the universe?

Inform groups that they will have 15 minutes to work on their mind map together. As they are working, circulate among the groups to answer questions and redirect and check for understanding of the tasks.

Note: As your students get into fifth degree and higher levels of connection, they will eventually identify the earth and the sun as connected “things.” Our solar system was created from the stardust of earlier solar systems and galaxies, reaching all the way back to the Big Bang. As the well-known astronomer Carl Sagan famously said, “We are all made of star stuff.” If time allows, direct your students to investigate this concept using online search tools. A simple search using the phrase “we are made of stardust” will lead to several reputable science websites explaining this idea.

STEP 4

When the time is over, invite groups to present their mind maps to the class, using whatever method you typically use for this. After the groups have presented their maps, invite student reflection and discussion. Here are some possible discussion topics:

Invite the students to share one insight they gained from the activity.

Ask them to share what created things on their maps human beings have treated with dignity and respect, making the earth a healthy ecosystem, and which created things have human beings misused, perhaps making the earth less healthy for future generations.

Invite them to reflect on the following questions: How does connecting our existence back to the stars and even the beginning of the universe make you feel? Do you feel more important or less important in the big picture of creation? Why?

Repeat this sentence from the article’s summary: “In particular, *Laudato si’* highlights the fact that humans have a special kinship with non-human nature and are responsible for its continuity for future generations.” Ask, how did this exercise help you better understand our “special kinship”—our interconnectedness—with all creation?

Note: If this is to be a graded project, consider making a simple rubric with criteria for levels of connection identified, accuracy of the connections, clarity and neatness, and presentation. You may also have them write and turn in a paragraph describing how this activity illustrates the thoughts of Teilhard de Chardin and Thomas Berry from the article.





CLASSROOM APPLICATION

STEP 5

Bring the activity to a close with your observations on the students' work and the connections with *Laudato si'*. Some possible closing points:

Science has helped the Church see even more deeply the spiritual connections among all created things. Scientists and theologians like Teilhard and Berry do not see science and faith at odds with each other.

Humankind is deeply reliant on a "healthy" planet. If the earth becomes polluted, diseased, and out of balance, human beings will also suffer the effects.

In light of this reality, *Laudato si'* emphasizes the importance of humanity's role in caring for the earth. Rather than seeing the earth and its goods as things to be exploited, we must treat them with reverence and respect.

Treating the earth with reverence and respect is one of the most important moral issues of our time. In the last two or three hundred years human beings have caused devastating damage to the earth through pollution, unsustainable mining and agricultural practices, overfishing, and so on. Even if we change our ways immediately, the consequences of these actions will take centuries to heal and some of these consequences will never be repaired (such as the loss of countless plant and animal species). Because such radical change is needed, in *Laudato si'* Pope Francis calls us to a renewed moral commitment to work together to heal and protect all creation.

STEP 6

End by praying St. Francis's "Canticle of Sister Sun and Brother Moon." Like many great mystics in the Church, Saint Francis had a keen sense of our intimate connection with the created universe, which he gave voice to in this canticle. The class could pray this together, or take turns reading stanzas on the following page.

Be praised Good Lord for Brother Sun
who brings us each new day.
Be praised for Sister Moon: white
beauty bright and fair, with wandering
stars she moves through the night.
Be praised my Lord for Brother Wind,
for air and clouds and the skies of every season.
Be praised for Sister Water: humble,
helpful, precious, pure; she cleanses
us in rivers and renews us in rain.
Be praised my Lord for Brother fire:
he purifies and enlightens us.
Be praised my Lord for Mother Earth:
abundant source, all life sustaining;
she feeds us bread and fruit and gives us flowers.
Be praised my Lord for the gift of life;
for changing dusk and dawn; for touch
and scent and song.
Be praised my Lord for those who
pardon one another for love of thee,
and endure sickness and tribulation.
Blessed are they who shall endure it in
peace, for they shall be crowned by Thee.
Be praised Good Lord for sister Death
who welcomes us in loving embrace.
Be praised my Lord for all your
creation serving you joyfully.

