

# ***BECOMING ECO-FRIENDLY FAMILIES***

***A MARFAM PROJECT with the vision of  
OUR WORLD, A FAMILY OF FAMILIES, 2024***

***In the context of UN International Year of the Family + 30***

***Theme: Families and Climate Change***



INTERNATIONAL  
DAY OF FAMILIES  
15 MAY [2024]



[2024] THIRTIETH  
ANNIVERSARY OF THE  
INTERNATIONAL  
YEAR OF THE FAMILY



**Christian unity week**

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## **BACKGROUND NOTES.**

### **FROM International Year of the Family (DESA) on events of 15 May 2024.**

The **United Nations DESA** (Department of Economic and Social Affairs), is a UN thinktank, responsible for raising awareness and offering support for families. It organized the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the International Year of the Family and hosted an in-person event in New York on the 15<sup>th</sup> May, the annual International Day of Families. The observance included the launch of various publications and reports on achievements of the IYF+30 preparatory process and outcomes of expert regional meetings, symposia and awareness-raising events. Civil society initiatives included the Civil Declaration on IYF+30.

The UN event programme and references to publications can be accessed on <https://social.desa.un.org/sites/default/files/IDF.2024.PROGRAMME.FOR%20POSTING.final.pdf>

**S.A. DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT FAMILY DIRECTORATE.** The preparatory DESA concept paper on the UN International Year of the Family 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary was circulated within the DSD network. **A NATIONAL EVENT** will be held in Gauteng to commemorate the event and will focus primarily on social cohesion and various UN IDF subthemes of recent years. **The SA Revised White Paper on Families 2021** is a guiding document for family life in South Africa with the priorities of promoting family well-being, relationship strengthening and support for vulnerable families. Climate change and its impact has not featured directly as a focal area to date. Through the DSD National Family Services Forum, other departments, NGOs and FBO's are stakeholders who do address specific issues.

### **MARFAM NOTES:**

**MARFAM - Marriage and Family Life Renewal Ministry**, an FBO, (Faith Based organization) and independent family support resource, within the Catholic Church, has been an active stakeholder since the inception of the Department of Social Development Family Directorate in 2004. A major component of the work is publications, currently many digital media. Family based themes on many aspects of family life, as units of various kinds are used, recognizing that women-headed families are a very common form. The annual UN IDF themes have been used over the years in workshops and parish training.

A current campaign is being held incorporating other events together with the celebration of IYF +30 : a week of PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY 12-19 May

and LAUDATO SI WEEK 19- 26 May focusing on care of the environment. MARFAM also celebrates its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2024-5 and has as its current vision OUR WORLD, A FAMILY OF FAMILIES with a specific project BECOMING ECO-FRIENDLY FAMILIES. God as creator who loves and sustains the earth has created all the ecosystems - human, animal and plant - as families. This vision brings a spiritual dimension to climate change in addition to the practical, economic and social understanding. [www.marfam.org.za](http://www.marfam.org.za) outlines the vision.

## **INTRODUCTION.**

*Parts of the article below, which incorporates MARFAM's Faith-based focus, have been adapted from the background notes prepared for the UN IYF event.*

This MARFAM publication is being produced at a special moment as **FAMILIES AND CLIMATE CHANGE** was the theme chosen for the celebration of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UN International Year of the Family.

Since 1994 and the 1<sup>st</sup> International Year of the Family an annual relevant theme was chosen by the UN. These included intergenerational matters, men and fatherhood and many more. Some recent issues, e.g. new technologies, urbanization and migration are being included in the 2024 UN IYF focus. An issue of great concern in 2024 is the impact of climate change on our world. At the same time the importance of families as core building blocks of society needs to be highlighted and reinforced. This paper takes both of these matters into consideration, from the perspective that climate change does have major impacts on family wellbeing and families have a role to play in climate action. These will be unpacked with some suggestions proposed for family action.

## **PART 1.**

### **THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON FAMILY WELL-BEING.**

The various UN resources aim to raise awareness of both the impact of climate change on families and the role of families in climate action.

Climate change negatively impacts the health and well-being of families. Natural phenomena exist and happen but they have been affected by human activity such as deforestation, burning of fossil fuels, misuse of water and pollution, which have resulted in raised temperatures, build-up of greenhouse gasses and changes in weather patterns.

Pollution and extreme weather events such as severe storms with strong winds and heavy rain, lead to floods and destruction of property. These and drought and water shortages, excessive heat and cold affect the lives and livelihoods of families greatly. Farming and food production are affected, increasing poverty and hunger. At times people are displaced or choose to migrate, with disruption in family life. All these have economic impacts on necessary industries and result in a loss of employment. Impacts are not only on the human family but on all ecosystems and families of creation.

### **THE ROLE OF FAMILIES IN CLIMATE CHANGE AND ACTION.**

Our lifestyles have a profound and mostly negative impact on the planet's health. Our use of power for lighting, cooking, heating and cooling, modes and frequency of travel, what we eat and what we use, from clothing to plastics and electronics, all contribute to greenhouse gas emissions, i.e. higher CO<sub>2</sub> levels. Materialism and advertising contribute to consumerist attitudes and behaviour, encouraging people to buy much more than they need and wastage is a major problem. Every family member in every way contributes in greater or lesser degrees. Our diets and eating habits, sports and entertainment industries also play a role. A carbon footprint measuring tool can indicate how much carbon we each produce and demonstrate how the more wealthy, who use more power, contribute many times more to this harmful situation.

### **THE NEED FOR RESPONSIBLE ACTION BY EVERYONE.**

Drastic action needs to be taken by everyone. Among the responsible role players are government departments, civil society which includes NGOs, Faith-based organisations (FBOs) and (CBOs) Community Based organisations. Climate change is an aspect of nature itself, and creation and the role of a Creator are also important moral and spiritual aspects in a consideration of climate change with churches and religious structures playing a major role. Individuals and all families, government, power producers and all forms of industry, farmers and all food producers, financial institutions and even our leisure activities can and should take relevant action to limit the harmful effects of our lifestyles.

Without such drastic action for climate justice, being able to adapt and mitigate the impacts of climate change will become increasingly difficult and costly. More ambitious positive climate action by governments, the private sector and citizens is a must. Through family and community initiatives, society

can foster effective climate action with education, access to information, training and community participation. Corruption and abusive practices must be challenged and accountability should be enforced.

By providing families with tools to form strong positive foundations and habits regarding climate change, civic awareness and activism can and must increase. Government policies that support and advocate for family empowerment within the context of climate change are crucial in securing a safe, resilient and sustainable future for everyone. The understanding and acceptance of interdependence of all areas of life is essential.

### **WHAT PRACTICAL THINGS CAN FAMILIES DO?**

Families contribute to the harm through their way of life. Making changes in lifestyle, taking informed and positive steps for climate action can equally help to reduce the impact and undo some of the harm. Education, changing consumption and advocacy are the ways to address the challenges. Education happens in our schooling system, but even more important is the knowledge and change that happens in the home. If sustainable habits and climate awareness are present within all types of families, parents, children and other carers can learn from each other.

Adult education, self-empowerment for eco-friendly decision-making, supporting community initiatives and integrating family-centred intergenerational approaches into policies can ensure meaningful climate action. Advocacy, by all for all, is a necessary attitude towards a co-responsible way of life with the ideal of “Each one, teach one” being adopted from young, even to those in the workplace and areas of control and power.

Clearly access to education and information is critical in addressing climate change and its causes and fostering climate action and many resources can be mobilised. Equally essential is a change in world-view towards the common good, the willingness to overcome indifference and greed and the short-term focus on economics and profit, so as to face the challenges now and in the future for all people, especially the vulnerable and the poor, our children, grandchildren and the wider world of creation.

### **THE ROLE OF THE FAITH-BASED SECTOR IN ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE.**

South Africa is primarily a Christian country with a number of different denominations. Other religious bodies, African traditional, Hindu, Muslim, Jewish, and more are also recognized. Most Christians and believers of other

faiths, accept that the earth was created and is sustained by a Higher Power known by many as “God.” One particular annual commemoration of a month-long “Season of Creation” is an ecumenical initiative of reflection, worship and acceptance of stewardship and co-responsibility in human “Care of Creation.”

Various Faith-based organisations have taken a stand on the issue of climate change. Pope Francis, the head of the Catholic Church in 2015 presented a document known as *Laudato Si*, which means “Praise God.” It is addressed to the whole world and includes a study of the reality facing all of creation, the impact on and of climate change, loss of biodiversity, the human roots of the ecological crisis and proposed lines of action towards an integral ecology. A particular emphasis is on “The Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor.” Other resources and movements have developed from this study. The LAUDATO SI MOVEMENT was created to raise awareness, do advocacy work towards climate justice and offers responses through a number of programmes, one of which is THE LAUDATO WEEK being celebrated from 19-26 May 2024. The LAUDATO SI ACTION PLATFORM has introduced a series of goals towards positive climate action. As well as a serious critique Pope Francis does also praise initiatives and actions by individuals or families as well as by corporate and governments, as these must go side by side. *“There are no lasting changes without cultural changes, and no cultural changes without personal changes.”*  
*Laudate Deum 70*

See [www.laudatosimovement.org](http://www.laudatosimovement.org) and [www.laudatosiactionplatform.org](http://www.laudatosiactionplatform.org). Resources are also available from other FBOs, e.g. Anglican church

MARFAM has adopted the concept of integral ecology and linked it with family life, in its project with the vision of “Our World, a Family of Families” which recognizes that the reality of a family, which is commonly the place for reproduction, is a factor in all the elements of creation, human, plant and animal. The project consists of implementation of the vision towards “BECOMING ECO-FRIENDLY FAMILIES.” A publication *Families Caring for God’s Creation*” is one current available resource together with a daily thought published and distributed digitally. Contact [toni@marfam.org.za](mailto:toni@marfam.org.za)

## **PART 2. RESOURCES for Families to address Climate Change.**

The UN DESA background paper launched on 15 May at the UN International Day of Families observance, ***“Climate Change and Families,”*** stresses that families, as central building blocks of society, have a significant role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

Many organisations and groups have produced lists of possible actions, often for “families” in a general, generic sense. But families, whatever their form, are sociologically described as changing and developing systems, and so awareness and teaching happens from early childhood, to debate and discussion from school and university level, to the practical activities of the workplace. Be selective therefore and develop or choose what is relevant and practically possible from these various lists of suggestions and make your own and your family list.

**“BECOMING ECO-FRIENDLY FAMILIES,”** is MARFAM’s environmental awareness and action project. [www.marfam.org.za](http://www.marfam.org.za)

### **WHAT PRACTICAL ACTION STEPS FAMILIES CAN TAKE.**

- Explore and use the available resources and detailed suggestions provided by them.
- Conduct a carbon footprint analysis and make necessary lifestyle changes. (Google a suitable worksheet to complete.)
- Ideally families as units could adopt any issue together, which can also strengthen their own relationships as they expand their knowledge and love for the environment.
- Nature visits, research projects, photography, social media chat groups, writing and art work, tree or vegetable planting can be done.
- As parents spend time with children from very young showing and teaching about life, nature, God and creation
- When practical activities are not possible there is great value in family study, communication and sharing insights on the topics which can result in spiritual and practical enrichment and adoption of causes.
- Join any of many environmental awareness groups focusing on wildlife conservation, climate justice advocacy, plastic waste collection, poverty alleviation, environmental clean-up projects, water warriors, etc.

**A CIRCULAR ECONOMY. REUSE, REDUCE, RECYCLE.** The concept of a circular economy has been suggested as a sustainable model to be adopted in place of the current linear, consumption-based economies of many nations that results in the mountains of waste dumps around the world and the clogging up of rivers and oceans. A circular economy aims for sustainable development, reuse, and little wastage. With proper implementation and management it is possible to achieve minimal waste and promote the sustainable use of natural resources as well as a sustainable economic future. Apart from the innovative technology, smart product design, longevity of use, recycling and regeneration a buy-in from the population is required.

Families can contribute by being conscious consumers and implementing the slogan Re-Use, Reduce, Recycle. This can be instilled from early childhood so as to become ingrained values and practices. Families can also advocate for climate-friendly solutions in their churches, communities and workplaces and demand climate action at the local and national levels. It is important that families take co-responsibility in every area of life, become resilient in their own way and not depend completely on the services and actions of leaders in governments and other providers.

**LAUDATO SI ACTION PLATFORM.** Laudato Si is a study document produced by Pope Francis as a guide on practical, spiritual and scientific matters with the subtitle *Care for our Common Home*. Initiatives have grown from this including the LS Action Platform with seven specific identified goals. See [www.laudatosi.org](http://www.laudatosi.org). [www.laudatosiactionplatform.org](http://www.laudatosiactionplatform.org)

**1. The Response to the Cry of the Earth** is a call to protect our common home for the wellbeing of all, as we equitably address the climate crisis, biodiversity loss, and ecological sustainability.

**2. The Response to the Cry of the Poor** is a call to promote eco-justice, to defend human life from conception to death, and all forms of life on Earth. A call also assists with poverty alleviation projects.

**3. Ecological Economics** acknowledges that the economy and finances which play an important role in human society need to be considered from an ecological perspective.

**4. Adoption of Sustainable Lifestyles** is about the ideals of sufficiency versus over-use and sustainability in the human use of resources and energy.

**5. Ecological Education** is about fostering ecological awareness and transformation through teaching and learning, re-thinking and re-designing curricula.



**6. Ecological Spirituality** springs from an ecological conversion and helps us to “discover God in all things,” from the beauty of creation to the sighs of the sick and afflicted, aware that life in the spirit is not remote from realities.

**7. Community Resilience and Empowerment.** A journey of community engagement and participatory action from and beyond the family.

**SOME SUGGESTED EXAMPLES AND SACRIFICES responding to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor from the LS Action Platform.**

- What changes or sacrifices would you be willing to make in your personal/family life to ensure a more sustainable future for humanity and other forms of life (select as many as you like)
- Do a carbon footprint energy audit to check your family carbon emission.
- Power your home with renewable energy/solar, insulate buildings.
- Invest in energy-efficient appliances, don't overuse air-conditioning and heating, dress wisely.
- Save electricity, switch off unused plugs and appliances.
- Recycle household waste, reduce water waste, use grey water in garden and toilets.
- Cut down on meat, change to a more plant-based diet
- Plant vegetables and fruit trees and eat locally produced food
- Plant indigenous trees to combat pollution, remove invasive species.
- Protect the environment for bees and insects, healthy soil, use organic fertilizer, make compost.
- Cut down on car and air travel, use public transport, walk/cycle if possible.
- Participate in neighbourhood clean-ups.

**A SPIRITUAL REFLECTION. THE CRY OF THE POOR. Reflection from Pope Francis' 2022 theme for the World Day for the Poor. “Christ's poverty makes us rich.”**

“Encountering the poor enables us to put an end to many anxieties and empty fears, and to arrive at what truly matters in life, the treasure that no one can steal from us: true love. The poor, before being the object of our almsgiving, are people who can help set us free from anxiety and superficiality. If we want life to triumph over death, and dignity to be redeemed from injustice, we need to follow Christ's path of poverty, sharing our lives out of love, breaking the bread of our daily existence with our brothers and sisters, beginning with the least of them, those who lack the very essentials of life.”

## **SOME ECO-FRIENDLY ACTS OF LOVE AND SACRIFICE**

Two purposes: give glory to God and benefit God's creation.

**"LIVE SIMPLY SO THAT OTHERS MAY SIMPLY LIVE".** A sacrifice is something offered to God. It can mean taking up something, doing, making, giving extra time for the benefit of others, but it is offered to God. Make up your own family calendar for a special period of time and include environmental needs. This can provide many ideas for action and for prayer as individuals or in a family.

**Study and Read:** subscribe to eco-friendly newsletters on line. Select topics of interest to study further on climate, biodiversity and simpler lifestyle. Read up on biomimicry. Read up on water saving, electricity saving, carbon footprints, healthy diets. Watch wildlife TV series and programmes on climate action and protection of creation around the world. Study St Francis life and way of life. Study Pope Francis writings especially *Laudato Si'*.

**Do:** Do a family project on becoming eco-friendly: pray privately and together, do faith sharing together. check your family carbon footprint and make adjustments to cut the footprint. Save energy and water. grow herbs, vegetables, trees, eat more healthily – less meat, more vegetables, support conservation projects for wild life, birds, bees, insects. Lobby about chosen issues – plastic pollution, environmental clean-up. Donate unused items to charity. Hold family fast days (Friday fast) save money and donate for feeding projects. Exercise to keep fit. From time to time have a Family Reconciliation service and a Family Prayer Meal.

**Save money:** Cut down alcohol, smoking, fizzy drinks, junk food, bottled water, cut car use. Think 2ce before you spend money, do a clothes-swop, buy in bulk and share.

**Waste-reduction:** Avoid single use plastics, styrofoam, avoid wasting food, compost kitchen garbage and food wastage.

**Energy Saving:** Do energy check, switch off unnecessary lights and plugs, use solar power, use rechargeable batteries. Cut down on TV and computer time to save energy and data.

**Water saving:** Use "grey" water from bath, shower and washing for toilets and garden. Don't run taps when not needed. Use drip irrigation in garden or veggie patch.

**Recycle:** Contribute to recycling projects. Plastic, paper, glass,

**General:** clean up the environment, recycle, plant trees, support ecological campaigns in church, school and society.

**Care for others:** Befriend, share, give to poor, give away unused items, show care for sick and lonely, elderly and unborn.

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**A FAMILY PRAYER FOR THE WORLD AS A FAMILY OF FAMILIES adapted from LAUDATO SI' by Pope Francis.**

God of love, we praise you and thank you with all your creatures that make up the family of creation.

Show us, as human families, our place in this world as channels of your love for all your creatures, as not one is forgotten in your sight.

Enlighten us, especially those who possess power and money, that we may avoid the sins of selfishness, indifference and greed.

May we love the common good and care for the poor, weak and suffering.

Help us to protect all life and prepare for a better future, as we hope and pray for the coming of your Kingdom of justice and peace, of freedom, love and beauty. Amen

**PRAYER OF ST FRANCIS FOR SOUTHERN AFRICA**

O God of justice and love bless us the people of Southern Africa and help us to live in your peace.

Lord make me an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love;

Where there is injury, let me sow pardon;

Where there is discord, let me sow harmony.

Divine Master grant that I may not so much

Seek to be understood as to understand

to be loved as to love,

to receive sympathy as to give it.

For it is in giving that we receive

In pardoning that we are pardoned

In forgetting self that we shall unending peace with others.

(Adapted from the Prayer of St Francis by the SA Catholic Bishops Conference)

# FAMILIES CARING FOR GOD'S CREATION



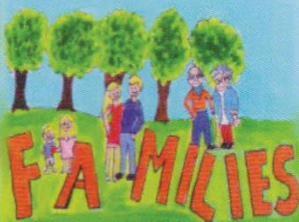
When all has been said and done,

WHAT WILL BE LEFT TO EAT?



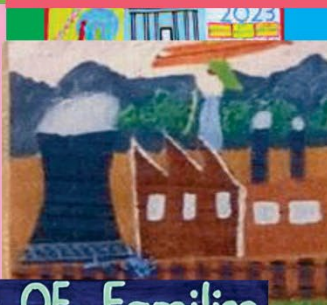
**Pope Francis  
Laudato Si'**

*May our struggles never take away the JOY of our HOPE*



Fill the world with love

Toni Rowland



 Our World A Family OF Families