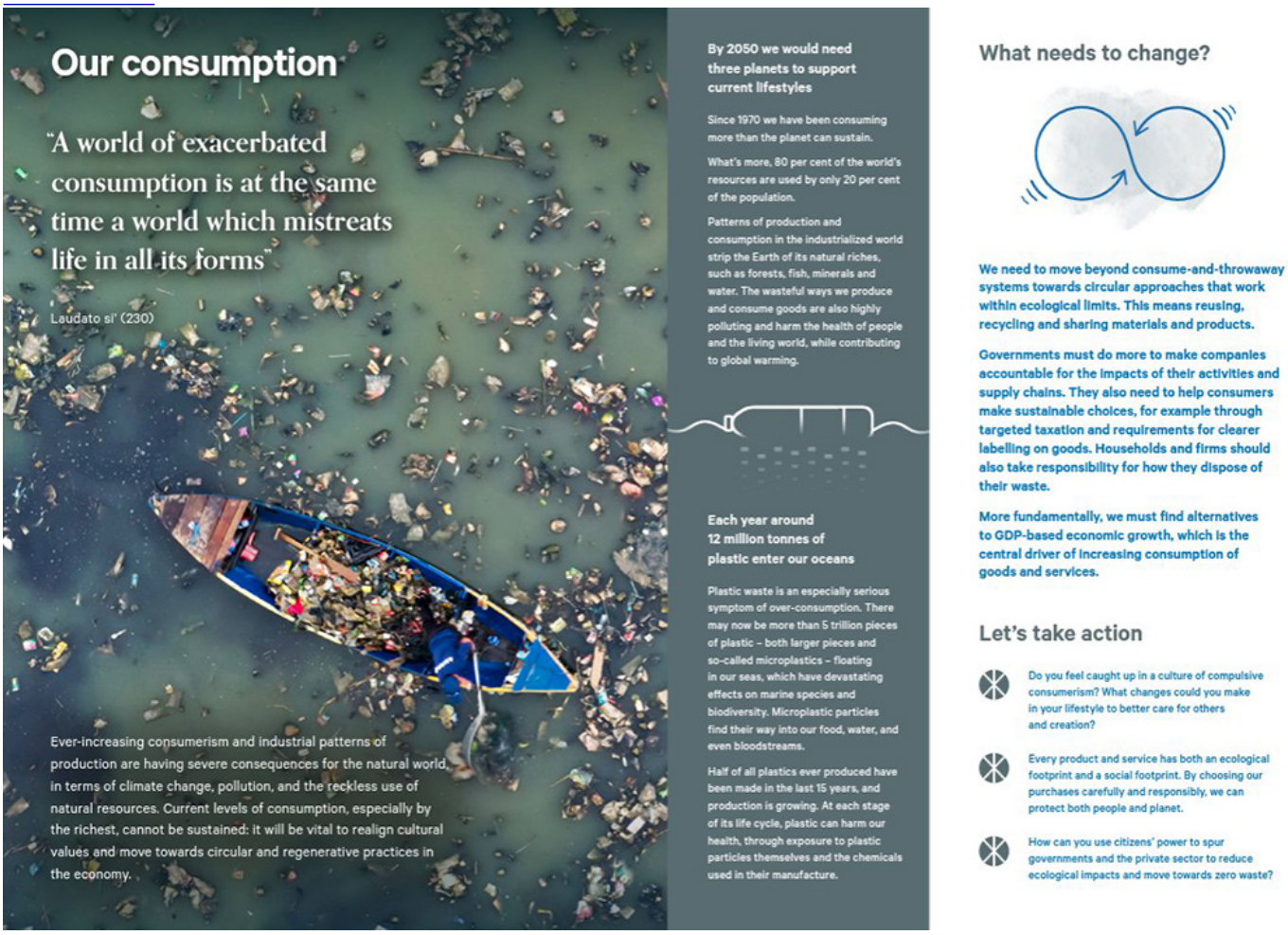
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An illustrated page from a new publication by the Stockholm Environment Institute and the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development released Feb. 14. The 20-page guide, titled "Our Common Home: A Guide to Caring for our Living Planet," connects the science of climate change, biodiversity and sustainable resource use with the messages of Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical, "*Laudato Si*', on Care for Our Common Home." (CNS/Screenshot from SEI)



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A new collaboration of faith and science looks to equip Catholics with the knowledge and means to turn prayers into actions on the multitude of environmental challenges around the globe, from climate change and pollution, to the rapid loss of species and ecosystems.

"Our Common Home: A Guide to Caring for Our Living Planet," is a just-released digital and print resource to help Catholic communities respond to Pope Francis' calls to protect the created world and develop a more sustainable future. It was the result of a joint initiative between the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development and the Stockholm Environment Institute, a scientific research and policy organization headquartered in the Swedish capital. The idea was first raised in 2020 by the Swedish embassy to the Holy See. The embassy funded the project.

The new guidebook provides a straightforward scientific overview of seven environmental topics:

- Climate;
- Biodiversity;
- Water;
- Air pollution;
- Food production;
- Sustainable consumption;
- Environmental and social justice.

For each, it offers a summary of the topic paired with a passage from "*Laudato Si*', on Care for Our Common Home" — Francis' 2015 encyclical on ecology — along with brief descriptions of what is required to address the problem and suggested reflections and action steps for people to take.



The cover of "Our Common Home: A Guide to Caring for Our Living Planet" (CNS/Screenshot from SEI)

Cardinal Michael Czerny, head of the integral human development office, said the "Our Common Home" booklet merges faith and science to "empower" people to take values-driven actions in their local communities to combat climate change and environmental destruction and protect vulnerable people and the ecosystems to which they belong.

"We are at a critical historical moment where actions today will determine the fate of generations to come," he said at a virtual launch event Feb. 14.

"The challenge ahead is monumental; we need nothing short of a 'bold cultural revolution' to respond to it adequately," Czerny said, referencing a line from *Laudato Si'*. "And bold, indeed, is this booklet." While slim at 20 pages, "it is packed with action suggestions that promise to bring about just and sustainable transitions."

Måns Nilsson, Stockholm Environment Institute executive director, said at the event, "One thing we know is that connecting with people's values and sense of their place in the world is crucial to have change."

He added that the collaboration, a first of its kind for the institute, was a way to reach not just people's minds about climate change and other environmental challenges "but also their hearts and souls."

The "Our Common Home" booklet is accessible online, and the dicastery has more than 500,000 print copies ready for distribution around the world. It is available in English, French, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish.

A dicastery spokesman told EarthBeat it has informed bishops' conferences about the booklets, with 5,000 already postmarked for Brazil, and that requests for print copies can be made with its office. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops did not respond to questions about whether it planned to distribute the booklet.

Related: At Earth Day checkpoint, Vatican's bold Laudato Si' initiative plants seeds of sustainability in the church

The "Common Home" guidebook is the latest resource to assist participants in the Laudato Si' Action Platform, the Vatican initiative to mobilize faith-inspired ecological actions across the global Catholic Church. To date, nearly 7,000 individuals and church institutions, including schools, parishes, dioceses, congregations and businesses, have enrolled in the Laudato Si' Action Platform.

"Our goal was to increase knowledge, awareness and debate within Catholic congregations worldwide and help Catholics heed the pope's call to protect our common home," said Molly Burd, Stockholm Environment Institute project lead for the booklet.

On climate change, the guidebook states that "without a far-reaching response, a changing climate will undermine the conditions that have allowed us to thrive on our planet," and that addressing the crisis will require "fundamental changes to our economies and behaviour."

Added Czerny, "Current modes of economic development rely on the unsustainable burning of fossil fuels; the current market pushes harmful levels of consumption that pollute the environment with garbage as well as our souls and spirits with insatiable greed. But this wild license to consume is enjoyed by a shrinking minority of the global population that hoards power and wealth and ignores any sense of the genuine common good."



Ducks swim past plastic bottles and other debris floating on the Tiber River in Rome July 28, 2019. In his 2015 encyclical, "Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home,"

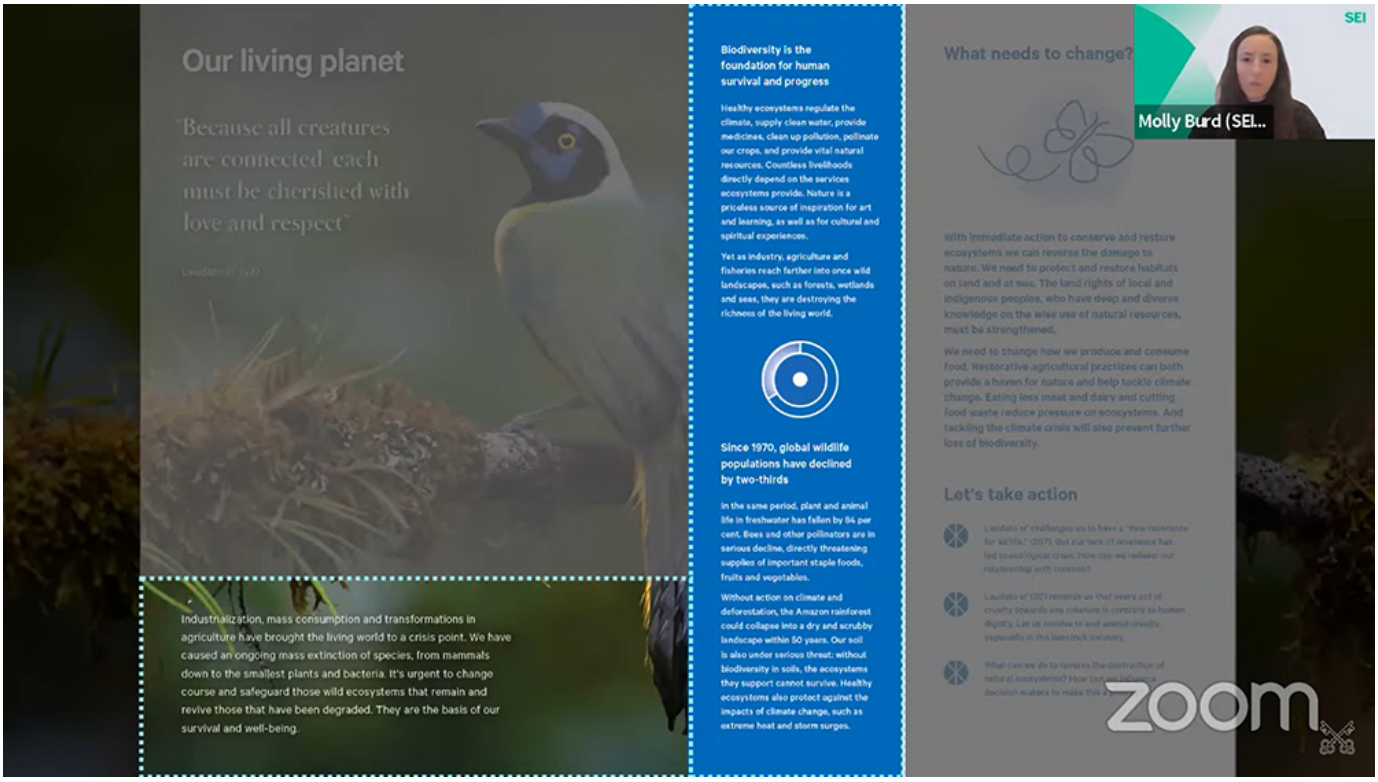
Pope Francis said that "the earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth." (CNS/Paul Haring)

The cardinal said it was essential for economic priorities to shift "from raw GDP growth toward integral human development," stressing the importance of Indigenous peoples, women and youth in all decision-making.

In many cases, the "Our Common Home" booklet highlights how environmental issues are interrelated, and reflect the principles of integral ecology and integral human development. For instance, it explains that burning fossil fuels is a main source of air pollution that threatens the health of people and ecosystems while also raising global temperatures, which in turn contributes to water and food shortages.

John Mundell, director of the Laudato Si' Action Platform, expressed excitement for the new guide, saying it provides clear explanations of environmental issues with practical ways to respond in easily understandable language.

"The time to respond is not tomorrow, it is today. The time for polite conversations and speeches is past," he said. "Only dramatic changes beginning today, right now, in both our personal lifestyles and choices as well as our communal policies and governance will head off the rising temperatures and their devastating consequences."



Molly Burd, project lead for the Stockholm Environment Institute for the "Our Common Home" guidebook, previews one of its pages during a virtual launch event Feb. 14. The institute collaborated on the book with the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. (NCR screenshot)

Mundell, a scientist and environmental engineer based in Indianapolis, shared that since it formally launched in November 2021, registrations for the Laudato Si' Action Platform have totaled 150 dioceses, 540 religious congregations, 700 religious communities, 385 parishes, more than 1,000 schools, 800 hospitals, businesses and organizations, and more than 3,000 families and individuals. Together, he said the groups represent 4 million people worldwide, a small sliver compared to the total 1.3 billion Catholics.

During a January webinar hosted by Catholic Climate Covenant, Mundell said that dioceses represent just 5% of sign-ups worldwide so far for the Laudato Si' Action Platform. In the U.S., 17 have done so, and only one — Chicago — is among the 10 largest dioceses in the country. Encouraging more dioceses to join will be a focus this year, he added, along with recruiting additional sign-ups overall and having those already on board submit reflection and action plans.

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"Part of that is engaging our dioceses and our parishes, because they represent a large leadership component for our church. We know that if they're active, if they engage, the rest of the Catholic world will engage," Mundell said.

The launch of the new "Common Home" guidebook is the latest effort by the Vatican to provide people tools and resources to put Francis' messages around environmental responsibility and sustainability into action. That includes a documentary film on the encyclical, "The Letter," that debuted in October on YouTube and has drawn more than 8 million views to date.

Earlier in February, the Vatican Governorate announced that Castel Gandalfo, long the traditional papal summer residence south of Rome, will now house the Borgo Laudato Si' project, which will promote ecological conversion through education and

training activities amid the villa's famous gardens.

According to Vatican News, the project will focus on integral ecology, circular and generative economy and environmental sustainability, and will be overseen by the Laudato Si' Centre for Higher Education, which Francis formally established by papal decree on Feb. 2.

A version of this story appeared in the **March 3-16, 2023** print issue under the headline: Science institute partners with Vatican on guide to protect Earth.