

Creation Time

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In 2015 Pope Francis designated 1 September annually as a World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation in the Catholic Church. The day of prayer, the pope said, gives individuals and communities an opportunity to implore God's help in protecting creation and an opportunity to ask God's forgiveness "for sins committed against the world in which we live". Pope Francis said he was instituting the prayer day for Catholics because he shares the concern of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, who initiated the 1 September prayer day for the Orthodox Church in 1989. And, of course, 2015 was the year that *Laudato Si'*, the Environment Encyclical was produced. On 1 September 2016, Pope Francis led vespers for the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation in St. Peter's Basilica. Similar prayer services were held around the world.

The day also marks the beginning of a longer contemplation on the planet the pope regularly refers to as "our common home". The Season of Creation is a month-long prayerful observation of the state of the world, its beauty and the ecological crises that threaten it and all its inhabitants. It runs from 1 September, the World Day of Prayer for Creation, through to 4 October, the feast day of St. Francis of Assisi. It also incorporates harvest services, which have long been celebrated around this time. Pope Francis encourages all the Catholic church to be engaged in the day of prayer and the spiritual and lifestyle transformations he has called for in his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, on *Care for Our Common Home*.

The Global Catholic Climate Movement, which includes around 300-plus networks which focus on creation care, coordinated efforts and shared resources for the 2016 Season of Creation. The NJPN and Columbans will be doing this for Catholics in Britain for 2017. Other sponsors of the Season of Creation include the World Council of Churches and the Anglican Communion Environmental Network, and many services are ecumenical.

Outlines of services held over the past two years for the Day of Prayer for Creation will be made available, providing a combination of reflections on scripture passages, sermon ideas, prayers and hymn choices. The NJPN Conference in July, 'A Sabbath for the Earth and the Poor – The Challenge of Pope Francis', will provide further formation and preparation. Resource lists will point to a range of resources.

In the 2016 message for 1 September, Pope Francis encouraged Catholics to examine their conscience and repent for sins against creation and the creator, and to "commit ourselves to taking concrete steps towards ecological conversion, which requires a clear recognition of our responsibility to ourselves, our neighbours, creation and the Creator". As part of that, Francis proposed adding "care for our common home" to each of the traditional sets of seven corporal and spiritual works of mercy:

Catholic activists on issues such as climate change have been very busy raising awareness, and indeed trying to ensure implementation of the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement. More religious orders will pledge to divest from fossil fuels to celebrate this year's Creation Time. The Columbans have already announced that they are divesting from fossil fuels.

In Britain we have had a few more parishes achieve the livesimply award this past year, but the focus on Creation in the Autumn attempts to bring many more Catholics on board for caring for our common home. The Season of Creation offers the opportunity for a common witness of the Churches. And the time to do it is now, as the planet continues its own season of sizzling temperatures, causing terrible suffering for the poorest communities on Earth.