

# Morality and Ecoconversion

Lessons from Scripture and Pope Francis' Laudato Si'.

Mark Norbury OP





**k<sup>w</sup>ik<sup>w</sup>ə<sup>ʔ</sup>əm**  
**Kwikwetlem First Nation**

We draw our sovereignty from the Creator, the transformers and deep-time histories, which granted us the responsibility to govern our territory in accordance with our customary laws.

k<sup>w</sup>ik<sup>w</sup>ə<sup>ʔ</sup>əm has never ceded, surrendered, nor abandoned our rights and responsibilities to our territory, and our title has never been relinquished.

I'd like to start by acknowledging that we are on unceded territories of the Coast Salish, in particular the Kwikwetlem First Nation. Let's take a moment to pray for them all. We pray that justice may be established for them as they have suffered much injustice, in particular through the residential schools. (Continue prayer on next slide.)

## Kwikwetlem Declaration of Economic Land Rights

We honour all lands and beings, sustenance and spiritual, that live within, rely upon, and migrate through our territory. Today, as in the past, we are guided by teachings to responsibly use and care for the lands, waters, and all that is above and below.

Our land is central to every aspect of our life. As stewards and caretakers of our lands, we have the right to enjoy, access, revitalize, develop and benefit from the resources of our territory.

We pray that we will learn from them how to better care for the creation around us.

## Talk Objectives

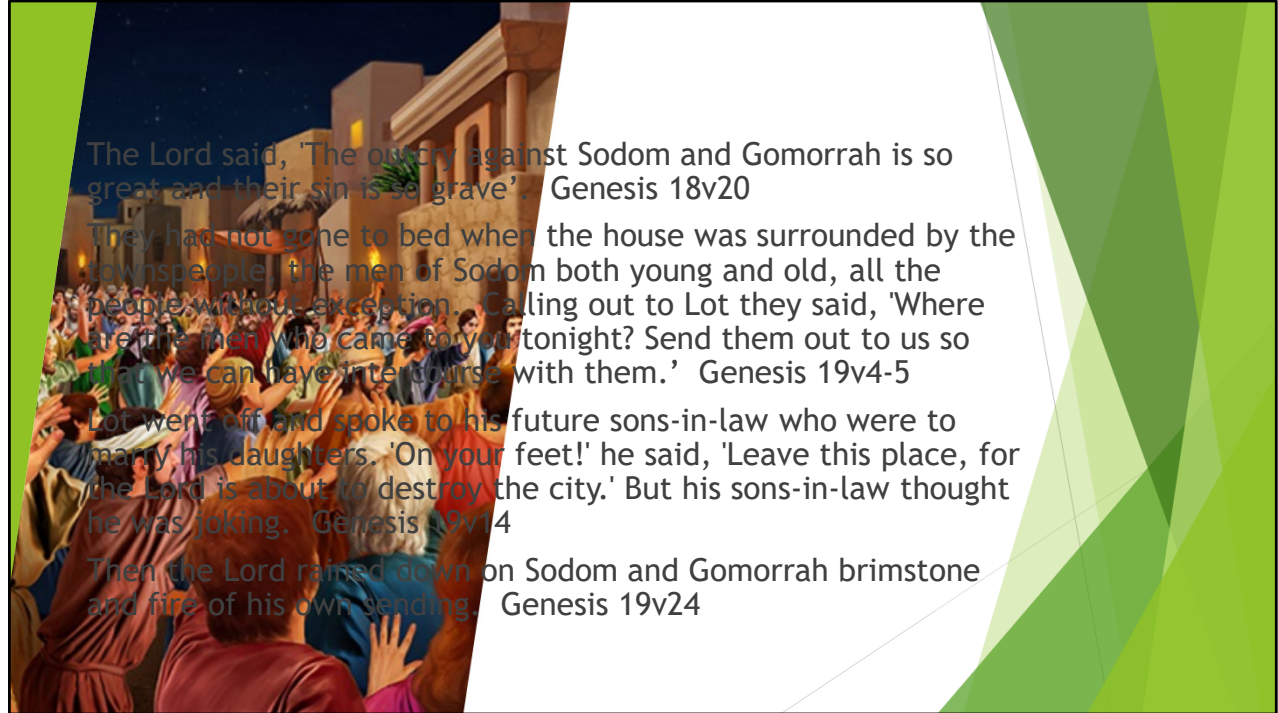
- ▶ Show that climate change is an issue for the Church because it concerns:
  - ▶ Morality
  - ▶ Truth
  - ▶ Justice
- ▶ Determine the key areas of action to combat climate change in Canada.

## The Issue

The climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all. At the global level, it is a complex system linked to many of the essential conditions for human life. A very solid scientific consensus indicates that we are presently witnessing a disturbing warming of the climatic system. In recent decades this warming has been accompanied by a constant rise in the sea level and, it would appear, by an increase of extreme weather events. Humanity is called to recognize the need for changes of lifestyle, production and consumption, in order to combat this warming. Most global warming in recent decades is due to the great concentration of greenhouse gases (carbon dioxide, methane, nitrogen oxides and others) released mainly as a result of human activity. As these gases build up in the atmosphere, they hamper the escape of heat produced by sunlight at the earth's surface. The problem is aggravated by a model of development based on the intensive use of fossil fuels, which is at the heart of the worldwide energy system. Another determining factor has been an increase in changed uses of the soil, principally deforestation for agricultural purposes. LS 23

I'd like to start under the premise that you all know about the climate emergency we're now living in. If not here is a summary of it by Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'* in paragraphs 23 & 24.

I won't read it all but in summary climate change is of major concern to the survival of the human race: many are already dying because of it. The continuing use of fossil fuels and deforestation are continuing to aggravate the issue.



Imagine what it would have been like living in Sodom. How would we know what is morally right? If everyone around you is living immorally then how do you know what is morally right or wrong?

Notice that Lot's daughters' fiancés thought he was joking about the city being destroyed. This is still often the reaction today when we talk about climate change and the emergency that it is. Many living in Canada still don't take it seriously and think it's a bit of a joke. Have you been ridiculed for talking about climate change to others? Pope Francis in paragraph 59 of LS complains against complacency and cheerful recklessness when it comes to climate change.

## Morality and Conscience

Conscience enables one to assume responsibility of the acts performed. CCC1781

Conscience must be informed and moral judgement enlightened. A well-formed conscience is upright and truthful. It formulates its judgements according to reason, in conformity with the true good willed by the wisdom of the Creator. The education of conscience is indispensable for human beings who are subjected to negative influences and tempted by sin to prefer their own judgement and to reject authoritative teachings. CCC1783



The CCC provides an article on the morality of human acts and the human conscience. We as human persons are supposed to live in uprightness guided by our consciences.

We are responsible for the acts we perform and our consciences help us to know whether these acts are good or evil.

If we know an action is wrong but we go ahead and do it anyway, then that is defined as a sin. We know that many of our behaviours, such as continuing to burn fossil fuels, are contributing to climate change, but we go ahead with them anyway. Everyone around us is behaving the same way so our consciences are not telling us it's wrong. Our consciences are not properly formed.

## Morality and Conscience

Man is sometimes confronted by situations that make moral judgements less assured and decision difficult, but he must always seriously seek what is right and good and discern the will of God expressed in divine law. CCC 1787

To this purpose, man strives to interpret the data of experience and the signs of the times assisted by the virtue of prudence, by the advice of competent people, and by the help of the Holy Spirit and His gifts. CCC1788

The advice of competent people: the world's scientists.

## Truth and Lies about Climate Change

Truth	Lies
Climate change is human caused.	Climate change is a natural process and the earth will recover by itself.
Climate change is crucial and needs to be taken seriously.	Climate change is not important and is just for those who have a particular interest in it.
Climate change will cause droughts, wars, food shortages and water scarcity.	Climate change is actually beneficial to the human race.
The well-being of society is at risk.	Caring for the environment is bad for the economy.
Scientists are in agreement about climate change.	Scientists are divided and still not sure about climate change.

We each individually have a duty to do what is right even if everyone around us is not. However it is possible for a conscience not to be well formed, due to ignorance or exposure to lies.

Here are some reasons why our consciences have not been well formed. There has been an organised propaganda campaign by the oil companies, the media and others. They have deliberately misled us in order to slow down or halt action on climate change.

More info from Donald Gutstein, David Suzuki, etc.

## Eco-sins

These are sins. To commit a crime against the natural world is a sin against ourselves and a sin against God. Repent of the ways we have harmed the planet. We are called to acknowledge our contribution, smaller or greater, to the disfigurement and destruction of creation. Acknowledge our sins against creation. LS 8

The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life. LS 2

### Definition of Sin

Sin is an offence against reason, truth and right conscience; it is failure in genuine love for God and neighbour caused by a perverse attachment to certain goods. It wounds the nature of man and injures human solidarity.

CCC1849

Pope Francis, quoting Patriarch Bartholomew, does not mince his words when he states quite clearly that when we harm the planet we are sinning. The pope is agreeing with Bartholomew in his identification of these actions as sins.

Our consciences have not been well-formed. We have been acting in ignorance. Because everyone around us has been behaving the same way we have assumed that there is nothing wrong with how we live, travel, heat our homes and eat. In a way we have been living in Sodom, not recognising our behaviours as sinful because everyone around us has been behaving the same way.

How can the pope claim these as sins? Let's look at the definition of sin from the Catechism of the Catholic Church. We know our behaviours are wrong but we go ahead with them anyway.

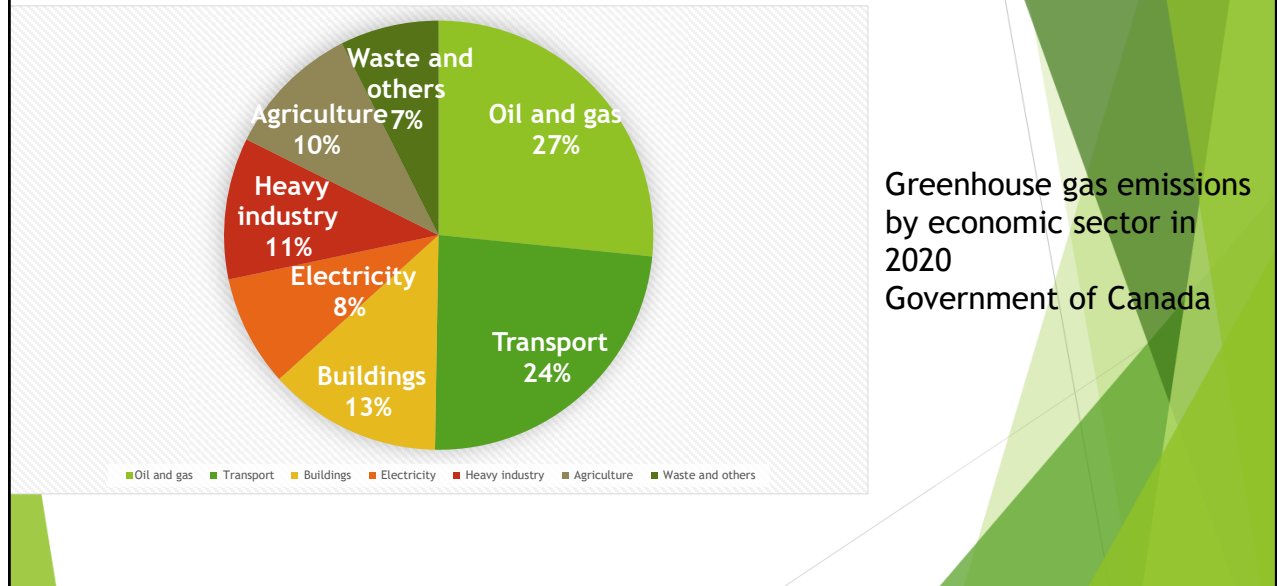
## Do not follow the world's culture

Do not model your behaviour on the contemporary world, but let the renewing of your minds transform you, so that you may discern for yourselves what is the will of God -- what is good and acceptable and mature.  
Romans 12v2.

St. Paul calls us to let the renewal our minds guide us in discerning what is the right way to behave rather than following the contemporary world.

We need to look critically at the culture around us and identify what is moral or immoral. Just because a lot of people behave a certain way does not make a behaviour morally correct.

## What must we do? Luke 3v10

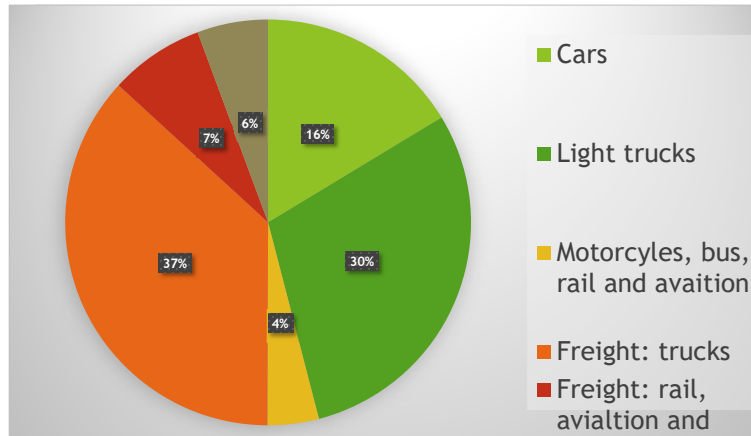


Canadians emit the highest amount of carbon dioxide per person of all the countries in the Americas, and higher than any country in Europe or Africa. We need to change our behaviours and the way we live. We have a lot of work to do.

So then what must we do to remedy the situation? Where should we focus our efforts in Canada to reduce our impact on climate change?

As we can see, the largest contributors to greenhouse gases in Canada are oil and gas and transportation. We need to reduce the amount of oil and gas we burn and adjust how we travel.

## Focus on Transport



Transport sector  
greenhouse gas  
emissions in 2020  
Government of Canada

Let's drill down into transport. We see that almost half of the emissions are from light duty trucks and cars, which are primarily privately owned. So we as individuals, by choosing to drive, are the biggest contributors to climate change from transport.

23.8 million motor vehicles for its 29.9 million adults. (80% of adults)  
74% of commuters drive to work.

Many Canadians drive short and unnecessary trips. We live in a car culture and for many if they're going somewhere, driving is the normal way they get there.

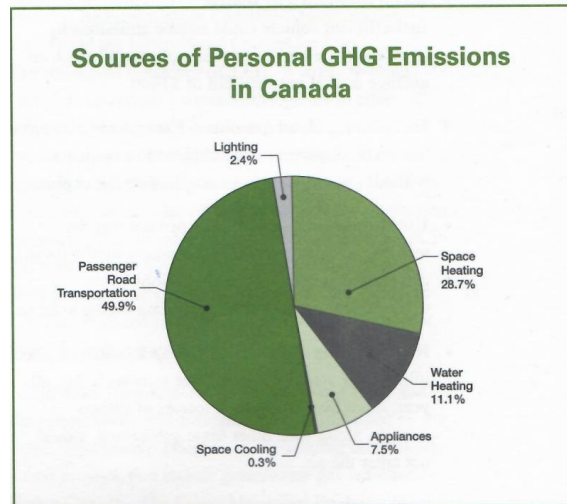
We can avoid driving large vehicles, such as pickup trucks. Electric cars are still too expensive for many and still have a large environmental impact. Walking, cycling and taking transit provide better ways to travel, that are also more relaxing and safer for society. Not owning a car is a great way to reduce the number of trips we make. For the occasional car

trip we can use Modo or some other car-sharing scheme, or rent a car from say Enterprise. By not owning a car we save around \$10,000 per year.

The power to reduce emissions is in the hands of the Canadian people themselves. We are choosing to drive cars, so we can choose not to. We don't have to wait for the government or industry to change: we ourselves can change our lifestyles and habits.

In 2020, the overall amount of GHGs we emitted in each category was less due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but the proportions and hence the percentages remained roughly the same compared with 2019.

## Personal greenhouse gas emissions



Climate Change Plan for  
Canada  
Government of Canada

This pie chart shows the sources of personal greenhouse gas emissions in Canada.

According to Environment and Climate Change Canada the highest two factors that impact the environment on an individual basis are passenger road transportation and space heating in our homes.

Wear warm clothing at home in the winter. Buy thick curtains: close them at night and open them in the morning to let the warm sunshine heat the house. Our houses will be heated naturally, which will not only reduce our carbon footprint but also saves us money on our fuel bills.

## What must we do? Luke 3v10

Replace consumption with sacrifice, greed with generosity, wastefulness with a spirit of sharing. It is a way of loving, of moving gradually away from what I want to what God's world needs.

LS 9

You must love one another just as I have loved you. It is by your love for one another, that everyone will recognise you as my disciples.

John 13v34-35.

We need to recognise that we have been making excuses for not changing. We need to increase the scope of our love to go beyond ourselves and our immediate families and learn to love all the world, just as Christ did who sacrificed Himself for all.

In short we need to repent, repent of our behaviours and change how we live. In Luke chapter 3 John the Baptist preached repentance and gave each person who came to him a way to repent that was unique to them. Each of us should find the way to repent that God is calling us to.

Preaching repentance is not always easy. Jesus preached repentance and so did John the Baptist, but they were opposed by those who did not like having their lifestyles challenged. Today Pope Francis is being opposed by many who do not want to change, even Catholics.

## Ecoconversion in Society

Self-improvement on the part of individuals will not by itself remedy the extremely complex situation facing our world today.... Social problems must be addressed by community networks and not simply by the sum of individual good deeds.  
LS 219.

Individual conversion is not enough. As well as changing ourselves we need to change those around us and influence the government at all levels, to change how our society is run.

Write to the government and join local climate action groups. Join the Laudato Si' Movement, which is international, but made up of local Laudato Si' circles.

## An Issue for the Church

The rich heritage of Christian spirituality ... has a precious contribution to make to the renewal of humanity. (LS216)

It must be said that some committed and prayerful Christians, with the excuse of realism and pragmatism, tend to ridicule expressions of concern for the environment. Others are passive; they choose not to change their habits and thus become inconsistent. So what they all need is an “ecological conversion”, whereby the effects of their encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them. Living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or secondary aspect of our Christian experience. (LS 217)

People don’t listen to scientists: history has shown that. People don’t read scientific journals at the breakfast table, they read newspapers and look at social media. In other words we rely upon the media to provide us with information.

If as an oil company then you want to run a propaganda campaign the way to do this is to influence the media. Over the past few decades the media has been effective in drowning out or distorting the voices of genuine scientists, in favour of what the influencers want us to hear.

However, people do listen to the clergy and other church leaders. The media has no power to drown out or filter out the words of a homily because the media does not operate inside our churches. As a result the Church is quite unique in presenting the truth to people on issues of justice. For example, many Catholics are quite rightly opposed to abortion and euthanasia and that is largely due to hearing our clergy

preach against it. Climate justice is an issue that our clergy need to be preaching about too.

Also it is because this is an issue of morality that it is an issue for the Church. Pope Francis makes it quite clear that this is an issue of morality and sinfulness and that people need to repent of their behaviours and habits.

Another reason why the Church needs to be involved is because it needs to guide environmentalists. Many of them are considering drastic measures, such as population control and abortion, to solve the environmental crisis, but the Church teaches that we must not choose evil in order to achieve a greater good. The Church needs to be exercising its role in teaching morality to guide the human race.

We can learn from history. 70 years ago the Catholic residential schools were committing acts of injustice by attempting to remove the culture and language from First Nations children. It's certain that 70 years from today people will look back at us and recognise our current behaviours in destroying the environment as gross acts of injustice. We need to repent today not wait 70 years.

[ANIMATION]

An Issue for the Church



Truth Justice Morality

Propaganda Selfish behaviours

Gross injustice affecting  
the survival of many

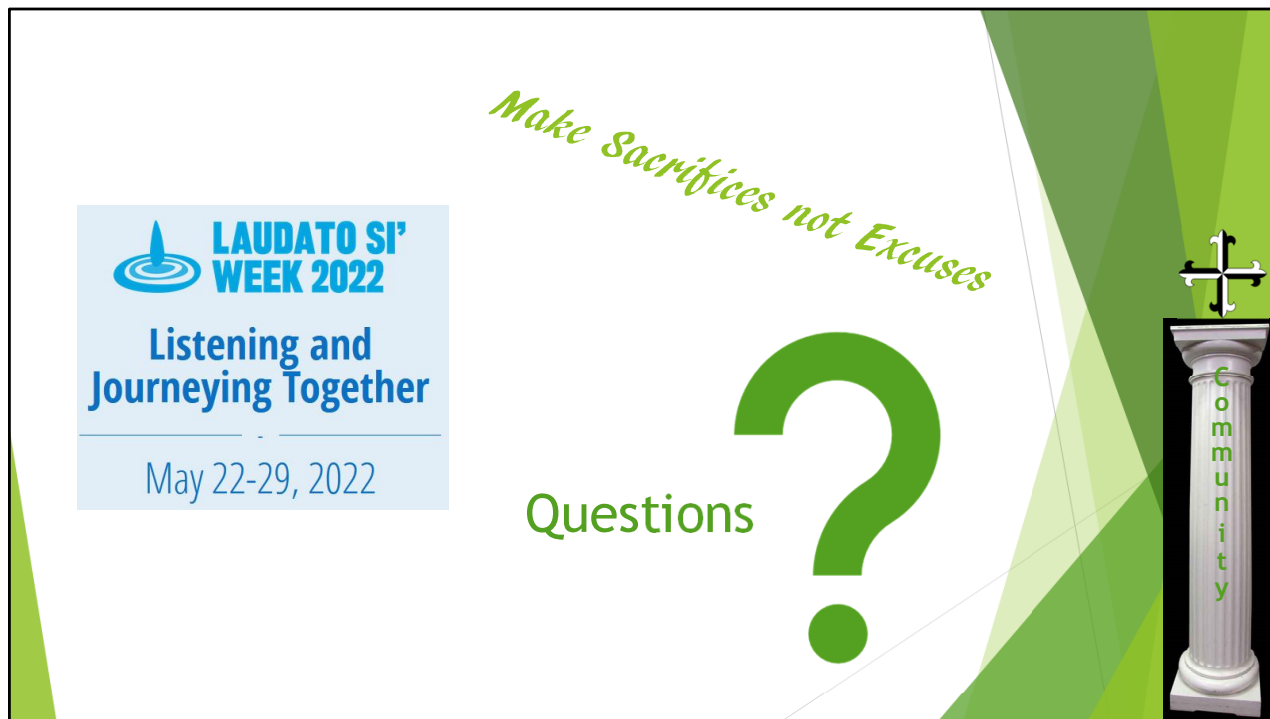
In summary there are three reasons why climate justice is an issue for the Church.

A well-organised propaganda campaign has misled many into believing that climate change doesn't exist or doesn't matter, whereas the Church is concerned about truth.

The survival of the human race is at risk. Many have already died as a result of climate change and many millions more will die if we don't act now. The Church is concerned with justice.

In Laudato Si' Pope Francis has identified our lifestyle habits and behaviours as selfish and therefore sinful and immoral. The Church has a duty to preach morality to the human race. As God's spokespeople we have a duty to preach repentance, following the example of Christ Himself, His forerunner John the Baptist and the prophets before him.

This won't necessarily be easy: people don't like to be told that what they are doing is wrong and that they need to change. We need to speak with love but be uncompromising in speaking the truth.



Finally we are being called to make sacrifices. These sacrifices are pretty small compared with the suffering and death that will continue if we don't make them.

Thank you for listening.

What questions do you have?

## Inspiring One Another



## Group Discussion

1. What has inspired you in today's workshop?
2. How do you feel God is calling you to take action on climate change?



## What must we do? Luke 3v10

- ▶ Personal lifestyle changes
  - ▶ Transport
  - ▶ Housing
  - ▶ What we eat
  - ▶ Reduce, Reuse, Recycle
- ▶ Write to the government
  - ▶ Divestment from fossil fuels
  - ▶ Reduce deforestation
  - ▶ Transport and housing
- ▶ Laudato Si' Circle
  - ▶ Action groups:
    - ▶ Laudato Si' Movement
    - ▶ Green Faith
    - ▶ David Suzuki Foundation
    - ▶ Stand Earth
    - ▶ Burke Mountain Naturalists
    - ▶ Etc.



Change our own lifestyles and encourage others to do the same.

The government listens to those who speak up. We need to tell them that climate change is of major concern to us. At the federal and provincial level we can write to them about industry, in particular divestment from fossil fuels, the move to renewable energy and deforestation. At the city level we can give our opinions about reducing the amount of cars on the roads and making them better for cycling and walking, or improving local bus services.

Following this workshop, we are planning to form a local Laudato Si' Circle. This will either be in-person or online, depending on preference, and meeting monthly. The format of meetings will be similar to today's workshop. Show of hands.

<https://www.burkemountainnaturalists.ca/>

LSM: Catholic international network addressing climate change, but operating locally in Laudato Si' Circles. They offer free online training.

Green Faith: multi-faith organisation working in the political sphere to address climate change.

Stand Earth: closely watching the government and policies. Help their members to write effective letters to the government at the federal and provincial levels.

DSF: science-based national org, providing information and building networks with First Nations, young people and all others working for the environment.

Burke Mountain Naturalists: local Tri-Cities group who meet regularly to study local wildlife. They also have regular talks from scientists about environmental concerns.