

# Founded on Rock

## *Putting into practice Catholic teaching on land and environment*

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This material has been prepared to accompany the Caritas Social Justice Week booklet *Founded on Rock: Putting into practice Catholic teaching on land and environment*. Some parishes run discussion groups during Social Justice Week, while others prefer to have material available for private reflection.



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## Introduction

Catholic social teaching on land encompasses both stewardship of the natural resources that God has entrusted to us, and justice and right relationships over land ownership and land use. The Jubilee tradition outlined in Leviticus 25 dealt with both of these questions: the right of the land itself to rest, and the obligation to return land to its original owners after 50 years.

The Caritas Social Justice Week booklet *Founded on Rock: putting into practice Catholic teaching on land and the environment* outlines some of the Catholic social teaching relating to both land use and ownership issues, and those of stewardship of our natural resources. These issues are often intertwined.

The theme of this year's Social Justice Week is land, in particular putting into practice Catholic teaching on land and the environment. Some parish groups and individuals may have looked at the environmental justice theme during Social Justice Week in 2006. For others this may be the first time to consider these issues.

## Using the booklet as the basis for group reflection

This reflection suggests opening and closing prayers, a shared opening activity, and some reflection questions for three of the sections in the Social Justice Week booklet. Please feel free to pick and choose from these topics – you may wish to concentrate on one topic, or offer participants the chance to talk more deeply in smaller groups on different topics and then share back their thoughts with the wider group.



## Opening Prayer

(Responses taken from Isaiah 65)

**Leader:** We pray for strength and renewal for ourselves and the land

**All:** God promises to create a new heaven and a new earth

**Leader:** We pray to be good stewards of the land

**All:** There shall always be happiness and rejoicing in what God creates

**Leader:** We pray for reconciliation of historic land injustices

**All:** No longer shall the sound of weeping be heard there

**Leader:** We pray that all will share the fruits of the earth

**All:** No longer shall there be an infant who lives but a few days

**Leader:** We pray for all who work on the land

**All:** They shall live in the houses they build and eat the fruit of the vineyards they plant

**Leader:** We pray for those throughout the world who are excluded from owning land

**All:** God's chosen ones will long enjoy the produce of their hands

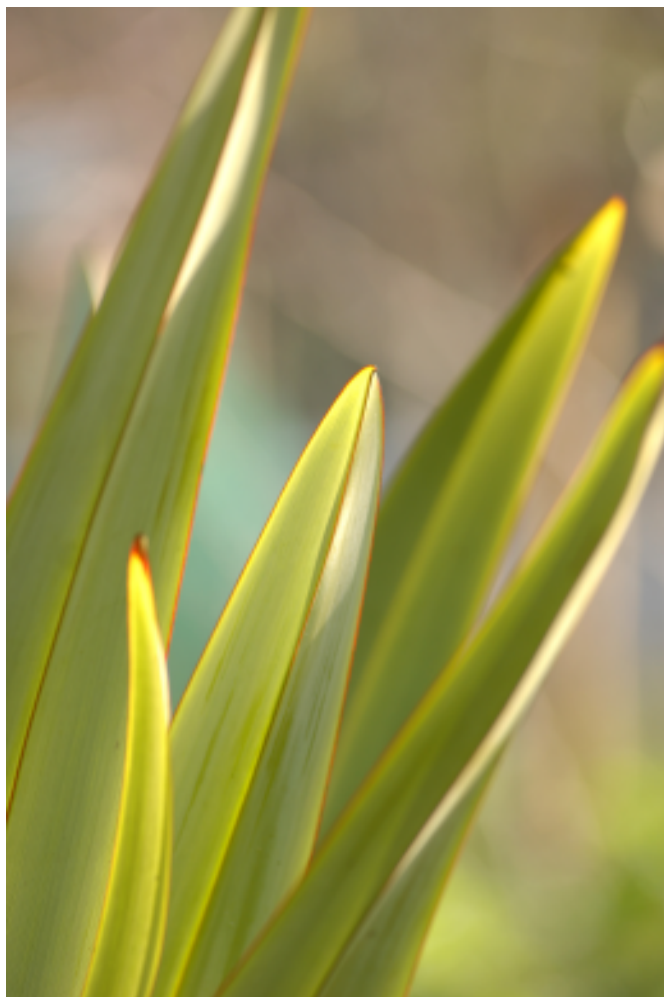
**Leader:** We pray for those living in places threatened by environmental disaster

**All:** They shall not toil in vain, nor beget children for sudden destruction

**Leader:** We pray for peace between people, and for peace with God's creation

**All:** The wolf and the lamb shall graze alike. None shall hurt or destroy on God's holy mountain

Inspired by a litany by Kim Limvere, Rural Life Committee of the North Dakota Conference of Churches.



## Opening readings

### ***Founded on rock***

Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise person who built a house on rock. Rain came down, floods rose, gales blew and hurled themselves against that house, and it did not fall: it was founded on rock.

*Matthew 7:24-25*

### ***From the foreword to the Caritas Social Justice Week booklet***

These words of Jesus give us hope. Even though the world as we know it seems threatened by human-induced climatic disaster, even though rain may fall, floods rise, and gales blow, if we listen to God's Word, and to the teaching and guidance of the Church in making that Word applicable and relevant to our lives today, then we have cause to hope, because our actions will be "founded on rock".

### ***From Pope Benedict's 2007 message for the world day of peace***

Humanity, if it truly desires peace, must be increasingly conscious of the links between natural ecology, or respect for nature, and human ecology. Experience shows that *disregard for the environment*

*always harms human coexistence, and vice versa. It becomes more and more evident that there is an inseparable link*

*between peace with creation and peace among people.*

## Opening activity

Look at today's newspaper. Look for headlines or stories which speak of current concerns with land and environment. Share with a small group what your response to the issues of the day are as presented by the media.

**Some questions for reflection:** What does Catholic social teaching have to say about the environmental and land issues of today? Do we have access to resources we need to understand the Catholic teaching on these issues? What questions of justice and injustice are raised by the stories in today's news?



PHOTO: ADRIAN HEKE

### **God's own: the last settled place on earth** *(Read the Social Justice Week booklet: pages 10-11)*

Our country is considered one of the last places on earth to have been touched by human migration. However, despite our recent history and a relatively low population, we have changed the landscape of this country, particularly in the last 150 years. On a global scale, human activity is threatening to change the ecological systems of our whole planet.

**Some questions for reflection:** What are some of the environmental issues in our area? Have we suffered drought or flooding, or are there other concerns such as erosion or pollution? How have these environmental issues affected people in our parish or local community?

### **Land and identity** *(Read the Social Justice Week booklet, pages 14-15)*

Many of us identify closely with particular places. This is particularly true for indigenous people throughout the world. Others feel less closely connected to particular places but may have strong connections with the environment.

**Some questions for reflection:** What places are especially important for me? Why is it easier for some people to respond to the needs of landless people in countries such as Bangladesh than to consider the rights of indigenous people in New Zealand? What land issue bothers me?



### **Reconciliation and healing** *(Read the Social Justice Week booklet, pages 22-25)*

Reconciliation over past land injustices has been an important part of our political landscape over past decades, as the Waitangi Tribunal has considered land claims, and Iwi and the Crown sought settlements.

Some Catholic groups have also taken the time to examine their own land ownership. The Caritas booklet tells three stories of how this examination has led to actions which have contributed to ongoing relationships and partnerships.

**Some questions for reflection:** What is your response to the stories from Hamilton Diocese, Petone parish and the Whanganui Sisters of St Joseph? Is it legally necessary to seek reconciliation in these circumstances? Is it morally necessary? Could there be any issues around land ownership or gifted land in our parish community? Where might we begin to search for answers?



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## Closing prayers



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Visit us, God  
in breath of wind  
in endurance of cliffs  
in glow of kowhai  
in silence of stars  
in solitude of moon  
in eyes of the poor  
in embrace of a mother  
in pleasure of friends  
in faith that does justice.

*Anne Powell*

### **A reading from the book of Proverbs**

Thus says the wisdom of God: "The Lord possessed me, the beginning of his ways, the forerunner of his prodigies of long ago; from of old I was poured forth, at the first, before the earth. When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no fountains or springs of water; before the mountains were settled into place, before the hills, I was brought forth; while as yet the earth and fields were not made, nor the first clods of the world.

"When the Lord established the heavens I was there, when he marked out the vault over the face of the deep; when he made firm the skies above, when he fixed fast the foundations of the earth; when he set for the sea its limit, so that the waters should not transgress his command; then was I beside him as his craftsman, and I was his delight day by day, playing before him all the while, playing on the surface of his earth; and I found delight in the human race."

*Proverbs 8:22-31*

### **Final Prayer**

Look around and you will see the presence of Christ.

Look around and you will hear the call of God.

Look around and you will know the Power of the Spirit.

Look around and you will be empowered.

Look around and you will be filled with joy.

You will be involved in the struggle for justice and peace.

You will hear the voice of God among the impoverished of the world.

You will hear God speak in the struggle for peace and justice.

You will be led into life and grace.

God dwells in the world.

*Claude Mostowitz*