

MINNESOTA

OUR COMMON HOME

An Ecological Examen

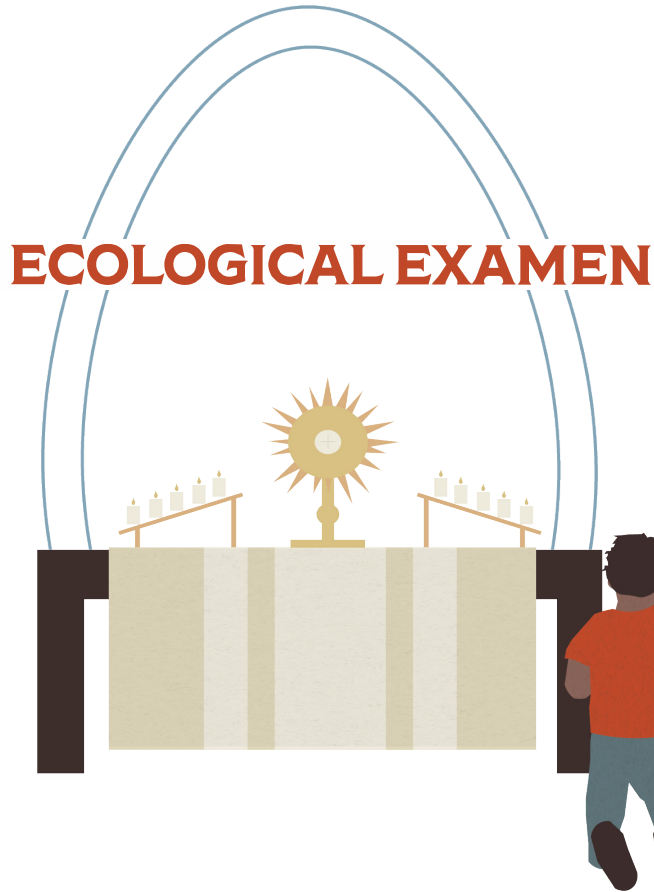
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MINNESOTA CATHOLIC CONFERENCE



INTEGRAL ECOLOGY
everything is connected.



The examen prayer, first developed by St. Ignatius of Loyola, is a technique of opening oneself to the guidance of the Holy Spirit by reviewing a certain aspect of one's life. Many people pray a daily examen, which involves reviewing the events of the day in the presence of God, to discover how God was active throughout the day, where the person was cooperative with God, and where he or she was unable or unwilling to cooperate.

This version of the examen is intended, not for daily use, but as a periodic review of your life in light of the teachings of *Laudato si'* and the ecological conversion to which it calls us. It is recommended as a practice during Lent or Advent of each year, to help you overcome temptations and make important changes in your attitudes and actions that will bring your life into greater harmony with God's will for your life.

The Five Steps of the Examen:

- 1) Place Yourself in the Presence of God
- 2) Pray for Light
- 3) Pray for Understanding
- 4) Pray for Grace
- 5) Make a Resolution

Steps 1 and 2 are prayerful exercises to help you call to mind the presence of God and invite the Holy Spirit into your time of prayer.

Step 3, **Pray for Understanding**, is the heart of the examen, in which you will consider different aspects of your life and how they reflect your relationship with God (for good or ill). It is divided into **three sections: Temptations, Attitudes, and Actions**. Here, your prayer will be most fruitful if you do not rush but allow some time for reflection and conversation with the Lord.

Steps 4 and 5 are similar to the first two steps and are intended to help you close your time of prayer by making concrete changes in your life.

This examen can be completed in a single one-hour sitting or spread out over the course of several days. **If you spend a few days working through it, practice steps 1 and 2 (pp. 4-5) as you begin your prayer each day and step 4 (pp. 28-29) as you close each day. Do not complete step 5 (p. 29) until you are finished with the whole examen prayer.**

At every step, the most important thing is that you maintain a disposition of sincere openness to God and a desire to know and achieve His will for you. Have confidence that God hears your prayers and wants to communicate with you each time you pray! In His time, He will make Himself known to you more than ever before.

1) Place Yourself in the Presence of God:

Acknowledge God's nearness to you. He is intimately present in all things, loving all creation into existence in this very moment. Nothing would even exist if God did not desire it to exist. This includes you. You, too, are a creature of God, willed into being and destined to reveal His goodness in a unique and remarkable way. God looks at you in this moment and says *you* are good.

2) Pray for Light:

Because we live in a fallen world overshadowed by the reality of sin, right relationship with God no longer comes easily to us; it is something we must learn. We need grace and the presence of the Holy Spirit within us to see with the eyes of Christ. Right now, you are placing yourself in God's light by the very fact that you are praying. Be confident that even now He is transforming you, allowing you to think and act like Jesus more than ever before. Ask Him to speak to you in this time of prayer and to draw you into a deeper conversion that will touch every aspect of your life. Pray that you will learn to see the plan and action of the Creator in the world around you.

3) Pray for Understanding:

Think about your life—your choices, thoughts, and attitudes—in light of the teachings of the Church and Pope Francis in *Laudato si'*. Doing a good examen demands deep humility and the willingness to be guided and corrected by the Holy Spirit. We can all easily misunderstand our own motivations and dispositions, so it is important to pray throughout this process.

Section One: Temptations

We are not God. The earth was here before us and it has been given to us. This allows us to respond to the charge that Judaeo-Christian thinking, on the basis of the Genesis account which grants man “dominion” over the earth (cf. Genesis 1:28), has encouraged the unbridled exploitation of nature by painting him as domineering and destructive by nature. This is not a correct interpretation of the Bible

as understood by the Church. Although it is true that we Christians have at times incorrectly interpreted the Scriptures, nowadays we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God’s image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures.

Laudato si’, §67

Pope Francis writes in *Laudato si'* that many of the hardships in modern life have come to us because “a certain way of understanding human life and activity has gone awry” (§101). With as much gentleness as possible, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, ask yourself if you regularly experience temptation to believe the following falsehoods.

Falsehoods About Creation

- The earth is nothing more than raw material that we can manipulate at will; *we* give it meaning by how we choose to use it.

- God told us to have dominion over creation. Therefore, we have unlimited discretion to decide what to do with it.
- Plants and animals are good only inasmuch as they serve human beings' needs.
- Trying to “find God in nature” is fundamentally un-Christian. It is dangerous, or at least suspect, for Christians to look for evidence of the Creator within His creation.
- The order of nature is basically arbitrary; it can change over time or with the intervention of technology and science.
- We have no duty to adhere to or cooperate with nature’s “laws.” We can make our own laws of nature.

- The environmental crisis is a secular problem that has little to do with faith.

Falsehoods About Myself

- The more control over my life I have, the happier I will be.
- My ultimate fulfillment may be different from someone else’s—I might find it in God, but someone else might find it in experiences, relationships, science, etc.
- My true self is invisible, and I think of my body as a house for my soul.
- My relationship with God is “spiritual”—I do not have a need to express it outwardly.

Falsehoods About Technology

- New technologies are always an unmitigated blessing.
- Science and technology will solve all the world's biggest problems one day.
- Technology can enable us to create our own identity and even transform human nature.
- My use of technology has no effect on me or my family.

Section Two: Attitudes

A spirituality which forgets God as all-powerful and Creator is not acceptable. That is how we end up worshipping earthly powers, or ourselves usurping the place of God, even to the point of claiming an unlimited right to trample his creation underfoot. The best way to restore men and women to their rightful

place, putting an end to their claim to absolute dominion over the earth, is to speak once more of the figure of a Father who creates and who alone owns the world. Otherwise, human beings will always try to impose their own laws and interests on reality.

Laudato si', §75

Attitudes Toward God

Christian maturity requires that we continually deepen our conviction about who God is and His relationship to us. Ask the Holy Spirit to be with you as you examine each of the following essential Christian beliefs. Where is your faith strong? Where is your faith weak? Do not be afraid to acknowledge that your faith is imperfect—we are all a work in progress; we all need to pray, “Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief” (Mark 9:24).

Think:

- God created the world and is intimately present to His creation at every moment.
- God created me—intentionally, out of love, with a plan full of hope for my future.
- God loves me no matter what my weaknesses, limitations, failures, and sins are (though I must repent of my sins).
- Jesus is God, and He is Lord of my life. I can entrust everything, including my future, to His providential care.

Attitudes Toward Scripture and the Church

As Catholics, we believe that the Bible is the divinely revealed Word of God and therefore that it teaches without error. We also believe that the Church preserves the truth of the Bible through the apostolic teaching authority of her bishops (cf. CCC 74-93). Scripture is our primary source for insight into the person of Jesus Christ, the *Logos*, who reveals to us through His humanity the meaning of human life and love.

Ask:

- Is the Word of God a part of my daily life?
- Do I look to Scripture when I need peace, encouragement, strength, or consolation?

- Do I really believe that everything contained in the Word of God is authoritative Scripture, or do I only adhere to some of what the Church says the Bible teaches us?
- When something that I read in Scripture confuses or upsets me, do I assume that it is Scripture that is wrong, or do I consider the fact that I may not understand fully or that I may be wrong?
- Do I trust the Church to transmit the Gospel in its fullness and guide my walk toward holiness through her teachings?

Attitudes Toward Prayer

Spending time in silent prayer each day is indispensable for maintaining a living relationship with God. Relationships take time, effort, and communication. It does not

need to be complicated; all we have to do is tell Jesus what is in our heart and then listen for His response.

Ask:

- Do I pray daily, or am I working toward a solid habit of daily prayer?
- What is a reasonable amount of time for me to pray each day, given my life circumstances?
- If I feel that I am too busy to pray, why? Is it because I am overscheduled, or because a lot of my time is wasted? Or is it simply because I do not want to make time for prayer?
- Do I see prayer as a burdensome and unnecessary obligation, or do I treasure it as time spent with my loving Father?

- In prayer, am I more focused on what *I do* or on *God's initiative* and His desire to spend time with me?

Attitudes Toward the Sacraments

Reception of the Sacraments keeps us united to the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church. Every time we receive the Sacraments, we receive an increase in grace that transforms our hearts; we look more and more like Jesus.

Ask:

- Do I show up for Sunday Mass every week and on holy days of obligation? If not, what is my reason for not attending?
- What is my attitude toward the Eucharist? Do I understand the requirements for a worthy reception of Holy Communion (cf. CCC 1385-87),

and do I only go to Communion when I meet those requirements?

- Have I made confession a regular part of my spiritual life? How long has it been since my last confession?
- If I have not been to confession in a long time, what is my reason for not going?

Section Three: Actions

We come together to take charge of this home which has been entrusted to us, knowing that all the good which exists here will be taken up into the heavenly feast. In union with all creatures, we journey through this land seeking God, for "if the world has a beginning and if it has been created, we must enquire who gave it this beginning, and who was its Creator". Let us sing as we go. May our struggles and our concern for this planet never take away the joy of our hope.
Laudato si', §244

The purpose of the previous sections of this examen prayer was to look closely at what temptations you struggle with most and what fundamental beliefs lie at the heart of your experience. It is crucial to identify how those thought patterns routinely shape our decisions, not just to put a finger on specific behaviors that need to change. Therefore, as you work your way through this next part, it might serve you to look back on your notes from the last section and ask the Holy Spirit to point out to you how your underlying worldview has informed your actions.

Stewarding the Gift of Faith

Faith is a gift. It is, as one holy priest says, “God’s work in me to which I respond.” God always takes the first initiative in giving us faith; our part is to continually say “yes” as He draws us deeper into His own heart. Therefore, we have a responsibility to treasure and safeguard the gift of our faith.

Ask:

- Do I take time to thank God for all the gifts He has given me, or do I often feel sorry for myself, focusing on what I do not have or on my struggles?
- Do I stand up for the Gospel when it is ridiculed or attacked to the best of my ability with the knowledge and experience that I possess? When I do not have adequate knowledge to defend the faith, do I refer others to someone who does, or do I insist on answering by giving an explanation that may not be correct?
- Am I discerning about the media I consume, conscious about how it affects my thinking about God, eternity, human dignity, and morality, however subtly?

Stewarding the Earth

God's first command to humanity in the Garden of Eden is "to till and keep" the earth (Genesis 2:15). That command still stands, and we are similarly charged with caring for the precious gift of creation. Environmental concern is not optional for Christians; it is an essential feature of our identity as creation's stewards.

Ask:

- Do I make an effort to purchase only what is necessary and limit my spending on luxury goods?
- Am I in the habit of using the things I own until they are worn out or only until I am bored with them or find something "better"?

- Am I thoughtful about limiting my consumption of water, electricity, and fuel use whenever possible?
- Do I consider where my groceries are sourced? Am I aware of where the meat and produce I eat comes from and how the animals are raised and cared for?
- What do I typically eat in a day? Do I eat simply and moderately? Does my diet reflect my faith in God and gratitude for His many gifts?
- Have I taken steps to reduce food waste in my household? Do I take care to shop according to what my family can reasonably consume, or does a lot of food go bad before being eaten? Have I considered composting or meal planning to cut waste?

- Do I foster regular encounters with the gift of creation for myself and my family, taking concrete steps to correct “nature deficit disorder”?
- Do I stay informed about pressing public policy matters related to the environment, such as mining issues, water quality, and climate change? During the election cycle, do I weigh candidates’ positions on environmental protection when considering my vote?
- Have I used hormonal contraceptives, flushing estrogen and other harmful hormones through both my body and the septic system and out into the water supply where plants, animals, and even other people will be impacted by them?
- Do I reach out to those who may not share my faith but to whom a message of creation stewardship may be an opportunity for evangelization?

Caring for My Neighbor

Pope Francis exhorts us in *Laudato si’* to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor. By saying this, he points out the intrinsic connection between care for the environment and justice for our neighbors, especially the vulnerable and the marginalized. Love of neighbor should motivate our efforts to become more ecologically aware.

Ask:

- Am I in the habit of tithing a portion of my income to provide for the needs of the Church and the poor?
- At mealtimes, do I call to mind the individuals who prepared the food I eat? The farmers who grew it? The people who harvested and transported it? Does it matter to me whether those people work in safe conditions or receive a fair wage?

- Do I know where my waste is dumped and who might be impacted by the landfill pollution caused by my consumption?
- Where are the poor in my community? Do I avoid them, or do I seek out encounters with them? Do I have an excess of something that they need? Do I give them a portion of my time?
- If every person on the planet had an equal level of consumption to me and my family, what would be the result?
- If I am a business owner or manager, do I pay my employees a just wage?
- Do I work for policies that foster distributive and social justice?

Stewarding My Body

Our bodies are not just shells for our souls. They are not mere raw material for our free expression. They are an integral part of our identity as sons and daughters of God and a precious gift to be stewarded. Furthermore, since Jesus Christ has redeemed us with His own Precious Blood, we belong to God now in a particular way. Scripture teaches that “you are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). We deny God His rights when we mistreat, mutilate, or destroy our bodies. Just as we are called to care for the earth, so, too, we are called to care for our bodies, cooperating with God’s design for our flourishing, which is written into our bodies.

Ask:

- Do I honor my body as a temple of the Holy Spirit by eating well and getting enough exercise and sleep? By avoiding harmful drug use and excessive alcohol consumption?
- Do I feel the need to dramatically alter my physical appearance with surgery, piercings, tattoos, etc.?
- Have I altered or frustrated my body's natural fertility with hormonal birth control or other contraceptive methods?
- Have I rejected God's gift of my bodily self, created as either male or female?
- Have I protected my bodily dignity and the purity of others with modest dress?

- Have I seriously considered or undergone sex reassignment surgery?
- Have I had the courage to speak against harmful gender identity ideology in schools, among friends, and in the public arena?
- Have I treated my body, or the bodies of others, as commodities through practices like surrogate pregnancy, organ sales, prostitution, etc.?
- Have I intentionally injured myself through cutting or other forms of self-harm?
- Have I attempted or considered suicide?

4) Pray for Grace:

This “Ecological Examen” is supposed to illuminate, with God’s help, areas in our lives where we are being invited to experience transformation and growth. It is never easy to look at our own lives with humility and candor. Even more challenging is the task of changing our habits, especially deeply ingrained thought patterns. In fact, it is not just challenging to change—it is almost impossible, without God’s help. Quiet your heart and be still before the Lord for a few moments. Ask Him to pour out the Holy Spirit into your heart in a deeper way, so you can live a transformed life, more deeply rooted in your true identity as a child of God and a steward of creation.

Rather than focusing solely on your failures and shortcomings, you might ask God to enlighten your mind with a lively vision

of what your life would look like if you experienced the kind of conversion called for in *Laudato si’*. With Christ alive in you, extraordinary holiness is possible.

5) Make a Resolution:

TODAY: What is one, simple, concrete action that you can take to dispose yourself better to the grace of ecological conversion?

THIS MONTH: What is one significant lifestyle change that you can make by taking some steps in the next 30 days?

ONE YEAR FROM NOW: What is one way you hope to see your life transformed by living out integral ecology more faithfully?

Write these resolutions down. Pray about them periodically and keep track of your progress. You can always adjust your resolutions; the most important thing is to start somewhere.

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