



Sandhill Cranes in Pokagon Fen, IDNR Photo, Division of Nature Preserves



ntegral Ecology: A Sacramental Vision

Full Document Study Guide

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Integral Ecology: A Sacramental Vision

Study Guide



The document *Integral Ecology: A Sacramental Vision* authored by the Bishops of Indiana, is a rich and challenging document that bridges the gap between Catholic theology and the specific environmental landscape of Indiana. To help your study group engage deeply with these themes, below is a list of potential discussion questions categorized by the sections of the document. It is recommended that this could be part of multiple-week course to discuss the key themes addressed by the Bishops.

For an interactive version of the maps included in the full document, please visit: bit.ly/integral-ecology-in

Introduction: The Call to Integral Ecology

- **Defining Terms:** The document defines "integral ecology" as the realization that human and natural ecology are interrelated. In what ways have you seen the health of your community (human) tied to the health of the local land or water (natural)?
- **Current Relevance:** Why is the topic of integral ecology, bringing together the care for the earth and the care for the poor, inspired by our life in the Eucharist, so relevant in Indiana today?

Part 1: Integrating Natural Ecology and Human Ecology

- **Our Identity:** The Bishops describe us as both "ecological citizens" and "ecclesial citizens". How does this dual citizenship change the way you view your responsibility toward your neighborhood, community, and parish?
- **The Eucharist as Fulfillment:** The document states, "The Eucharist is the fulfillment of integral ecology". How does the process of bringing the "fruit of the earth" (wheat and grapes) to the altar help you see the real presence of Christ in the world around you?
- **Sacramental Vision:** Nature is described as a "sign that points beyond itself" to God's presence. Can you share a time when a physical encounter with nature helped you feel closer to the Creator?

Part 2: Watershed Theology

- **Watershed Awareness:** The text encourages us to consider our home not only as a street address but also our location within the broader ecosystem and watershed. Can you find your watershed on the watershed map included? How does the image of your local water eventually flowing into the Gulf of Mexico change your sense of responsibility for what goes down the drain or onto your lawn?
- **Our Heritage:** Indiana is one of the birthplaces of ecology. Can you think of any ways our Catholic faith can guide us in finding harmony between our natural areas and industrial economies?

Part 3: Theology of Creation

- **Divine Encounter:** Nature is not just nature but creation, and an encounter with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Do I take the time to thank and praise God for the gift of creation? How might this gratitude for God's creation influence the way I treat it?

- **Works of Mercy:** How might caring for the earth and creation be a way to more deeply live the works of mercy?

Part 4: Natural and Human History of Indiana

- **A "Love Song" of Time:** The document describes Indiana's geological history—from 300-million-year-old coal deposits to glacial soils—as part of "God's love song". How could viewing the earth's resources as a "composition" by a Divine Composer change how you use energy or land?
- **Precious Natural Treasures:** When European settlers arrived in the 17th and 18th centuries, our state's 10 terrestrial natural regions were more clearly identifiable (see map). If only 1% of those natural areas remain today, how can we balance providing for our booming population with protecting and replenishing those precious notes of God's song for future generations?
- **Indigenous Connection:** The Bishops mention the tribes (Potawatomi, Miami, etc.) who inhabited this land before us. How can we better honor the "human history" of the land we currently occupy as a parish? Are there any connections that can be strengthened or enhanced with those that still have that heritage in our local communities?

Part 5: Noah's Ark of Indiana Ecosystems: Extinction Threatens Biodiversity

- **Our Local Ark:** Are we caring for the creatures in our local "ark" with the same care that Noah and his family had for the creatures on the biblical ark? Are there specific situations that might need a renewed mercy like this?
- **Naming Creatures:** The Bishops extend an invitation to "become acquainted with your home watershed" and learn the names of the creatures there. Why do you think the Bishops believe that "naming God's creatures" is an act of spiritual joy?
- **The Loss of Wetlands:** With only 0.03% of Indiana's original wetlands remaining, the Bishops note we have "deleted numerous notes" from God's song. In what ways can our parish act as a "Noah's Ark" to protect the life that remains, and replenish what has been lost?

Part 6: Agriculture and the Eucharist: Green Revolution or Brown Revolution?

- **Agriculture and Human Dignity:** Indiana is a leading agricultural state, yet "the food supply of the USA is in crisis". How can we better support "good farming" that treats "people, land, and animals in accord with their God-given way of being"?
- **Welfare of Migrant Workers:** Nearly three-quarters of Indiana farm workers are immigrants, subject to increased exploitation, wage theft and health impacts from weather and pesticide poisoning. What would more "just and dignified treatment" for them look like?
- **Eating to Build Relationship:** Meals are for more than bodily nourishment, as they also remind us of our dependence on God, one another, farming, and ecosystems. Whether at the Thanksgiving table or the Eucharistic table, how can we keep this at heart?

Part 7: Life-Giving Water: From the Baptismal Font to Aquatic Ecosystems

- **Water & Baptism:** We use water to bring new life in Baptism, yet 73% of Indiana's streams are impaired. Is there a contradiction between how we treat "holy water" inside the church and "natural water" outside the church?
- **Life-Giving Water?:** Production of coal and other items release mercury and toxic chemicals into our drinking water, negatively impacting human health, and are still occurring in Indiana. How can we better protect the health of current and future generations by protecting our water?

Part 8: Marriage and Family: What's In the Water Irritating Indiana Fish?

- **Everything Is Connected:** Researchers found that fish populations exposed to these chemicals at concentrations comparable to those in some natural waters collapsed. Studies have shown that concentrations of hundreds of endocrine-disrupting compounds released in our wastewater are causing decline in male reproductive health in general. How might this help us reflect on the impact of our choices on the community at large?

Part 9: Energy and the Eucharist: Preparing Our Grandchildren's Futures

- **The Atmosphere as a Common Good:** Though the use of fossil fuels has increased human welfare, it also has had negative effects such as rising air pollution and respiratory and heart diseases. How can we discern "just use" of energy and encourage the development and use of safer, renewable energy sources?
- **Energy and Wisdom:** Before looking for technological solutions to energy, we are asked to examine our "personal and communal ways of life". Does our current level of consumption reflect a "priority of ethics over technology"?

Part 10: Caring for Creation: Putting Faith Into Action

- **Technology vs. Presence:** The Bishops warn that "digital age" lives can distance us from our neighbors and the natural world. What practical steps can you take to "unplug" from the virtual world and "encounter the real presence" of God in creation?
- **Recovering the Lord's Day:** How could a more intentional "recovery of the Lord's Day" as a time of rest, healing and time in nature help "motivate us to greater concern for nature and the poor"?
- **Serene Attentiveness:** Pope Francis describes integral ecology as "taking time to recover a serene harmony with creation". How can our parish cultivate this "attitude of serene attentiveness" in our prayer and community life?
- **What are some other ways the Bishops encourage us to take action?**

Conclusion

- **Mary, the "Greenest Branch":** The document concludes with a prayer to the Holy Spirit to "green us with your love" and mentions "Mary Gardens". How might honoring Mary as the "New Eve" inspire us to better care for the "garden" of our own hearts?



Suggested Activity: Look at the maps provided in the document. Find your parish's location within its specific watershed and natural region. Discuss one local environmental challenge (like water quality or habitat loss) that your study group could pray for or address through a "work of mercy".