



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



ntegral Ecology: A Sacramental Vision

Summary Study Guide

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Integral Ecology: A Sacramental Vision

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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 Summary 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

SUMMARY DOCUMENT

Part 1: Integral Ecology & The Sacramental Vision

- **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)?
- **The Eucharist:** The Bishops state that "the Eucharist is the fulfillment of integral ecology." How can seeing the bread and wine as "fruit of the earth" and "work of human hands" change your experience of the Mass?
- **Pilgrimage:** We are described as "citizens of both creation (ecology) and of the Church (ecclesiology)." Does your daily life feel more like you are a "consumer" of the world or a "pilgrim" journeying through it?

Part 2: Watersheds and the History of the Land

- **Local Awareness:** Do you know which watershed your home or parish sits in? 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?
- **Lost Landscapes:** The document notes that less than 1% of Indiana's original forests, prairies, and wetlands remain. What is lost—spiritually or physically—when a natural landscape is replaced entirely by development or industrial use? Are there current development activities occurring in your area that continue to put pressure on loss of land (e.g., data centers)?
- **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 3: Human Impact & The Ethics of Production

- **Agriculture:** Indiana is a major farming state. How can we, as consumers and parishioners, better support "good farming" that restores relationships rather than just maximizing production?
- **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?

- **The "Pill" and the Environment:** The document makes a striking connection between synthetic estrogens (from birth control) and the health of fish populations. How does this help us see the Church's teaching on human sexuality as part of a larger "ecological" concern for nature's design? Are there other chemicals we are discharging into our sewers and into our rivers that also have that same kind of negative impact?
- **Energy Transition:** The Bishops suggest it is "prudent" to develop renewable energy. What are the obstacles (spiritual, economic, or political) that prevent us from moving away from finite resources like coal and gas? Are there some positive steps in our parish that can bring us closer to responsible use of our energy resources?

Part 4: Spiritual Renewal & Action

- **Serene Attentiveness:** What does the phrase "serene attentiveness" mean to you? How can we practice this in a world dominated by digital technology and "technological, digital, and urban" lifestyles?
- **The Sabbath:** How could recovering a true "Lord's Day" of rest help heal our relationship with the environment? What are some simple concrete steps we can take in this direction?
- **The Naming of Creatures:** Like Adam, we are invited to name the creatures in our watershed. Can you name five birds, trees, or wildflowers native to your specific parish grounds? How does knowing their names change your care for them?
- **Concrete Steps:** The document mentions solar panels, sustainable gardens, and the Laudato Si' Action Platform as potential actions that could be taken to create a more sustainable parish community. Which of these feels most "doable" for our parish in the next year? What small steps can be made by everyone to begin this new ecological journey?

Closing Reflection

- **The Garden of the Heart:** The summary concludes by comparing the Garden of Eden to the "garden of our hearts." If your heart were a plot of Indiana land right now, would it be a "wetland" full of life, a "fallow field" waiting for seed, or "paved over" by the busyness of life? What does it need to become "fertile ground"?

