



Critical Conversations in Catholic Education

Climate Anxiety, Education, and Catholic Social Teaching



A young woman with long brown hair, glasses, and a patterned scarf is shouting with her mouth wide open. She is holding a large white sign above her head with both hands. The sign has the word 'Eco' in blue and green letters, a drawing of a globe in the middle, and 'WORRIERS' in blue and green letters below it. The sign is decorated with pink arrows pointing in various directions. In the background, other protesters and signs are visible, including one that says 'MELT EARTS'.

Eco-Anxiety

chronic fear of environmental doom

Global Dread

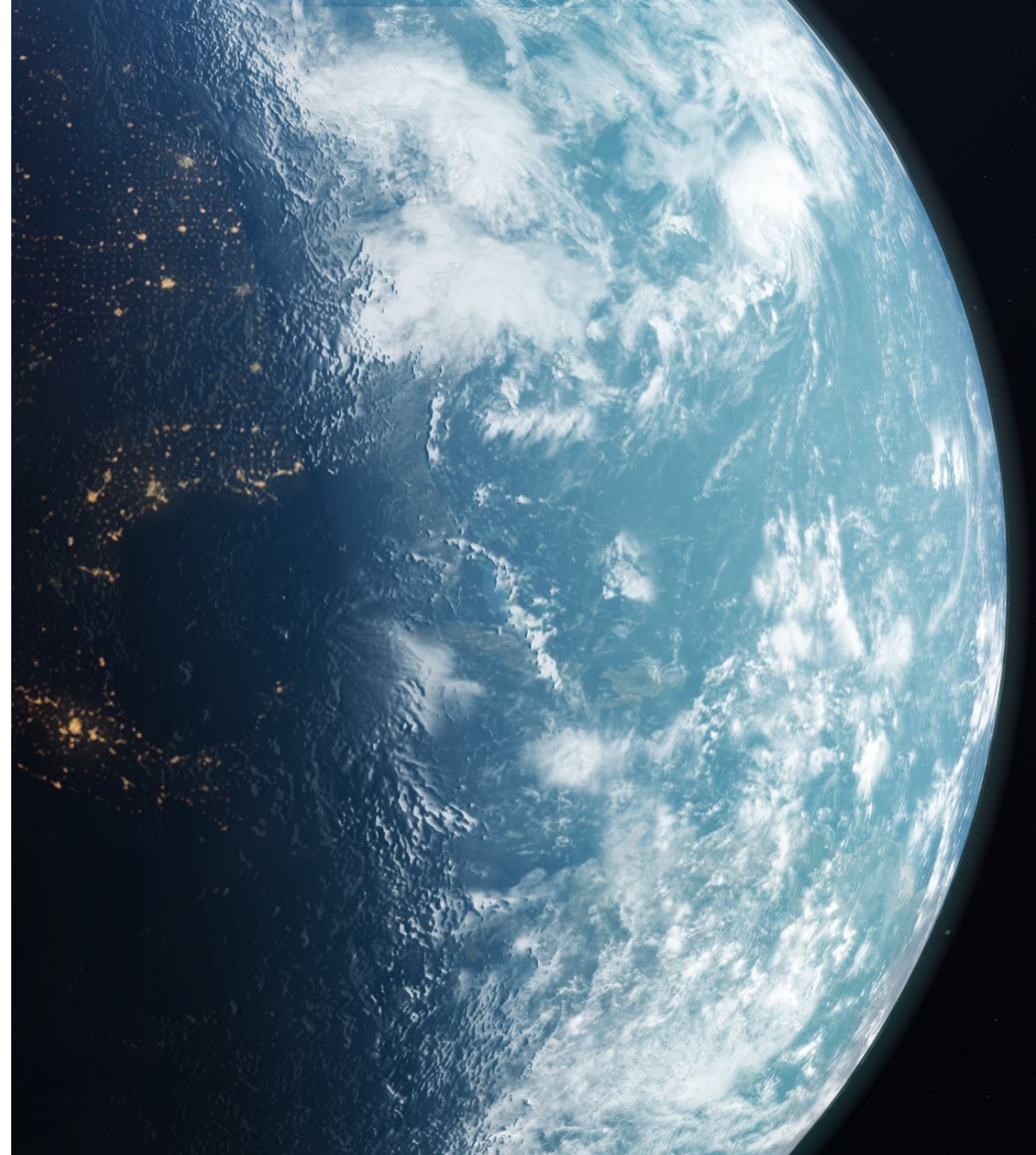
“The anticipation of an apocalyptic future state of the world that produces a mixture of terror and sadness in the sufferer for those who will exist in such a state.”





Climate Change is a *Hyperobject*

- “A **hyperobject** is distributed across space and time to such an extent that our minds cannot fully comprehend it... or think about it as a contained phenomenon.”
- **Psychic numbing** occurs “when one faces an overwhelming threat that is inescapable, and when one cannot muster what’s needed to resist.”



Causes of Climate Denial

As more people experience the dangers of climate change, psychic numbing towards the climate crisis increases because we cannot grasp how to intervene to reduce the threat of such a hyperobject.

Many of us don't engage in the reality of climate change because it elicits painful feelings, and we lack safe spaces to express and explore them.

Acknowledging climate change also means recognizing that we are complicit in systems that force us to behave in ways that contribute to the crisis

Types of Climate Denial

- *Outright climate denial*
- *Negation*
- *Disavowal*
- *Perverse state of mind*



Culture of Un-Care

- **A culture of un-care** maintains and promotes social acceptance of selfish impulses and short-sightedness
- But when we bring thinking and feeling together, eco-anxiety can be an antidote to the culture of un-care and develop into **eco-compassion** or **eco-empathy**.



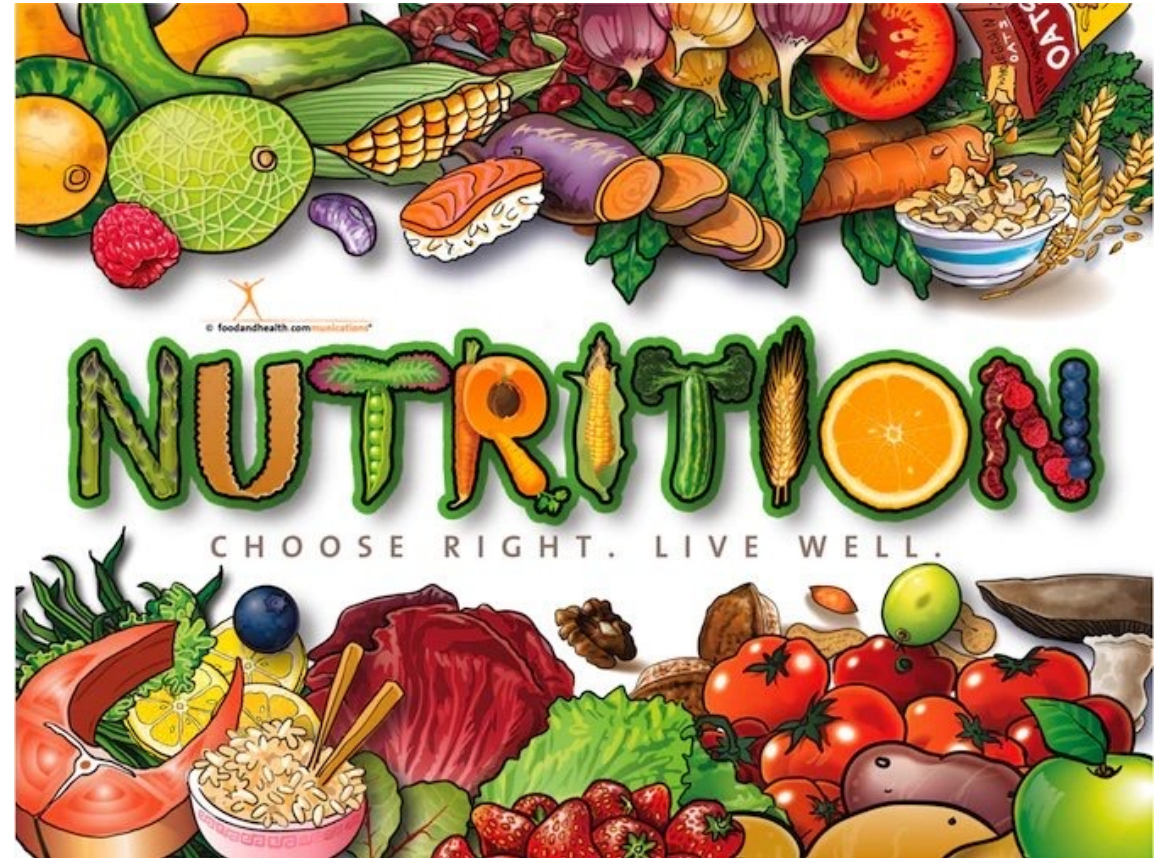


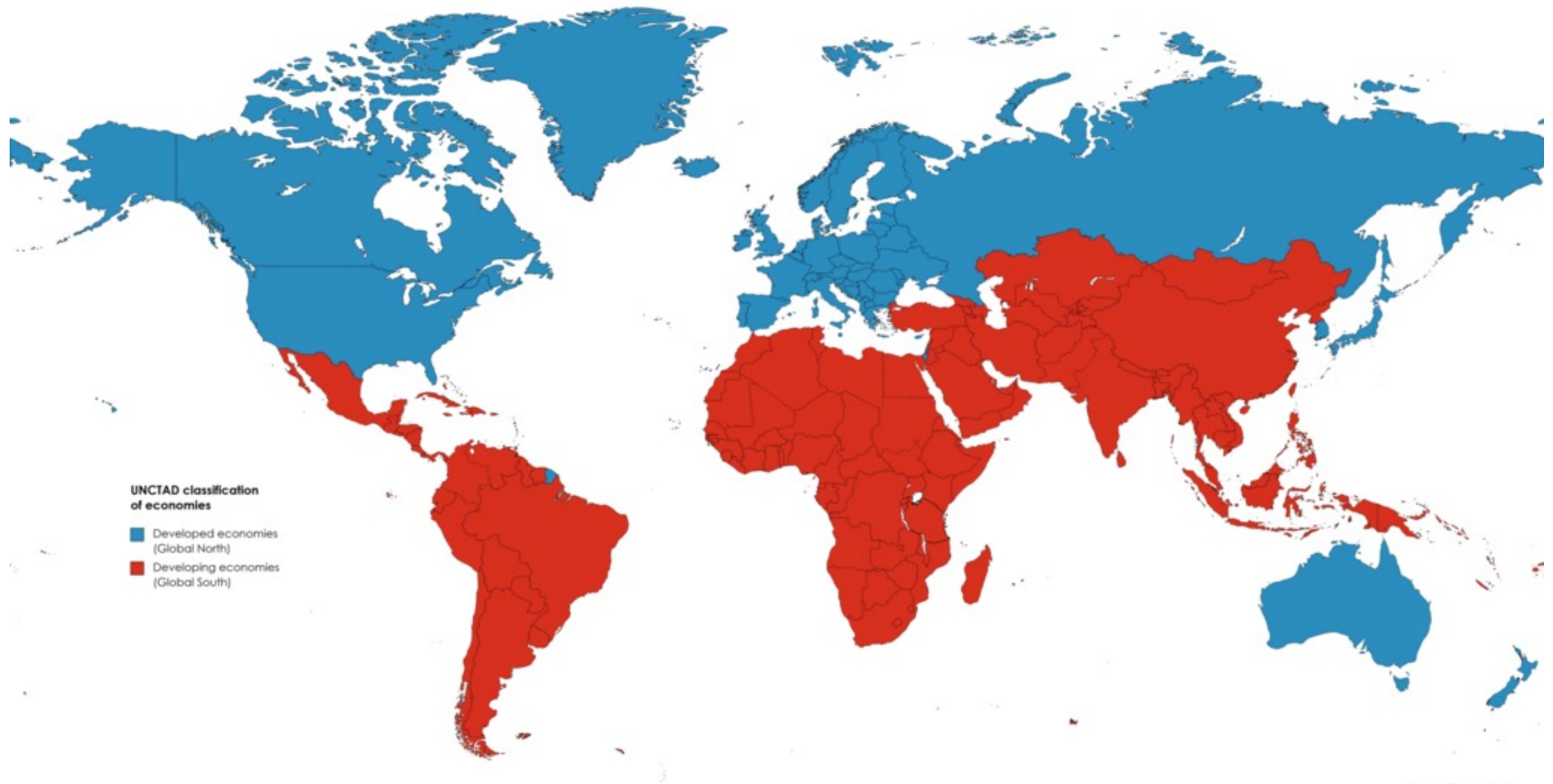
Climate Anxiety in Our Youth

Research / Findings

Department Spotlight

Canadian and World Studies





**UNCTAD classification
of economies**

- Developed economies
(Global North)
- Developing economies
(Global South)







- When the earth suffers, humanity suffers.
- For most of us, our daily lives are lived far removed from the stark realities of our world.
- We should view ourselves as caretakers of creation.
- Science has a role to play in the conversation about the future of the world but so does our Christian faith or spirituality.
- Our faith or beliefs calls us to be the kind of people who will not let the earth be despoiled and people forgotten.
- We have greatly benefited from technological advancements, however, technological growth has not necessarily been accompanied by a development in human responsibility, values, and conscience.
- Society/Governments/Systems have focused too much on economic profit for the few and has ignored humanity's search for meaning through work, the complexity of ecosystems and regional economies, and the plight of poor and future generations.
- Everything in the world is connected and interrelated in some way
- Our leaders need to think of the long-term common good and not only short-term gains.
- Many things have to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change in order to make the world a better place (i.e. if we don't personally change our attitudes and lives, the solutions to our global ecological crisis will never really arrive).



- More violent hurricanes for the people in Cuba.
- My family back in Ethiopia have experienced drought.
- Many islands [in] the Philippines are at risk of sinking because of raising water levels.
- My cousins in Trinidad was telling me about the floods she get and that some days she has to skip school because of them.
- My friend...I would always be worried about her when there's a hurricane happening.
- Yes, most of my family lives in Mexico and there has been an increase in temperature there. Mexico is already a hot place and in the summer it has gotten worse because of climate change.
- Heatwaves and droughts have led to fluctuating what prices over the last few years. This is leading many products' prices to spike which affects my family and other people in my community who might live on tight budgets.
- The harsher weather conditions and temperatures affects everyone I know including myself. The weather is so inconsistent now, and it effects people's moods.
- Many floods have occurred in the Philippines and this caused many homes to be destructed. It's been in the news and its terrifying to think everything you've worked for can be wiped out in one flood.
- My family in Mexico is very affected by the consequences of climate change. They live in a city that has a lot of pollution caused by factories. In the morning and throughout the day you can see a smog of cloud which is made up of pollution and dangerous chemicals that can be toxic to humans.
- ...climate change is also having a disproportionate impact on low-income communities, indigenous peoples, and other marginalized groups that are less able to adapt to these changes.

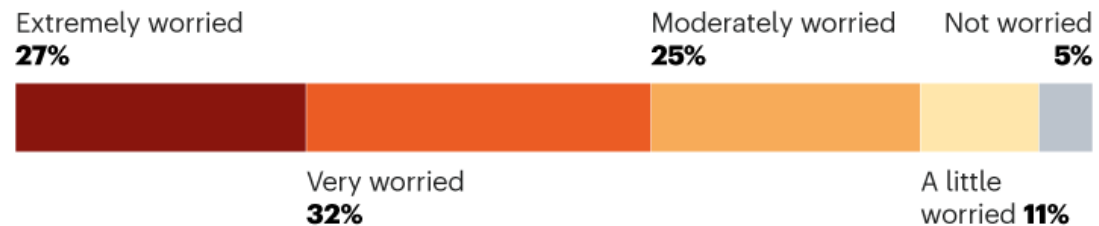


- Sad because we are destroying the world.
- The current state of the environment is bad and needs to be helped, but feel powerless knowing that there is more evil than good.
- I feel sad that there isn't much we can do to fix it, but we can just keep it at how it is now. I also feel powerless and that anything I do to try and help doesn't change anything.
- I feel ashamed when I think of the state of the environment because we as human beings are meant to protect earth but we are the ones destroying it.
- ...it makes me feel worried. I want to be able to enjoy a healthy planet for the rest of my life and for future generations and learning that many animals could/will go extinct due to climate change is saddening.
- Frustration...because people take their only home for granted and do not realize that by killing the planet, they are killing themselves and their descendants. Only once it's too late will people start scrambling to make amends for their behaviour.
- ...angry that so many government systems and businesses don't care at all.
- I start to worry when I think about it because if the world keeps destroying our carbon sinks and replaces them with other buildings, I worry about getting oxygen to breathe.
- I feel as if my kids won't have a safe [place] to grow up, and that scares me.
- I feel disappointed that we don't care for our future generations and we're destroying the earth over money.
- Angry at everyone in charge. Why is it so hard to help other people? What's the point of being called a leader if you can't even do that.

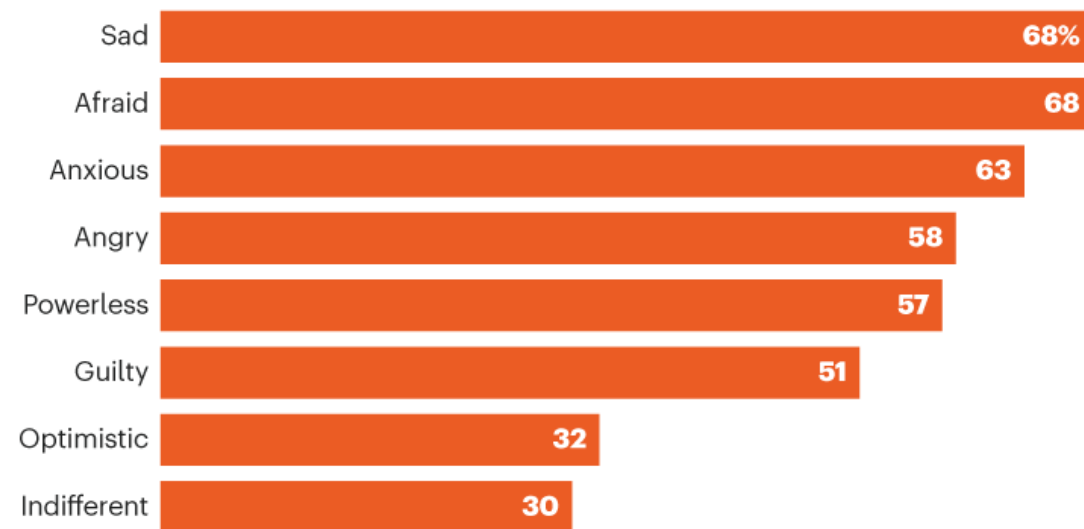
CLIMATE ANXIETY

A survey of 10,000 young people shows that negative feelings about climate change can cause psychological distress.

How worried are you about climate change?



Climate change makes me feel...






Questions...

Do you see signs of eco-anxiety in yourself, in your family and friends, in your students?

How does it show up in your interactions at school, particularly with students?





Catholic Resources in a Time of Eco-Anxiety



Providing Theological Language

Elizabeth Gandolfo:
Vulnerability

Providing Theological Language

Edward Schillebeeckx:
Negative Contrast Experiences



A Religious Education Concern

Theresa O'Keefe:
Robust Relationships





The Problem of Privilege

- ▶ “myopic focus on self”
- ▶ “the protection of one’s own”



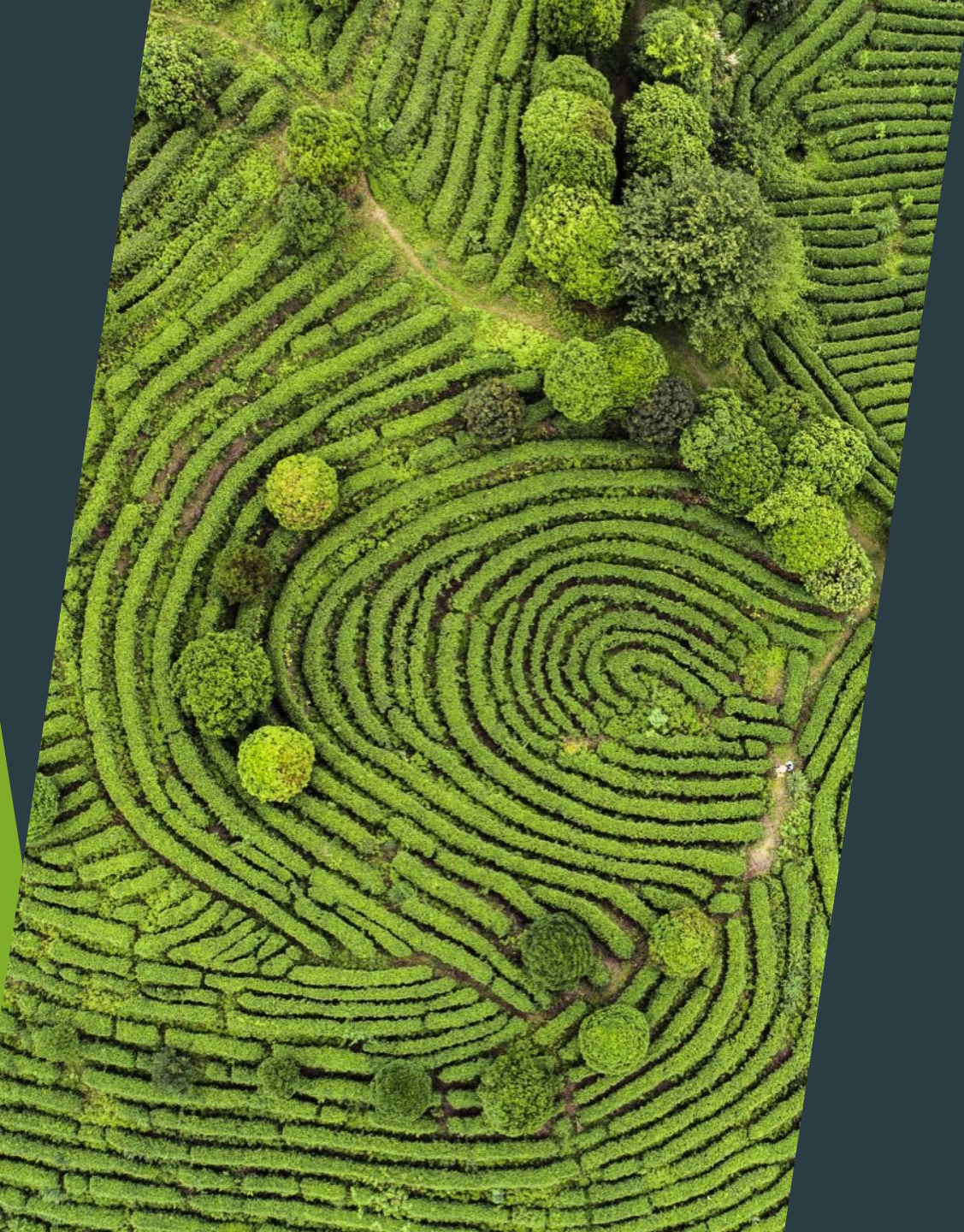
Combating Climax Anxiety with Community



Community of creation

- ▶ “As part of the universe, called into being by one Father, all of us are linked by unseen bonds and together form a kind of universal family.”

Laudato Si' (89)



Ecological Conversion

Gratitude

Gratuitousness

Interconnectedness

Questions...

In what ways do you see these theological ideas implemented in your school community? Or where might you wish they were better implemented?

What are some of the practices of your school that foster communities of care, address our eco-anxiety, and reconnect us to the earth?

What ideas or insights have you learned today that you want to think about more?





Upcoming Event

Workshop Two: Science Suffering, and (Eco-)Theology

Hosted by Durham Catholic, Oshawa

Wednesday, April 17, 4:30-6:00
in-person and online

Featuring Adam Hincks, SJ
and Jean-Pierre Fortin





Upcoming Event

Conference:

Youth Climate Anxiety and Religious Education

Hosted by Regis St. Michael's Faculty of
Theology, University of St. Michael's College

Saturday, October 5, 10:00-2:00

Keynote: Joyce Mercer, Yale University