



Justice and Peace Department
Archdiocese of Johannesburg

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Dear Reverend Father,

Greetings in the Holy Name of Jesus and Mary! It is a great pleasure to approach your office with the programme for the *Season of Creation: September 1 to October 4, 2021* as accessed from the website of the SACBC Justice and Peace Commission.

September is the month dedicated by the Holy Father for the **ecumenical family** to celebrate our care of creation. We journey through *Laudato Si* with prayerfulness, reflection, and action as we thank and praise our Creator and care for others and our environment. In 2019 Pope Francis said that “our relationship with the environment can never be isolated from our relationship with others and with God.” The theme for 2021 is “**a home for all, renewing the Oikos of God**”. This year’s symbol, **Abraham’s Tent**, expresses the ecumenical call of radical hospitality, safeguarding a place for all creatures, human and non-human, in the household (oikos) of God.

September is also heritage month in South Africa, linking us with the country’s champion trees, which includes the oldest and culturally significant trees. The Sophia Town Oak Tree and the Sagole Baobab Tree in Limpopo are amongst the culturally significant trees. South Africa also celebrates Arbor Week from 30th August 2021 to the 5th of September 2021, coordinated by the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD). As Christians, Arbor week is not only an environmental management process or a sustainable development project: it is an opportunity to plant indigenous trees as a gesture of our love, appreciation, and care for creation.

Trees absorb excess carbon dioxide and pollutant gas, provide water and climate regulation and clean air. Research has also linked trees to health and crime reduction benefits. Trees have a significant place in Sacred Scripture - from Genesis to Revelation, we learn about the tree of life. In Revelation 22:2-3 it is stated: “On each side of the river was the tree of life. It gives twelve different kinds of fruit. It gives this fruit twelve times a year, new fruit each month. Its leaves are used to heal the nations.” Indeed, Sacred Scripture teaches us about many types of trees – oaks of righteousness, cedars of Lebanon, almond, fig, and olive trees; a tree of life and a tree of knowledge and the trees at Mamre where God visited Abraham.

The symbol for 2021 *Season of Creation* is ‘Abraham’s Tent’. From a justice and peace perspective, this theme carries much relevance. Are our homes a place of safety for all – the vulnerable, the elderly, the marginalised? Is our home a safe space for women and girls in our family? Is our home as safe and peaceful as *Abraham’s Tent*? Are our communities a safe space for all? Do we keep our environment safe and taken care of? During the *Season of Creation* Christians are called to ‘transform

our home into a tent for all creation'. This year, the symbol of *'Abraham's Tent'* "signifies our commitment to safeguard a place for all who share our common home, just as Abraham did in Genesis."

The inspirational journey of *Abraham's Tent*, "**a home for all, renewing the Oikos of God**" challenges us to 'safeguard a place for all creatures, human and non-human in the household, (oikos) of God'. It inspires us to open ourselves towards learning. We draw from the insight of Job who at a time of his own crisis, were still able to recognize the magnificence of God in non-human creatures.

The Book of Job reads: "But ask the animals, and they will teach you, or ask the birds of the air, and they will tell you. Or speak to the earth and it will teach you. Or let the fish of the sea inform you. Which of all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? In God's hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all humankind." (Job 12:7-10).

As Justice and Peace Department, we invite parishes to also customize their programmes for the month of September and address aspects that requires interventions in parish life and outside parish life, in the communities where we live. Let your programmes include prayer, sustainability, and advocacy to bring about the desired change we so much want to see around us. Let us not forget the vulnerable and marginalized in our prayers, finding ways to pray for them or with them. Sometimes the vulnerable and marginalized are within our own parishes and we may not even be aware.

The **Season of Creation** is also an opportunity for Catholics, a critical moment, to give essence to the voices of the most vulnerable and advocate on their behalf ahead of two important summits, the UN Summit on biodiversity (COP 15) in October and the UN Climate Summit in November (COP 26). **You are invited to join the advocacy initiative, Healthy Planet, Healthy People Petition for bold action to protect creation in addition to other initiatives calling for bold action forward.** The Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development has called upon Catholics to join this advocacy initiative as a priority during this *Season of Creation*. You can access the petition at www.thecatholicpetition.org or you can find it on the link hereto¹.

Please find attached hereto, for your ease of reference, the following information:

- Season of Creation 1 September to 4 October 2021 (SACBC).
- 2021 Season of Creation: Letter from Sr Patricia, SACBC).
- Letter from the Secretary, Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development dated 24 May 2021.
- Way of Beauty: Stations of Creation by Fr Gilbert Choondal. Access it via this link:

<https://seasonofcreation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Way-of-beauty-8.pdf>

¹ <https://laudatosimovement.org/2021/08/17/pope-francis-vatican-duffe-letter-season-of-creation-2021/>

- Practical Ideas for Weeks 1-4: Compiled by Peace and Justice Department, Archdiocese of Johannesburg.
- Tree planting guide for the Season of Creation 2021: You can access the full liturgy at <https://catholicclimatecovenant.org/tree-plantingservice-and-and-prayer>. You are most welcome to make it a special moment during this *Season of Creation*, for example after Mass on the World Day of Prayer for Creation (1st September 2021) or after Mass on the Feast of St Francis (4 October 2021). You can also plant indigenous trees during the national Arbor Week from 30th August to the 5th of September 2021. Please add your tree to the United Nations Environment Project Tree Counter at <https://a.plant-for-the-planet.org/treemapper>

You are most welcome to network with the tree-planting project coordinator of the Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to obtain sponsored trees². The Department has a tree-planting project until end September 2021.

You are invited to join the initiative towards food resilience during a pandemic that contributed towards job losses and reduction in income. More than half of the children in South Africa live below the poverty line³. We invite families to start a vegetation patch to grow their own vegetables - homestead gardening is a way to ensure food security.

Lastly, I humbly suggest you consider placing a statue of St Francis of Assisi, the Patron Saint of Animals and Ecology in your church during the Season of Creation.

Greetings in Christ Jesus,

Rev. Fr. Sefako Daniel Santawana

Episcopal Vicar for Justice and Peace

² Send an e-mail request to Ms. Happy Baloyi at happy.baloyi@gauteng.gov.za

³ Child Gauge Report, 2019