

# Roman Catholic Diocese of Syracuse 2023 Plan to Continue Implementing Laudato Si / On Caring for Our Common Home

## Diocese of Syracuse 2023 COCH Action Plan

Our climate crisis, dwindling natural habitats, and our throwaway mentality are serious threats to all forms of life on God's Earth, our common home. Our Holy Father tells us that the ecological crisis caused by human activity in the past two centuries is the biggest challenge now facing us (Laudato Si, 2015, chapter 46). We often need a crisis to motivate us to recall why we are alive and why we need to act. For so many centuries even before humans ever existed, God has poured out love to all of creation in such abundance. Today, God's love continues to flow to us, but the cries of Earth in the form of rising global temperatures caused by excessive use of fossil fuels and rapidly dwindling areas of natural habitats bring with them an urgency for our actions. At the same time, these cries of the Earth also bring exciting opportunities to interact with God, with each other, and with God's world. Using gifts from the Holy Spirit and allowing Jesus to show us the way, we must shift our priorities and our habits based on the seven interconnected elements of the Vatican's Laudato Si Action Platform outlined below.

- **Ecological Spirituality:** Promote a faithful vision of God's love poured out to us through creation and encourage greater contact with God's world full of wonder, praise, and life.
- **Ecological Education:** Provide facts about our climate crisis in understandable forms and to foster greater awareness and to generate and enliven transformative actions.
- **Respond to the Cry of the Earth:** Protect God's Earth for the wellbeing of all, as we equitably address the climate crisis, biodiversity loss, and ecological sustainability.
- **Respond to the Cry of the Poor:** Promote eco-justice for all of God's people aware that we are called to defend ourselves and all forms of life on Earth.
- **Ecological Economics:** Individuals and our Diocese can impact our economy in ways that can beneficially affect how resources are used and conserved.
- **Adopt Sustainable Lifestyles:** Identify and promote actions grounded in promoting efficient use of renewable resources and reducing use of non-renewable resources.
- **Community Engagement and Participatory Action:** Participate in our wider community and advocate for policies that protect God's Earth for us and for future generations.

In addition, this plan includes our task force supporting established Parish Creation Care Teams and actively encouraging new Parish Creation Care Teams to form using experience gained from the established Teams.

This Plan is an adjustable path forward to better care for our common home based fundamentally on our spirituality and our science. To help us all to act with love for God's creation, we offer this path forward for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Syracuse and for its parishes and people of any age throughout our Diocese. Others caring about God's Earth are welcome to join us. This plan will be reassessed annually as it is shared and used.

It is important to name and begin to address what keeps us from better caring for God's creation, Given the ecological crisis is our biggest challenge, why are we not talking more about it and doing more to address it? Let us discuss and better understand potential barriers and how they can be overcome. We encourage discussions of these and other barriers as this Plan is implemented.

# Roman Catholic Diocese of Syracuse 2023 Plan to Continue Implementing Laudato Si / On Caring for Our Common Home

- **Not part of my faith life:** Do social concerns belong in church?
- **The power of habits:** We very often act without considering consequences;
- **Fear of change:** Do we get “stuck” in our ways? If so, why?
- **Discomfort:** Do we turn away from topics that seem large and complex?
- **Ideology:** Why do we believe what we believe about our current affairs?
- **Vision:** What are each of our visions for our future?
- **Distrust of science:** What is fact and what is hearsay or opinion?
- **Feeling overwhelmed:** Do we as individuals feel we cannot have influence?
- **Why bother? What can I do?:** I am only one person. How does the common good affect me?
- **Too political:** Was Jesus political with his words and actions?
- **Personal stake:** What truly motivates us to act?
- **Strength of the profit motive:** Our current system seems to focus on profits for the next month or quarter at the expense of long-term needs.
- **Hesitancy to engage with others:** Not all of us enjoy engagement, but we are interconnected.

God has given us free will. By doing little to nothing to address our challenges, we make a choice not to address what is hurting us, and when we do, our God weeps.

Members of our Care for our Common Home Task Force feel that two of the seven elements stand out for our Diocese: ecological spirituality and ecological education. Our faith and in God as our Creator and our faith that Jesus Christ has been present from the beginning form the basis that all of us are interconnected through God with each other and with all forms of life. Education provides understanding of the science needed to deal with our social challenges as best as we can, and education can enhance our faith and vice versa. Our faith and science are complementary. On this basis, we present first our plan to promote ecological spirituality and ecological education from which the other five elements of this plan follow.

## **Ecological Spirituality**

Our Church leaders since at least Pope St. John Paul II have taught us about the importance of the natural world. The Earth and all its elements and structures and all its millions of life forms have been wonderfully created and interconnected with each other by God who is love. We come from the Earth as the beginning of the Book of Genesis tells us. All of us are part of God’s creation. God has created us and shown us through Jesus what we are called to do; love everyone and everything with compassion and with the Holy Spirit as our constant guide. We have been created to thrive which we can only live out by loving. When we stray from loving all forms of life, we need to remind ourselves with humility, identify and confess our straying, regroup, and proceed again. In addition, we are reminded of our need to love when we worship God and remember Jesus’ gifts given to us. Life is about communion with God and each other.

The following actions are offered to promote eco-spirituality within our Diocese:

<b><u>Action</u></b>	<b><u>Lead Responsibility</u></b>	<b><u>Timeframe</u></b>
S-1 Identify specific ways we each can get more in touch with our faith through the natural world’s wonder and awe, such as Scripture, prayers, and experiencing nature.	Diocesan Task Force eco-spirituality work group and parish creation care teams	Develop initial listing to be introduced for Season of Creation 2023 starting Sept. 1

## Roman Catholic Diocese of Syracuse 2023 Plan to Continue Implementing Laudato Si / On Caring for Our Common Home

<u>S-2</u> Identify blessings and/or prayer services for the Season of Creation (September), Thanksgiving, Lent, Easter, and solstices	Diocesan Task Force eco-spirituality work group and liturgy planners	Offer a blessing of seeds each April and a prayer service to open Season of Creation (September 1).
<u>S-3</u> Identify ecological catechesis materials for middle school, high school, and adults.	Diocesan Offices of Catechesis and Catholic Schools	Fall 2023
<u>S-4</u> Identify and promote discussions of <u>Laudato Si</u> (Pope Francis, 2015) and/or other faith-enriching creation care resources.	Diocesan Task Force eco-spirituality work group	Provide an outline or study-prayer guide in 2023.
<u>S-5</u> Explore how caring for creation overlaps with Eucharist and the Synod process. Consider the Diocese of Davenport's work on this.	Diocesan Task Force eco-spirituality work group with the Diocesan Synod office.	Offer to meet with the Diocesan Synod coordinator in August – September 2023.

### Ecological Education

Education and spiritual growth are both essential and complementary. The more we appreciate God, the more we want to learn, and the more we learn, the more we appreciate God.

The power of God's love is clear when we consider what we know about God's world. Scientific advances have shown us the Earth is perfectly situated relative to the size and power of the Sun. The Earth dances with the Sun so we can experience our days, nights, and seasons thereby allowing us to thrive. In addition, as Einstein has shown to us, energy and mass are interchangeable as, through the Eucharist, we have been saying since Jesus' time.

All the elements needed for life were formed by God when the Earth was formed. What great power and love God has demonstrated to us by creating the Earth resulting in such beauty and such variety! Any variation in the Earth's dance with the Sun and any variations in the balances or cycles needed for life to thrive could impact all of us.

The following actions are offered to promote eco-education within our Diocesan parishes and households.

<u>Action</u>	<u>Lead Responsibility</u>	<u>Timeframe</u>
<u>E-1</u> Identify and begin to communicate visual explanations of our most significant impacts on God's earth.	Diocesan Task Force ecological education work group	Fall 2023
<u>E-2</u> Assess and distribute creation care programs for students and adults, including laboratory and outdoor opportunities.	Diocesan Office of Catholic Schools with Lemoyne College representatives	May 2024
<u>E-3</u> Continue to implement an annual Green Apple Award in association with the Diocese of Ogdensburg.	Diocesan Offices of Schools and Catechesis	Ongoing. Consider expanding to high schools in 2024.

# Roman Catholic Diocese of Syracuse 2023 Plan to Continue Implementing Laudato Si / On Caring for Our Common Home

## Respond to the Cry of the Earth

Our excessive use of fossil fuels for many decades is resulting in God’s Earth crying out in pain. God’s wondrous Earth is running an unsustainable fever, and we are clearly feeling the fever’s effects. Cutting back our use of fossil fuels is essential, including energy consumption and food consumption. We must transition ourselves to the use of electricity and renewable forms of energy. In addition, so many forms of life are being crowded out of their habitats by human construction projects. We as believers can set an example for others to follow.

The following actions are offered to parishes, Catholic schools to respond to the cry of the Earth as affected by our Diocesan buildings and by our households:

<b>Action</b>	<b>Lead Responsibility</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>
<u>CE-1</u> Identify and communicate tools for reducing our use of fossil fuels, including switching to renewable energy forms, and reducing use which also saves money.	Diocesan energy conversion work group using resources from NYSERDA and regional energy hubs.	Winter 2023-2024
<u>CE-2</u> Identify and communicate sustainable ways to promote foods produced using fewer resources, such as locally grown fruits and vegetables.	Diocesan work group for adopting sustainable lifestyles	2024
<u>CE-3</u> Identify and communicate ways to enhance local natural habitats, such as promoting native and pollinator plant types on parish grounds.	Task force members working with national, regional, and local initiatives, such as the Sacred Grounds program.	Winter 2023-2024
<u>CE-4</u> Identify and communicate how we can use fewer plastics.	Diocesan work group for adopting sustainable lifestyles	2024
<u>CE-5</u> Communicate long-term climate restoration efforts to uptake atmospheric carbon.	Foundation for Climate Restoration	Start in 2024

## Respond to the Cry of the Poor

As impacts of climate change and loss of habitat occur, most often historically underrepresented people are the people that suffer the most even though they are least responsible for our creation care challenges. For example, who too often lives in flood prone areas and who are climate refugees? Our Catholic Social Teaching is clear that everyone has a right to basic human needs such as a respectable place to live, clean water, and clean air. Government agencies are offering financial opportunities for historically underrepresented persons to access opportunities that otherwise would be cost prohibitive.

The following actions are offered to promote responding to the cry of the poor in our Diocese:

<b>Action</b>	<b>Lead Responsibility</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>

## Roman Catholic Diocese of Syracuse 2023 Plan to Continue Implementing Laudato Si / On Caring for Our Common Home

CP-1 Identify and assess funds for energy and/or food conversion benefiting historically underrepresented groups.	Diocesan work group for energy conversion	Fall 2023
CP-2 Identify areas of our Diocese most vulnerable to climate extremes that may differ from areas identified by NYSERDA.	Catholic volunteers working with SUNY-ESF	Fall 2023
CP-3 Welcome and promote opportunities to interact with Indigenous communities and climate refugees relocating to our Diocese.	Catholic Charities local operations	Start in 2024

### **Ecological Economics**

We all have power as consumers through the purchases we make. Our economic system often encourages private companies to maximize their financial profits rather than maximizing peoples' wellbeing. In addition, certain profit-making entities influence our governments to protect their own interests that are often different from peoples' interests and protecting God's Earth.

The following actions are offered to promote economic practices that better care for God's creation:

<b><u>Action</u></b>	<b><u>Lead Responsibility</u></b>	<b><u>Timeframe</u></b>
EE-1 Identify economic resources that are Earth-friendly and review with local economists and respected watchdog groups such as Green America.	Parish creation care team members collaborating with outside professionals	November 2023
EE-2 Continue to divest Diocesan funds from credit card companies, financial institutions, insurance companies, and investment funds that significantly support fossil fuel extraction and refining companies.	Diocesan financial representatives based on USCCB guidelines.	June 2025 for Diocesan leadership as an example for others to follow

### **Adopt Sustainable Lifestyles**

As we as individuals and household members become more aware of our connection with God's Earth and more educated about how we are impacting God's Earth, we will want to at least consider doing more in our homes to care for God's creation. As individuals, we can have influence and provide Earth-friendly examples for our families and friends to evaluate.

The following actions are offered to promote adopting sustainable lifestyles that better care for God's creation:

<b><u>Action</u></b>	<b><u>Lead Responsibility</u></b>	<b><u>Timeframe</u></b>
----------------------	-----------------------------------	-------------------------

## **Roman Catholic Diocese of Syracuse 2023 Plan to Continue Implementing Laudato Si / On Caring for Our Common Home**

<u>ASP-1</u> Identify and publicize practices that are particularly Earth-friendly, such as energy efficiency, conservation, eco-friendly materials, and reducing use of plastics.	Diocesan work groups for adopting sustainable lifestyles and communications	Fall 2023
<u>ASP-2</u> Evaluate the utility of the CNY Carbon Challenge for parishes and households.	Diocesan work group for adopting sustainable lifestyles	2024
<u>ASP-3</u> Keep abreast of how different local counties in our Diocese have varying recycling practices and communicate these to parishes and households.	Diocesan work group for adopting sustainable lifestyles	2024

### **Community Engagement and Participatory Action**

Actions by individuals, households, parishes, and our Diocese do not address regulations and policies that also need to care for God’s creation. Community organizing actions can be warranted particularly when proposed County, State, and/or Federal initiatives are Earth-friendly (or unfriendly). As faithful Catholic Christians, we can have influence with community or larger advocacy and related actions particularly when the timing is suitable.

The following actions are offered to promote community engagement and participatory actions that better care for God’s creation:

<b><u>Action</u></b>	<b><u>Lead Responsibility</u></b>	<b><u>Timeframe</u></b>
<u>CEPA-1</u> Working with respected initiatives, identify key regulations and legislation worth supporting.	Diocesan work group for community engagement and participatory action	Ongoing
<u>CEPA-2</u> Discuss with the New York State Catholic Conference how caring for God’s creation could be included in the Conference’s work.	Diocesan work group representative(s) and Diocesan Office of Advocacy	2024
<u>CEPA-3</u> Work with parishes and possibly other Catholic entities in our Diocese to help start effective local creation care teams.	Diocesan work group for creation care teams	Begin September 2023 working with the Ignatian Volunteer Corps.