



ARCHDIOCESE
OF INDIANAPOLIS
The Church in Central and Southern Indiana

Written by:



Archdiocese
Creation Care
Ministry

LAUDATO SI' REFLECTION

May 22, 2023



OUR COMMITMENT TO LAUDATO SI'

In 2022, the Archdiocese of Indianapolis was one of the first dioceses worldwide to enroll in the Laudato Si' Action Platform, the online platform equipping the Catholic Church and beyond to take concrete action in line with Pope Francis's encyclical letter, *Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home*.

Archbishop Charles C. Thompson and Chancellor Chris Walsh, together with the members of the ArchIndy Creation Care Commission, are committed to supporting the entire archdiocese in working toward the Laudato Si' Goals through a continual process of reflection, assessment, planning and implementation, integrating this work with the archdiocesan pastoral plan.

This reflection is an important step on our Laudato Si' journey. It has helped us identify opportunities and challenges present as we seek to answer the Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor in our local context. Developing this document has prompted increased dialogue about integral ecology in our archdiocese and has helped shape the goals identified in our Laudato Si' Plan.

Our hope is that this work helps revitalize our archdiocese and leads its members in a renewed relationship with God, with one another, and with nature by answering the call to be good caretakers of the Earth.

This reflection was authored by the Archdiocese of Indianapolis's Creation Care Commission:

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Cover photo: Prayer flags, made by St. Thomas Aquinas School (Indianapolis) students to express their hopes and prayers for our world, were carried by Sharon Horvath, Jo Beck Jennings, Andy Pike (St. Thomas Aquinas Parish) and Joe Shierling (Cathedral Parish, Indianapolis) in the People's Climate March on April 29, 2017, in Washington, DC.



“MANY THINGS HAVE TO CHANGE COURSE,
BUT IT IS WE HUMAN BEINGS ABOVE ALL
WHO NEED TO CHANGE.” (LAUDATO SI’, 202)

VISION

We are an archdiocese committed to the principles and values set forth in Pope Francis’ encyclical, Laudato Si’.

Parishes, schools, agencies, and organizations exhibit a culture of sustainability and consider the environmental impact of their activities.

Parishioners make good environmental choices in their homes and daily lives and understand that their choices affect the lives of others. They know the joy of living more simply and understand that creation care is a moral imperative.

As we reflect on our journey toward this vision, we begin with an understanding of who we are as an archdiocese.





*Statue of St. Francis on the grounds of the Sisters of St. Francis in Oldenburg, Indiana.
Photo courtesy of the Sisters of St. Francis in Oldenburg, Indiana.*

ARCHDIOCESE OF INDIANAPOLIS SNAPSHOT

The Archdiocese of Indianapolis is one of five dioceses in the state of Indiana. When it was originally established as the Diocese of Vincennes in May 1834, it encompassed the entire state of Indiana and the eastern third of Illinois. The Archdiocese now covers 13,800 square miles of central and southern Indiana and is divided into 11 deaneries that cover urban areas (including the capital city of Indianapolis), small towns and rural areas.(1) As of 2015, there were approximately 221,000 Catholics in the archdiocese (about 8% of the area population). The Archdiocese comprises 126 parishes, 56 Catholic elementary schools, 11 Catholic high schools, one private K-12 school, two Catholic Universities, two Seminaries, six Catholic Charities agencies, three Catholic Healthcare Systems, and many offices of ministry.(2)

The mission of the Archdiocese is to “joyfully proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all people by living his mission of mercy, hope and salvation.” This is demonstrated through ministries that reach out to families, youth and young adults, incarcerated people, and people of other faiths, to name just a few. Many parishes include a St. Vincent de Paul ministry to assist those in need. Education is a high priority in the Archdiocese, as seen by the fact that a total of 26 archdiocesan schools have earned 32 Blue Ribbons from the U.S. Department of Education since 1985 as recognition of overall academic excellence or progress in closing achievement gaps. This is the most Blue Ribbon awards by any diocese in the nation.(3)



CATHOLICS IN INDIANA

Historically, Catholics in Indiana were associated primarily with European immigrants, especially from Ireland, Italy, and Germany. In Indiana, Catholics make up approximately 18% of the population (2015 figures), a percentage which has actually increased from 13% of the state's population in 2001.(4) Indiana has been able to counter the trend toward the decline in Catholics because of the growth of immigrants from Latin America.(5) According to the Pew Research Institute in their 2015 study (6), Catholics in Indiana tend to be older (53% over the age of 50), white (78%), and have lived in the U.S. for three or more generations. They are devout, with a high percentage reporting a strong belief in God and a regular prayer life. Hoosier Catholics often look to common sense for guidance about right and wrong, with religion as the second highest source for guidance. Hoosier Catholics tend to be more conservative in their political ideology, with 47% declaring an affiliation with the Republican Party. A significant number of Indiana Catholics say they are moderate (30%) or liberal (17%), with 35% belonging to the Democratic Party.



*Shrine to Our Lady of Fatima at
Fatima Retreat House,
Indianapolis, Indiana*

ARCHINDY ENVIRONMENTAL JOURNEY

In 2009, the Archdiocese commissioned an “Environmental Stewardship Agenda for Archdiocese of Indianapolis,” which essentially was a climate action plan for the Archdiocese. Although some aspects of the plan were implemented right away, personnel changes, including the archbishop himself, unfortunately resulted in the plan being shelved for the most part.

In March 2015, in anticipation of a papal encyclical on climate change scheduled to be issued in the summer of 2015, then Archbishop Joseph W. Tobin (now Cardinal Tobin of New Jersey), addressed a gathering at Marian University on “The Stewardship of Creation.” Archbishop Tobin’s remarks were moving and reflected his deep commitment to care for creation. He said, “For people of faith, this environmental crisis is more than just a scientific or technological problem. It is a moral problem. It is not a marginal matter, but a fundamental priority that must be addressed now and to our children or grandchildren to resolve.”

Several people who attended the event decided to meet regularly to come up with a proposal to address climate change archdiocese-wide. At the conclusion of the group’s meeting with Archbishop Tobin, he established the group as the ArchIndy Creation Care Commission to recommend a vision for a sustainable Archdiocese of Indianapolis, as well as specific goals and strategies to achieve that vision. The Commission, made up of volunteers with strong personal commitments to addressing climate change, developed a mission, vision, guiding principles and an initial plan for moving forward.



Archbishop Charles C. Thompson with members of the Creation Care Commission and the Indiana Catholic Conference after the Mass for the Season of Creation in 2022.



The efforts of the Commission since 2015 have primarily focused on education and outreach through articles in the archdiocesan newspaper, *The Criterion*, the formation of a website (ourcommonhome.org), and participation in various webinars and events. Materials and activities to celebrate the Season of Creation have been developed each year since 2019. "Plarn" (plastic yarn made from plastic bags) projects to make mats for those who are unhoused have been facilitated at the National Catholic Youth Conference and with several local confirmation groups. With the help of an intern from the Indiana Sustainable Development Program in the summer of 2019, four parishes and a high school participated in a pilot project to evaluate and encourage their sustainability efforts. The Commission also coordinates Indiana Catholics for Creation (IC4C), a statewide group of lay people, priests, and religious who are working together to protect our common home. This group, begun in the fall of 2020, works closely with the Indiana Catholic Conference to support education and advocacy outreach across the state.



Creation Care Ministry publicly supporting care for the Earth during the 2017 Climate March in Indianapolis



ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN INDIANA

Central and southern Indiana are home to beautiful forests, hillsides and rivers where many people enjoy connecting with nature. More than 80% of Indiana's land is devoted to farms and woodlands, many privately owned, which provide a diverse array of products.(7) But Indiana is ranked low in air and water quality. A report from the Environmental Integrity Project finds that Indiana has the most polluted rivers and streams of any state, primarily because of agricultural runoff. (8) The air quality is poor, especially for low-income and communities of color located near highways.(9) Manufacturing plays a crucial role in the state's economy, but Indiana ranks third in the nation for the highest amount of toxic chemicals released.(10)

Indiana uses a lot of energy – 12th in the nation for total energy use per capita – primarily for industry, transportation, and residential use. Historically, electricity generation was powered by coal which provided cheap, reliable electricity but also contributed to air and water pollution. In 2016, a report by the Center for Public Integrity found that five coal plants in Indiana ranked in the top 100 of U.S. plants releasing toxins and greenhouse gases. There were more of these "super-polluter" plants in Indiana than any other state.(11) Coal ash ponds containing the toxic residues from coal combustion can contaminate groundwater, surface water, and drinking water and remain an environmental problem even as coal-fired plants are retired.

In Indiana, the percentage of coal-fired power plants has declined from 90% in 2010 to 58% in 2021. Much of that energy source has switched to natural gas, but renewable energy in the state is increasing. In 2021, renewable resources (primarily wind) supplied 10% of the state's electricity. The state's national solar ranking in 2020 was 18th, up from 32nd place, and is expected to move to the number four spot in state rankings.(12) Another positive environmental trend is the slowly growing use of regenerative agriculture practices in the state.(13)



LOOKING TO THE FUTURE: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Indiana's climate is changing. The Purdue Climate Change Research Center, in their 2018 Indiana Climate Change Impacts Assessment (14), projects that there will be significantly more extremely hot days with temperatures at or above 95°F. It also projects that in southern Indiana, the number of extremely hot days is projected to rise from an average of 7 days per year to between 38 and 51 days by 2050. The average annual precipitation has already increased; more precipitation is likely to come in the form of heavy downpours in the spring and winter with less rain in the summer and fall. These impacts will greatly affect human health and agriculture in the state.

Scientists tell us that this is the decisive decade to make changes in order to avert the worst impacts of climate change. Pope Francis calls us to an "ecological conversion", which the Laudato Si' Movement explains as the "transformation of hearts and minds toward greater love of God, each other, and creation. It is a process of acknowledging our contribution to the social and ecological crisis and acting in ways that nurture communion: healing and renewing our common home." But change is hard.



St. Anne Shell Chapel on the grounds of the Sisters of Providence, St. Mary-of-the-Woods, Indiana. Photo courtesy of the Sisters of Providence.

Challenges

As we look to the future in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, **we recognize challenges ahead.** The archdiocese is geographically spread out – how can the church reach people effectively? Young people are leaving the church, but the issue of climate change resonates strongly with them. How can the church walk with them and authentically address their concerns? The 2022 Pew Research report “How Religion Intersects with Americans’ Views on the Environment”(15) finds that a strong majority of U.S. Catholics believe the Earth is sacred and that God gave humans a duty to protect and care for the Earth. But the same study finds that political affiliation rather than religious beliefs is more likely to determine one’s attitudes about the seriousness of climate change. In a conservative state, how do we encounter those resistant to the need for change and build relationships with them? How do we convey the urgency of the message? And as the climate changes, how can our church minister to those who are impacted by heat, floods, and severe weather?



Flowers in the Peace and Nature Garden of the Benedictine Sisters of Our Lady of Grace Monastery in Indianapolis, Indiana

Opportunities

We also recognize opportunities. Archdiocesan leadership is engaged in creation care efforts and enrolled the archdiocese in the Laudato Si' Action Platform in February, 2022. The principles of Laudato Si' will be included with the next archdiocesan pastoral plan and plans are underway to begin measuring the greenhouse gas emissions of archdiocesan buildings. In 2024, the Eucharistic Congress will be held in Indianapolis, which offers the opportunity to explore the relationship between the Eucharist and creation. There are many opportunities for collaboration and support with other local groups, including Hoosier Environmental Council, Keep Indianapolis Beautiful, Earth Charter Indiana, Faith in Place and the Indiana Catholic Conference. Together, through the grace of God, the people and ministries of the archdiocese will continue on the journey toward living in right-relationship with God, each other, and creation.

The Archdiocese of Indianapolis has made a good start on its sustainability journey, but the road ahead is long. The ArchIndy Creation Care Commission will spearhead outreach to archdiocesan ministries, parishes and schools in order to build relationships with more people as we work toward our vision of a more sustainable archdiocese. As we strive to bring about change, we need to remember that lasting change only happens when minds are convinced and hearts are touched. To quote Reverend Jennifer Bailey of Faith Matters Network, "Relationships are built at the speed of trust, and social change happens at the speed of relationships."



Fr. Rick Ginther, pastor of Our Lady of Lourdes, in Indianapolis (top left), and Sr. Barbara Battista, SPSMW, from St. Mary of the Woods (bottom right), join interfaith leaders in presenting the Indiana governor with a petition of over 900 signatures supporting climate action.



THE JOY OF HOPE

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis says “[W]e come together to take charge of this home which has been entrusted to us, knowing that all the good which exists here will be taken up into the heavenly feast. In union with all creatures, we journey through this land seeking God [...]. Let us sing as we go. **May our struggles and our concern for this planet never take away the joy of our hope. God, who calls us to generous commitment and to give him our all, offers us the light and the strength needed to continue on our way.** In the heart of this world, the Lord of life, who loves us so much is always present. He does not abandon us, he does not leave us alone, for he has united himself definitively to our earth, and his love constantly impels us to find new ways forward. Praise be to him!” (LS, 244 – 245)



*Second-graders at Little Flower Catholic School in Indianapolis learn about *Laudato Si'* through *The Earth Cube*.*

NOTES

1 <https://www.archindy.org/history/general.html>

2 <https://www.archindy.org/stats/index.html>

3 <https://ocs.archindy.org/schools>

4 <https://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/indiana-catholic-church>

5 <https://www.indystar.com/story/news/2015/11/25/indianas-top-5-religious-groups-now-include-those-who-chose-none-above/75593168/>

6 <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/religious-landscape-study/religious-tradition/catholic/state/indiana/>

7 <https://www.in.gov/isda/about/about-indiana-agriculture/>

8 <https://www.indystar.com/story/news/environment/2022/03/17/indiana-rivers-environmental-integrity-project-swimming-clean-water-act/7049700001/>

9 <https://www.indystar.com/story/news/environment/2021/06/01/indianapolis-indiana-air-pollution-compares-other-cities/5242128001/>

10 https://enviro.epa.gov/triexplorer/tri_factsheet.factsheet_forstate?pYear=2019&pstate=IN&pParent=NAT

11 <https://www.wfyi.org/news/articles/indiana-has-more-super-polluters-than-any-other-state>

12 <https://electrek.co/2022/01/14/coal-hungry-indianas-largest-capacity-solar-farm-is-about-to-come-online/>

13 <https://www.indystar.com/story/news/environment/2021/01/18/regenerative-farming-requires-cultural-shift-indiana/4138478001/>

14 <https://ag.purdue.edu/indianaclimate/indiana-climate-report>

15 <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2022/11/17/how-religion-intersects-with-americans-views-on-the-environment/>

