



St. Thomas Aquinas Parish Indianapolis, Indiana Comprehensive Laudato Si' Action Plan 2025

Introduction

The Laudato Si' Action Platform (LSAP) is a global Vatican initiative that provides a framework for Catholics and Catholic entities to put the values and principles of *Laudato Si'* into action. St. Thomas Aquinas Parish and School both enrolled in LSAP in early 2022. The Platform, organized around seven Laudato Si' goals, offers the opportunity to examine how the values and principles of *Laudato Si'* are already being expressed at STA. The Platform also offers the opportunity to further integrate the Laudato Si' goals into our parish culture and ministries.

The 7 Laudato Si' goals listed below are based on Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si': On Care for our Common Home*.

ECOLOGICAL SPIRITUALITY springs from a profound ecological conversion and helps us recognize God everywhere and in both the beauty and suffering of Creation. An ecological spirituality helps us to look at the world with a new perspective and provides the foundation for our actions to care for our common home and for our neighbors.

ECOLOGICAL EDUCATION helps us understand how people are intimately connected with and sustained by Creation. We are asked to integrate this awareness of our interconnectedness with nature into all aspects of our lives and to learn how our actions impact others.

ADOPTION OF SUSTAINABLE LIFESTYLES calls us to make changes in our personal lives and in the operations of our parish and school in order to lessen the negative impacts on our common home and on our neighbors.

RESPONSE TO THE CRY OF THE POOR recognizes that certain communities are impacted more by environmental degradation, climate change, and poverty. We are called to defend the worth and dignity of all human life from conception to death, and all forms of life on Earth.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATORY ACTION encourages us to join with others and take actions to strengthen the local, regional, state and national communities.

RESPONSE TO THE CRY OF THE EARTH is a call to protect our common home for the well-being of all by taking actions to address the climate crisis, biodiversity loss, and ecological sustainability.

ECOLOGICAL ECONOMICS recognizes that the goods we purchase are sourced from nature and made by human workers. We are asked to support sustainably produced goods and protect the dignity of workers.



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The first parish action plan (2022/23) had as its main goal to enter into dialogue with parish leadership, parish ministries, and parishioners in order to raise awareness of the Laudato Si' goals, understand how the work of parish ministries already aligned with the goals, and to identify actions for a more comprehensive plan.

The listening sessions held with various ministries offered these examples of how the parish is working to care for our common home and for our neighbors.

Ecological Spirituality has been expressed by Creation Care prayer services or Masses organized by the Creation Care Ministry and held annually since 2016. In 2023, St. Thomas hosted the 2nd Annual Archdiocesan Season of Creation Mass, which was celebrated by Archbishop Thompson. The Creation Care Ministry has also led Laudato Si' Stations of the Cross during Lent and offered reflections during the Lent and Advent seasons.

The Creation Care Ministry has also offered Ecological Education on numerous topics, including a series on Living Simply, the Lent 4.5 program, presentations for the Feast of St. Francis and Earth Day from the Catholic Climate Covenant, the film "The Letter", discussion groups on Laudato Si', and tips for living sustainably in the bulletin "Green Corner".

In addition to the Green Corner tips for families, the parish has taken steps toward the Adoption of Sustainable Lifestyle goal by installing a commercial dishwasher and using durable dishware for parish functions. Sustainability practices at the annual parish festival include recycling and using plant-based containers when possible. The Buildings and Grounds Committee seeks to manage building and maintenance projects in a sustainable manner as much as possible. Most of the items donated to and distributed by the parish St. Vincent de Paul conference are repurposed. When the Haiti Committee sends goods via a sea container to our sister parish in Belle-Riviere, the materials are repackaged to avoid transportation and packaging waste.








Many parish ministries work to care for our local and global neighbors, to Respond to the Cry of the Poor and to encourage Community Engagement and Participatory Action. The Haiti Committee collects donations that are used to provide clean water for the people of Belle-Riviere and support the local school. Local people are used as much as possible to implement actions there; food and materials are sourced locally. Closer to home, the St. Vincent de Paul Conference provides home visits to assess client needs and food baskets for Christmas, Thanksgiving, and Easter. The Boulevard Place Food Pantry provides clients with needed food. Clients are always treated with respect. The parish also works with the Martin Luther King Community Center on occasional projects. The Wellness Committee hosts blood drives and also offers opportunities for vaccinations. The Race and Culture Committee, whose theme "We are all one" parallels the idea of interconnectedness in Laudato Si', hosted a presentation and discussion about environmental racism in Indiana.



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The parish seeks to Respond to the Cry of the Earth with actions to become more energy efficient. They include installing many LED lights and motion sensors, and identifying leaks in the building envelope with a blower door test and thermographic imaging study done in 2017. The Boulevard Place Food Pantry was renovated to be as energy efficient as possible, which included LED lighting, additional insulation, and set backs on heating and cooling. In addition, the pantry installed solar panels that generate approximately 80% of their electrical needs. The pantry has also given LED bulbs to clients. Solar panels have been installed in Belle-Riviere to provide electricity to power cell phones and the Friends of Belle-Riviere organization provides individual solar lights to the community.

Recognizing that some of the Laudato Si' goal areas overlap, it was decided that parish and school representatives would work together to make joint commitments in four focus areas: Ecological Spirituality, Ecological Education, Community Engagement, and Facilities/Parish and School Operations. A chart showing the alignment of the focus areas with the Laudato Si' goals is shown below.

Focus Areas	Alignment with Laudato Si' Goals
Ecological Spirituality	 ECOLOGICAL SPIRITUALITY
Ecological Education	 ECOLOGICAL EDUCATION  ADOPTION OF SIMPLE LIFESTYLES
Community Engagement	 RESPONSE TO THE CRY OF THE POOR  COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATORY ACTION
Facilities/ Parish and School Operations	 RESPONSE TO THE CRY OF THE EARTH  ECOLOGICAL ECONOMICS

Although the parish and school have common commitments in these areas, they will make separate Action Plans that reflect their individual approaches to the joint commitment. In the spirit of integral ecology, it is hoped that these commitments will be integrated into the broader strategic planning for both the parish and the school.



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Commitments and Parish Action Steps

Ecological Spirituality: The parish and school commit to offering regular opportunities for spiritual growth and reflection related to creation care and ecological conversion. We seek to recognize God through Creation and to see God in each of us.

ACTION STEPS

1. Continue to offer a special Mass during the Season of Creation. Consider doing quarterly prayer services, one per season. Seasonal prayer services could include an outdoor Mass, rosaries, and/or ecological penitential services.
2. Continue to offer a pet blessing on or around the feast day of St. Francis of Assisi.
3. Continue to offer Laudato Si' Stations of the Cross each Lent.
4. Incorporate ecological spirituality into masses (songs, prayers, petitions, and/or homily) on a regular basis. (To start Fall 2025)
5. Collaborate with STA School, religious education, and youth ministry groups to incorporate ecological spirituality into their curriculum/activities. (To start 2025-26)
6. Conduct annual book discussions on a theme related to Laudato Si'. (To start Fall/Winter 25-26)
7. Plan a parish Pilgrimage of Hope for Creation during the 2025 Season of Creation.
8. Provide weekly suggestions for a conscious commitment parishioners can take during the Season of Creation (2025) and/or the Easter season (2026) and during these seasons in future years.
9. Focus Parish Mission event on ecological spirituality based on the goals/themes of Laudato Si'. (Winter/Spring 2026)
10. Offer a nature-based, ecological conversion retreat. (Spring 2027)

Ecological Education: The parish and school commit to providing opportunities for education about sustainable living and other environmental issues.

ACTION STEPS

1. Communicate the importance of caring for our common home to parishioners and how St. Thomas Aquinas is participating in the Laudato Si' Action Platform.
 - a. Add information about STA participation into new parishioner information packets.
 - b. Create a Laudato Si' corner for the newsletter, bulletin and Narthex screen to highlight the Laudato Si' goals and practical ways to implement them. Share how parish ministries are carrying out these goals.
 - c. Continue to share information about LSAP at the annual Ministry Fair.
 - d. Help to develop and share sustainable operation guidelines for parish and school events.
 - e. Give regular updates to the parish concerning progress on the LSAP goals



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2. Develop multiple avenues for ecological education about sustainable actions people can take individually and about broader environmental issues.
 - a. Develop a list of resources for sustainable living to share with parishioners through a variety of methods including the newsletter/bulletin, social media, the Creation Care Ministry webpage and a Sustainable Living Fair that would include eco-spirituality as the basis for actions.
 - b. Develop a list of environmental topics with input from parish ministries and parishioners and present the information to the parish community. Partner with parish ministries to present information on topics related to the ministry's mission.

Community Engagement: The parish and school commit to providing ways to serve our local and global neighbors, especially the poor and vulnerable, and to collaborate with other organizations that care for our common home.

ACTION STEPS

1. Continue to serve our local and global neighbors through:
 - a. St. Vincent de Paul Ministry and the Boulevard Place Food Pantry
 - b. Collaboration with the Martin Luther King Community Center
 - c. Haiti Committee
 - d. Wellness Committee (blood drives and vaccination opportunities)
2. Facilitate environmental service opportunities in the local community
 - a. Adopt the Kenwood Ave, 47th St, and Illinois St blocks through the Keep Indianapolis Beautiful "Adopt a Block Program" and develop a volunteer schedule for keeping these blocks litter-free.
 - b. Share information with the parish and school about environmental service opportunities (such as tree plantings and neighborhood clean-ups) from local organizations.
3. Establish a regular volunteer schedule of STA parishioners to maintain the garden beds at the SHarP (Shared Harvest Program) garden and donate the produce to the Boulevard Place Food Pantry

Facilities and Operations: The parish and school commit to identifying a path to become carbon neutral in energy use through exploring energy efficiency and renewable energy sources. Sustainability will be a consideration in all parish and school operations.

ACTION STEPS

1. Identify the components that contribute to energy use at STA and assess them to ensure that they are operating in an efficient manner.
 - a. Audit all the HVAC systems in the parish and school to make sure they are operating as designed, beginning with the heat pump units in the original school building



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- Create a system for assessing whether the units are operating properly
 - Assess trend data electronically
 - Confirm that temperature set points and occupancy modes are set properly so that ventilation and heating/cooling are matched to occupancy
 - Perform periodic assessments using a hand-held carbon dioxide and humidity sensor
 - Gather feedback from the building users about temperature levels and other concerns
 - Ensure that the recommended periodic maintenance is being performed and documented
- b. Review the 2017 blower door test and thermographic imaging study done by Bledsoe Environmental LLC and evaluate what steps still need to be finished to control leaks in the building envelope.
- c. Assess all the lights on campus to see if they have been converted to LED lights. Make a plan for converting any non-LED lights. Assess the feasibility of adding additional occupancy/motion sensors.
- d. Assess other devices and appliances that use energy (copy machines, computers, projectors, refrigerators, etc.) to ensure that they are being operated in an energy efficient manner.
2. Track energy use
- a. Set up a sustainable system (i.e., not reliant on one person) to track electricity, water and gas use plus cost to track trends and identify potential improvement/cost savings
- b. Determine the parish Energy Star rating periodically as changes are made
3. Documentation and Communications
- a. Create a document explaining, in easily understood language, the proper control and operation of the HVAC units, and make this document available to building users.
- b. Create a "Best Practices" energy efficiency guide for operating equipment such as copy machines, computers, and projectors
- c. Document all the equipment and appliances used at STA. Make a database or spreadsheet to track installation date, expected lifetime, serial numbers, maintenance/repairs, and whatever other information is relevant.
- d. Maintain a list of repairs, projects, and actions that impact energy use and share it with the people tracking energy use so that improvements can be correlated with impacts
4. Source the energy used at STA from renewable sources.
- a. Identify the process needed to install solar panels at STA.
- b. Investigate the 30% credit from the direct pay provision of the Inflation Reduction Act that allows tax-exempt entities to convert clean energy tax credits into cash payments.



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- b. Determine the cost of purchasing "Green Power" from AES to source electricity from renewable sources and discuss the feasibility of doing so.
 - c. Explore the feasibility of using carbon offsets to offset natural gas usage.
5. Assess parish practices concerning cleaning supplies, land use/lawn care, waste/recycling, water use, purchasing, etc. Write a best practices guide and communicate it to all stakeholders.