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Laudato Si’

On Care for Our Common Home



A Laudato Si' Action Plan for the

DIOCESE OF KNOXVILLE

October 2026 - October 2027

Introduction

Care of creation is an act of Christian love. The cry of the earth and the cry of the poor rise together, and as followers of Christ, we are called to hear both. When we restore our relationship with creation, we restore our connection to the God who made us from the dust of the earth and breathed his own life into us.

In his 2015 Encyclical, *Laudato Si': On Care for our Common Home*, Pope Francis stated that "Living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience" (217).

In response to this call to care for creation, and with firm trust in the work of the Holy Spirit, Bishop Mark Beckman established a Care of Creation Commission to encourage and assist in the development of a *Laudato Si'* Action Plan for the Diocese of Knoxville and to encourage and assist each of the 51 parishes/missions of the diocese in the creation of similar plans for the care of God's creation.

The Care of Creation Commission supports the parishes and people of East Tennessee in living their faith through stewardship of God's creation — rooted in Catholic teaching and grounded in our Appalachian home.



Bishop Mark Beckman’s letter on Care of Creation May 15, 2026

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In this time of celebration of the Jubilee Year of St. Francis, I invite all the Christian faithful to follow the example of St. Francis in becoming models of holiness and witnesses of peace. St. Francis showed his love for God with complete humility. He showed an extraordinary love and oneness with God’s creation, even naming God’s creatures his sisters and brothers. St. Francis understood that “from the greatness and beauty of created things, their original author, by analogy, is seen” (Wisdom 13:5).

Pope Francis followed the example of his namesake in making care for the environment and for all of God’s people a key priority. In his 2015 encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, On Care for Our Common Home, he offers insight into our modern global situation, the problems before us, and proposes solutions. In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis states that despite making incredible technological progress over the past two centuries, humanity has not kept up with moral progress, making our world less rich and less sustaining for vast numbers of God's people. Pope Francis asks us to listen carefully, beyond our own wants and needs, to "the cry of the earth" and "the cry of the poor" and to respond by rediscovering our responsibility to be true stewards of God's creation.

“There exists a certain reciprocity: as we care for creation, we realize that God, through creation, cares for us (Pope Benedict XVI's Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace, 1 January 2010)."

Humanity and Creation

Creation is the first word of God — a gift provided for all creatures to live sustainably and thrive. God created the universe and its laws and has care and dominion over all creation. He gave us the sacred responsibility to share dominion on our unique earth by tilling it and keeping its creatures and resources so they can be enjoyed by all peoples and future generations. God has provided us with an unending source of awe and wonder, and a plentiful source of materials to form and build useful societies. Yet, as we read *Laudato Si'*,

[Our earth] now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life. This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she "groans in travail" (Romans 8:22). We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth (cf. Genesis 2:7); our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters (*Laudato Si'* 2).

God provided earth's resources for us to till and keep, and yet accelerating climate change, caused by industrialization, fossil fuels, and deforestation, causes more frequent and severe weather extremes—droughts, wildfires, extreme rainfall and flooding, and melting of glaciers and icecaps around the world. Many innocent people have had to relocate as a result. We find

plastic in every location of the globe — from the deepest regions of the oceans to the summits of mountains and in rainfall and snowfall — and production continues to accelerate. We are experiencing a loss of biodiversity of creatures, mostly due to habitat loss and pollution, which diminishes the gift of nature God created in His wisdom. This is impacting the global food web needed for all creatures to thrive. "Because of us, thousands of species will no longer give glory to God by their very existence, nor convey their message to us. We have no such right" (*Laudato Si'* 2). Inequity between the rich and poor has never been greater with ten percent of the people owning more than the bottom fifty percent, greatly impacting the poorest of our world.

I offer the following from the United States Bishops' recent letter.

At the same time, our country is stepping back from global and national efforts to change course. Progress to slow climate change remains elusive, even while instances of extreme weather, wildfires, droughts, and floods are now common. Receiving the brunt of the burden are people seeking refuge from disasters, farmers struggling to adapt to erratic weather patterns, children suffering from dehydration and hunger, migrants who flee their homes due to loss of livelihood, and species declining in forests and coral reefs. Never has it been clearer that everything is interconnected (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' February 2026 Letter "An Invitation to Ecological Conversion for US Catholics").

God created every person on earth with inherent dignity—this is a cornerstone of Christian understanding found in both Genesis creation stories. When humanity existed in the Garden of Eden, our relationship with God and with the earth was fully realized. As pride entered the human heart, both of those relationships were broken and we became separated and divided. We need to restore both relationships!

This is something that many of our late holy fathers have been attentive to. St. John Paul II wrote, "We must therefore encourage and support the ecological conversion which in recent decades has made humanity more sensitive to the catastrophe to which it has been heading" (General Audience, 17 January 2001). Pope Francis turned to his predecessor Pope Benedict saying, "the misuse of creation begins when we no longer recognize any higher instance than ourselves, when we see nothing else but ourselves" (*Laudato Si'* 6).

Jesus intentionally opened the eyes of the blind and the ears of the deaf in a miracle of conversion. Let our eyes and ears continuously be opened to the "cry of the earth" and the "cry of the poor," calling for Christ to open our hearts to the Gospel, to release our tongues to praise God and break through sin and apathy. Uniting physical restoration and spiritual opening, Jesus' command encourages us to open ourselves to God's will.

Solutions to a Global Problem

Our hope lies in the goodness of God and the grace he offers the Church. We are a people who respond to God's call with a multitude of talents and gifts—all of which are "needed to redress the damage caused by human abuse of God's creation" (*Laudato Si'* 22). 'All of us can cooperate as instruments of God for the care of creation, each according to his or her own culture, experience, involvements and talents" (*Laudato Si'* 14).

Pope Francis asked urgently for a "new dialog" within the Catholic Church, and among all people of good will, to address and remedy these serious issues. I wish to echo Pope Francis and other visionary popes by preaching Jesus' message of compassion and morality over individualism and profit gained by a few.

We need to restore our three essential relationships: to God, to our neighbors, to the earth, and can only accomplish this with intentional prayer, contemplation, and humility followed by action. Solutions begin in our own backyard, and we are truly blessed with the beauty of the Diocese of Knoxville in its incredible mountains, streams, forests, and unique plants and wildlife.

I am asking the Diocese of Knoxville to commit to a new relationship with God's creation which will benefit the world around us and provide interior peace.

Invitations

The Holy Spirit is guiding the church in a particular way, and we each have a response in faith to build God's kingdom and uphold human dignity as we ask, "what kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?" (*Laudato Si'* 160). Since the release of *Laudato Si'*, many dioceses around the globe have adopted Care for Creation principles. Some of our parishes in the Diocese of Knoxville have also begun similar initiatives, which I commend. I am asking the Diocese of Knoxville to commit to a new relationship with God's creation.

As a Diocese, we commit to environmental sustainability with a newly formed Diocesan Care of Creation Commission. I also invite each parish to develop Creation Care Teams and for each parish and school to develop action plans according to the unique abilities and resources of each community. I invite individuals and families to devise ways to live more simply and sustainably as we mindfully live out our Christian faith, protecting life and beauty. We are a Catholic people of hope!

In this coming year as we commemorate the 800th year since the death of St. Francis, I invite each parish to:
1. Hold a Parish Listening Session or other consultation, with your key advisory bodies to parish leaders.
2. Develop a Creation Care Team.
3. Enroll in the Laudato Si' Action Platform and submit an action plan.

Our Care of Creation Commission is available to support and help you accomplish this essential effort. Please see the information and resources on the Care of Creation website and on the Laudato Si' Action Platform,

Thank you for all you do to embody the Gospels of Jesus in our own time and place.

Most Rev. Mark Beckman
Bishop of Knoxville

Laudato Si' Prayer

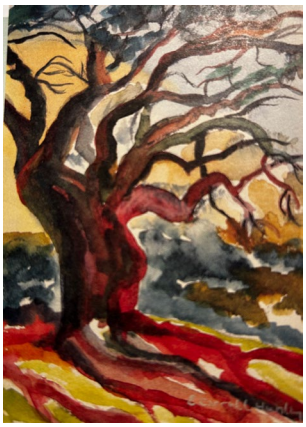
(From Laudato Si' Encyclical, 2015)

All powerful God, you are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of your creatures. You embrace with your tenderness all that exists. Pour out upon us the power of your love, that we may protect life and beauty. Fill us with peace, that we may live as brothers and sisters, harming no one.

O God of the poor, help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth, so precious in your eyes. Bring healing to our lives, that we may protect the world and not prey on it, that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction.

Touch the hearts of those who look only for gain at the expense of the poor and the earth. Teach us to discover the worth of each thing, to be filled with awe and contemplation, to recognize that we are profoundly united with every creature as we journey towards your infinite light.

We thank you for being with us each day. Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle for justice, love and peace.



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In this Jubilee year of St. Francis, we continue exploring how Franciscan eco-spirituality can guide our response to the ecological crisis of our time. Pope Francis warns that the "virus" of materialism "anesthetizes the heart," fuels inequality and poverty, and destroys the environment. (Fratelli Tutti, 2020)

Catholic Climate Covenant promotional reflection from the Franciscan Jubilee Year (2026–2027)



Response to The Cry of the Earth



The response to The Cry of the Earth is a call to protect our common home for the wellbeing of all, as we equitably address the climate crisis, biodiversity loss, and ecological sustainability.

Diocesan Commitment: Provide information to parishes for the opportunity to plan for/create a St. Kateri Habitat area on their parish grounds.

- Responsible Persons: DoK Creation Care Commission
- Measure of Success: Shared information on the diocesan website and mailed to pastors
- Time Frame: Spring 2027

Diocesan Commitment: Transform the Chancery and Christ Prince of Peace Retreat Center grounds into St. Kateri Habitats and eco -educational Laudato Si' Gardens.

- Responsible Person: Father Pete Iorio
- Measure of Success: Completion of work and application for recognition
- Time Frame: October 2027

Diocesan Commitment:

- Provide educational resources for parishes regarding the environmental problems of climate change, loss of biodiversity, pollution, and water quality issues as espoused in Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'*.
    - Responsible Persons: DoK Creation Care Commission members, Mary Tankersley and Glenn Cada
    - Measure of Success: Articles shared on the website and parishes reached
    - Time Frame: Approximately every six weeks throughout the year

For believers, "We cannot love God, whom we cannot see, while despising his creatures. Nor can we call ourselves disciples of Jesus Christ without participating in his outlook on creation and his care for all that is fragile and wounded." - Pope Leo XIV

Response to The Cry of the Poor



The response to The Cry of the Poor is a call to promote eco-justice, aware that we are called to defend human life from conception to death and all forms of life on earth.

Diocesan Commitment: Strengthen knowledge and collaboration with the many community outreach programs and special collections for the poor and disadvantaged (and those affected by climate disasters) that the diocese coordinates.

- Responsible Persons: DoK Creation Care Commission working with community outreach leadership
- Measure of Success: Services provided to help meet local needs, collections made to help meet local, regional, and global needs
- Time Frame: Ongoing

Diocesan Commitment: Support the Bishops' strategic goal to have 10 percent or greater of parish budgets dedicated to serving our neighbor's foundational needs.

- Responsible persons: pastors
- Metric of Success: Using the formula set by the diocese
- Time Frame: Conform with diocesan timeline

Diocesan Commitment: Coordinate a synodal listening session with the goal of building a greater understanding of needs and participation with the various communities.

- Responsible Persons: DoK Care of Creation Commission members, Beth Carroll Hunley and Kayla Jacobs
- Metric of Success: Schedule and attendance of the listening session
- Time Frame: Fall of 2026

Ecological Economics



Ecological Economics acknowledges that the economy plays an important role in protecting the well-being of our common home. Actions could include purchasing sustainability produced goods, ethical investments, and protecting the dignity of workers.

Diocesan Commitment: Continue to assess diocesan investment practices yearly, based on the Socially Responsible Investment Guidelines from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Communicate diocesan practices annually.

- Responsible Persons: DoK Director, Office of Communications, John Mecklenborg and DoK Finance Officer, Christine Lucheon
- Metric of Success: Yearly budget review
- Time Frame: Ongoing

Diocesan Commitment: Identify three green grants and/or other funding sources.

- Responsible Person: DoK Creation Care Commission member, Juan Alarcon
- Metric of Success: Grant opportunities shared with the diocesan finance office
- Time Frame: Summer of 2027

Diocesan Commitment: Create diocesan recommendations regarding purchases for the diocese that prioritize sustainability.

- Responsible Persons: DoK Creation Care Commission
- Metric of Success: Creation and distribution of a list of recommendations
- Time Frame: Summer of 2027

Diocesan Commitment: Research the ability for the diocese to contract with a company to buy sustainable products in bulk for diocesan/parish purchases.

- Responsible Persons: DoK Creation Care Commission
- Metric of Success: Completion of research send to the bishop
- Time Frame: December 2026

Diocesan Commitment: Develop a fact sheet to explain why “total cost” matters when making purchasing decisions, not just the price tag. Include prompts, examples and resources to help with ethical purchasing that honors people and the planet.

- Responsible Persons: DoK Catholic School Superintendent, Martha Mundine, in collaboration with Catholic high school students
- Metric of Success: Fact sheet development and offered to parishioners via the website
- Time Frame: Spring 2027

Adoption of Sustainable Lifestyles



The Adoption of Sustainable lifestyles is grounded in the idea that in our personal lives and in parish life, we can make intentional choices regarding our use of resources and energy that can promote the well-being of the planet.

Diocesan Commitment: Create and communicate guidelines to lessen the purchase and use of single-use products, such as plastics and styrofoam by 50 percent or more.

- Responsible Persons: DoK Creation Care Commission with the approval of the bishop
- Metric of Success: The creation of guidelines to share with the bishop
- Time Frame: October 2027

Diocesan Commitment: Work with pastors to arrange a professional energy audit (ex. KUB) on at least 25 percent of all diocesan buildings by the end of 2027.

- Responsible Persons: DoK Creation Care Commission and pastors
- Metric of Success: DoK Creation Care Commission will keep track of the parishes that have completed an energy audit
- Time Frame: December 2027

Diocesan Commitment: Identify and share a list of organizations that give preference to green catering options offering no-waste or limited waste services for all gatherings where food is served.

- Responsible Persons: DoK Creation Care Commission
- Metric of Success: Creation of list to share with the bishop and pastors
- Time Frame: Summer 2027

Diocesan Commitment: Work with Catholic Energies to select one of the diocesan buildings to develop a low cost model building.

- Responsible Persons: Catholic Energies and Laudato Si' Cohort representative
- Metric of Success: Competition of the energy project
- Time Frame: Offer expires at the end of the Laudato Si' cohort



Ecological Education

Ecological Education that prioritizes formation and educational opportunities that promote ecological awareness and transformative action.

Diocesan Commitment: Make available a set of sustainability videos highlighting pastoral and exemplary parish/school sustainability practices for sharing via social media.

- Responsible Persons: DoK Catholic School Superintendent, Martha Mundine, in collaboration with Catholic high school students
- Metric of Success: Completion of videos that are shared on the website
- Time Frame: Spring 2027

Diocesan Commitment: Connect with faith formation directors to integrate Care for Creation initiatives into their programing for future use.

- Responsible Persons: DoK Care of Creation Commission and diocesan staff member
- Metric of Success: Email, phone calls, Ministries Day, website information
- Time Frame: Winter 2026

"It is only by returning to the heart that a true ecological conversion can take place," Pope Leo said, saying, "We must shift from collecting data to caring; and from environmental discourse to an ecological conversion that transforms both personal and communal lifestyles." -Pope Leo XIV





Ecological Spirituality

Ecological Spirituality springs from a profound ecological conversion and helps us to discover God is in all things.

Diocesan Commitment: Include Care for Creation intentions — as encouraged by the Diocesan Vision, *Bearing the Light of Christ in East Tennessee* — at all diocesan Masses, and encourage parishes to create Care for Creation intentions for their Masses.

- Responsible Persons: Office of the Bishop
- Metric of Success: Shared intentions and their use in the liturgy
- Time Frame: Fall 2026

Diocesan Commitment: Encourage parishes to offer a Mass on or near Sept. 1 celebrating the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation.

- Responsible Persons: Office of the Bishop, Diocesan Priests
- Metric of Success: Masses are planned and held
- Time Frame: On or near Sept. 1

Diocesan Commitment: Research the development of a diocesan Mass to acknowledge and bless those who work in conservation, ecology, sustainable agriculture, environmental advocacy, and relief and community resilience organizations, to be called the Brown Mass.

- Responsible Persons: Father Michael Cummins
- Metric of Success: Development and shared with the bishop
- Time Frame: Winter 2026

Diocesan Commitment: Conduct annual diocesan Season of Creation and Laudato Si' Week events, highlighting the spiritual aspects of creation care.

- Responsible Persons: DoK Care of Creation Commission
- Metric of Success: Planning, advertising, and completion of the event
- Time Frame: 2027

Community Resilience and Empowerment



Community Resilience and Empowerment promotes active and conscious involvement and participatory action to care for creation at the local, regional, national, and international levels.

Diocesan Commitment: Promote and maintain the Care of Creation website to share resources with parishes and parishioners of the diocese.

- Responsible Persons: DoK Care of Creation Commission
- Metric of Success: Sharing of current information with monthly updates
- Time Frame: Ongoing

Diocesan Commitment: Network with various ecumenical and local groups on Care of Creation initiatives.

- Responsible Persons: DoK Care of Creation Commission
- Metric of Success: Monthly meeting notes and collaboration
- Time Frame: Ongoing

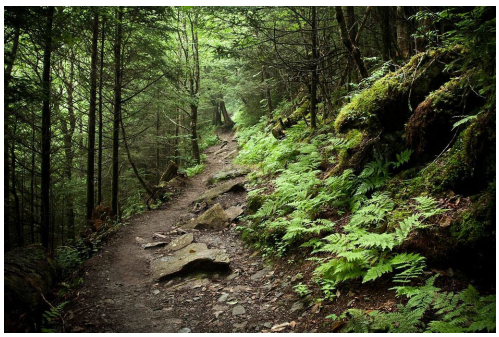
Diocesan Commitment: Organizing a meeting with TN Catholic Conference to offer our assistance in regards to state policy.

- Responsible Persons: DoK Care of Creation Commission member, Kayla Jacobs
- Metric of Success: Scheduling a meeting and developing next steps
- Time Frame: November 2026

"We must regain the conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for others and the world, and that being good and decent are worth it." — Pope Francis, Laudato Si'

Conclusion and An Invitation

"Integral ecology thrives on four relationships: with God, with others, with nature and with ourselves. Through our commitment to them, we can grow in hope by living out the interdisciplinary approach of Laudato Si' and the call to unity and collaboration that flows from it."
-Pope Leo XIV



"A true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor… Everything is connected. Concern for the environment thus needs to be joined to a sincere love for our fellow human beings and an unwavering commitment to resolving the problems of society." (Pope Francis, On Care for Our Common Home [Laudato Si'], nos.49, 91)

The Diocese of Knoxville Laudato Si' Action Plan is a commitment, joining many dioceses around the globe, to restore our relationships to God, our neighbors, the earth, and ourselves. Solutions begin locally, in our families and communities. Restoration of these relationships can be accomplished with intentional reflection and prayer followed by action. As a diocese, we have committed to environmental sustainability. The Diocese of Knoxville Care of Creation Commission commits to the current plan and its annual review. Bishop Mark Beckman has invited individuals, families, and parishes to devise ways to live more simply and sustainably, honoring and protecting life and the beauty around us. The commission is available to support and help your efforts. Please see the information and resources on the Care of Creation website and on the Laudato Si' Action Platform.

Thank you for taking the time to review the plan and reflect on the gifts of God's creation,

The Diocese of Knoxville Care of Creation Commission Members