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***Seeking God in Everyone and Everything***

***Laudato Si’* Action Plan Reflection**

Our Lady of Grace Monastery

*Seeking God in everyone and everything, we, the Sisters of St. Benedict of Beech Grove, IN, commit to journey with the global Catholic community toward integral ecology as active participants in the Laudato Si’ Action Platform.[[1]](#endnote-1)*

*We join with the human family to listen with the ear of our heart to both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor, reflecting on the signs of the times and discerning our role in caring for our common home*.

The Rule of St. Benedict[[2]](#endnote-2), our Benedictine charism, and our monastic vows give us a foundation for living the call Pope Francis challenges us with in his encyclical *Laudato Si’*[[3]](#endnote-3) (LS). Our Mission Statement and our Laudato Si’ Action Platform Commitment[[4]](#endnote-4) stated above both begin with the foundation of our Benedictine life: *Seeking God in everyone and everything.* As we strive to live this, we give witness to the understanding that everything is sacred. The monastic “is to regard all vessels and goods of the monastery as if they were the sacred vessels of the altar” (RB 31:10).2 Benedict reminds us that Christ is present in ourselves, in our sisters (RB:36:1; 63:10), in the guest (RB 53:1), and especially in the poor (RB 53:15).2 God’s presence is revealed in the beauty and produce of our grounds, and in all creation.

The virtue of humility is key in Benedictine spirituality. As we grow in humility, we grow in right relationship with God, ourselves, one another, and all of creation. Our monastic vow of stability binds us to this community of sisters, to seek God together by living the common life of prayer, work, leisure, and hospitality. Growing in humility and in our relationships with one another, we learn interdependence. This way of relating to one another flows naturally and extends outward into the understanding that in all of creation everything is interconnected. According to Pope Francis, the interdependence of all creatures is God’s will, that “creatures exist only in dependence on each other, to complete each other, in service to each other” (LS 86)3. Humility “calls us … to take our proper place among all creatures of the earth.”[[5]](#endnote-5)

St. Benedict teaches us that “the first step of humility is obedience” (RB 5:1),2 another of our monastic vows. Seeking God is also about discerning God’s will and tempering our own self-will. This prompts us to learn our limits, to care for others, and seek and discern the common good, and to avoid further irresponsible behavior toward both the natural and the social environment (LS 6).3 We can only do this by listening with the ear of our heart (RB Prologue:1)2 to God speaking through our Prioress, through Scripture, through our community members and through the news and signs of the times. In our daily praying of the Liturgy of the Hours and *lectio divina*, our hearts and our minds are being formed to hear and respond to the cry of the poor as God does, and as Jesus shows us. Here we practice giving praise to God for the beauty and awe of all of creation. We discover the power of creation and learn to find our proper place within it and the responsibility to care for it. As we listen, we also learn the mercy, compassion, and self-sacrifice of Christ which he calls us to imitate.

As we live this life of listening, humility, and prayer, we develop a monastic mindfulness. We notice more, become more aware of the presence of God, of the beauty that surrounds us, of what needs our attention and care.5 We understand that every living being has a purpose, and “has a value of their own in God’s eyes” and so we are obligated to use the earth’s goods responsibly (LS 69).3 As we grow in our awareness of the sacredness of all life, we come to realize that our decisions and actions have consequences on the environment, the climate, and the poor. We become more aware of issues around climate change that we can give our voices to or can prompt us to take action for ecological justice. Each year during the Season of Creation, we incorporate prayers into the Liturgy of the Hours about the need to care for our common home and for the poor who are most affected by climate change.

St. Benedict calls us to a life of hospitality to one another and to our guests, who are to be welcomed as Christ (RB 53:1), noting that great care and concern are to be shown to the poor in whom Christ is more particularly received (RB 53:15).2 We treat our co-workers with great care, ensuring their dignity with a supportive environment, just wages, and benefits. Receiving the earth’s hospitality to us should prompt our desire to respond with gratitude and respect in return.

As Benedictines we live a life of moderation and simplicity centered around a *horarium*. Moderation creates a life of setting limits to what we use and own, both individually and as a community. Moderation in consumption is so important to St. Benedict, that he devotes one entire chapter to the proper amount of food (RB 39), and another to the proper amount of drink (RB 40).2 Being given that which will suffice for clothing and footwear is discussed as well (RB 55).2 Choosing moderation and simplicity leads us to the discernment of wants and needs. This discernment helps us realize our role in caring for the earth.

Our value of stewardship calls us to actively care for all aspects of life from finances to buildings and grounds. St. Benedict states in his Rule, the monastic “is to regard all vessels and goods of the monastery as if they were the sacred vessels of the altar, aware that nothing is to be neglected” (RB 31:10-11).2 We are called to steward and take care of everything for which God has blessed us. In *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis is calling us to especially steward the earth: “If we make something our own, it is only to administer it for the good of all” (LS 95).3

Stewardship also calls us to give of our resources to others. We consider how our use of resources impacts the earth and the community around us. We endeavor to compost, reuse, recycle, reduce our food waste, and improve the sustainability of our buildings. We have our Swap Shop[[6]](#endnote-6) and we donate clothing to the poor. We share our abundance so we can help others in need while striving to be good neighbors to both the people who live in our community and the nature that surrounds us. We are concerned about protecting our earth and resources now in order to have something to pass on to future generations. We make great efforts to care for our grounds here at the monastery and at Regina Retreat. Our Peace and Nature Garden, consisting solely of plants native to Indiana, helps protect biodiversity. Open to the public, this garden provides a hospitable oasis to our neighbors, while educating our local community about a variety of ecological topics.

In his Rule, St. Benedict states that the vice of personal ownership in the monastery must be cut out by the very root (RB 33:1).2 In *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis states that we have come to see ourselves as the earth’s lord and masters, entitled to plunder her at will (LS 2).3 In both scenarios the concern is control and power – putting ourselves before God. Both St. Benedict and Pope Francis promote the common good, which leads to a fair distribution of goods and equitable use of the earth’s resources (“distribution was made to everyone as they had need”
Acts 4:35, RB 34:1)2, attention to the most vulnerable (“above and before all else, care must be taken of the sick” RB 36:1)2, and an other-centered focus (“no one is to pursue what is judged better for one’s self, but rather what is better for others” RB 72:7)2.

As we live our monastic vow of conversion, we are also called by Pope Francis to an ecological conversion: an interior change in our view of reality, a shift from a level of thought to the level of action, and a deepening of our love for God, our neighbor, and the created world. And so, with Pope Francis and “in union with all creatures, we journey through this land seeking God” (LS 244)3 so that one day “Christ will bring us all together to everlasting life” (RB 72:12)2. Living our Benedictine way of life compels us, then, to join Pope Francis and the global Catholic community to care even more intentionally and concretely for our common home and all who inhabit it. In this way, we participate in God’s great work of transformation.

Endnotes

1. https://laudatosiactionplatform.org/. The Dicastery for Integral Human Development has proposed a process of discernment and action where we assess our current actions, reflect on our charism in light of Pope Francis’ 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si’*, and choose or modify behaviors and actions that move us toward integral ecology. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Sutera J, OSB. *St. Benedict’s Rule: An Inclusive Translation*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2021. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Francis. Laudato si’. Vatican City: Vatican Press, 2015. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. The first step in the Laudato Si’ Action Platform process requires the participant to make a formal written commitment to the process. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Chittister J, OSB. *Wisdom Distilled from the Daily: Living the Rule of St. Benedict Today*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990. 196-98. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Our community has a designated area in the monastery where sisters or others donate clothing items they no longer want or need that are shared with community members and staff. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)