



Laudato Si' Action Platform Reflection
Parishes of Our Lady of the Assumption, Cheltenham and St Agnes, Highett
Archdiocese of Melbourne, Victoria, Australia



"The Burning Bush" – St Agnes Parish Season of Creation 2022, painting by Maree Holmes

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the traditional owners of the lands on which we live, the Bunurong People of the South-East Kulin Nation, we thank them for their continuing care and nurture of these lands, and acknowledge their example over many thousands of years of living sustainably on the resources of land and sea.

Who we are

With the expansion of the Australian population after World War II and growth in the Catholic population in Melbourne's south eastern suburbs, the parishes of St Agnes, Highett and Our Lady of the Assumption were established in 1948 and 1951 respectively. Two primary schools were established, St Agnes (1951) and Our Lady of the Assumption (1952) to cater for the growing student population. Upon graduation, many students go on to nearby Catholic secondary colleges St Bede's, Kilbreda and others.

Our priests and parishioners have been largely of Irish Catholic heritage, although since the War our parishes have welcomed and been immensely enriched by migrants initially from Europe and more recently from Asia. Parishioners have enthusiastically engaged in social, pastoral support and community activities, forming many self-help, common interest, charitable and welfare groups over the years, several of which continue.

In common with the trend across Australia and the Western world, our parishes have seen large declines in church attendance, with the result that today only a minority of the people in our parish catchments who might consider themselves Catholics attend Mass on a regular basis. This results in the age profile of our parishes constantly increasing. Together with this and the effects of Covid on Mass attendance, the number of parishioners regularly attending Mass is in decline.

Our “joys and our hopes”

We are guided by our Catholic faith and Scripture to care for the Earth, its people and creatures. Pope Francis’ encyclical letter *Laudato Si’—On Care for our Common Home* (LS) provides a special inspiration for us. And the Australian Catholic Bishops remind us that ‘When it comes to human knowledge of the lands and waters now known as Australia, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are our first teachers’. (*Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor, Social Justice Statement 2021-2022*).

The *Laudato Si’* Action Platform enables us to join with Catholic families, parishes and dioceses around the world in a seven-year journey towards ecological justice and sustainability. We are excited by the possibilities opening before us to respond to the Pope’s call to return to right relationship with the Earth, each other and God!

Laudato Si’ encompasses a subject that many people, Christians and non-Christians alike embrace, namely justice and mercy for the Earth, its people and its creatures. We hope that our own embrace of *Laudato Si’* may help draw more people, both those currently active within our parish communities and those outside, to “care for the Earth, to care for the poor”, and to find themselves in loving relationship with Jesus and the Earth.

Embarking on this journey we will draw on our study and reflection of *Laudato Si’* since its publication in 2015, and also on initiatives our parishes have already taken towards care for the earth and care for the poor. These include addressing environmental concerns through audits of parish energy resources, the installation of water tanks, solar panels and energy-saving lighting in St Agnes’ Parish, and our liaison with local climate action groups.

Parish Groups and Ministries

Our Lady of the Assumption Parish Primary School

We are committed to caring for our Earth and our neighbours. Each year four Grade 6 Sustainability Leaders apply for their important responsibility after nominating for leadership positions and are then appointed. These four leaders play a key role in our School and community as they work closely with the Dolphin Research Institute and are iSea iCare Ambassadors for the Great Southern Reef. The leaders attend a range of workshops throughout the year and teach their fellow students about caring for our marine life and environment. The leaders also represent our School when attending the Kingston Big Green Schools Conference where they present a project concept to schools in our community.

In 2022 the leaders started a new initiative to reduce waste at our School and encourage students to become 'Waste Warriors.' They created a competition where the class that has the least soft plastics over a two week period are awarded a trophy. The School also participates in Earth Hour, has a student Garden Club and learns about sustainability in the Inquiry curriculum. The School has regular working bees to increase the plant life in our grounds. All students learn about Creation as part of their Religious Education and their important roles as stewards of God's creation and our responsibility to care for our planet.

St Agnes Parish Primary School

St Vincent de Paul Society

Our Conferences in both parishes have a long tradition of assisting needy and vulnerable neighbours in our community. This tradition arises from our faith and concern for the poor. In *Laudato Si'* Pope Francis points to his namesake, St Francis of Assisi, 'as the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically... He shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace' [LS10].

Care for our Common Home Group

The Care for our Common Home Group comprises parishioners of Our Lady of the Assumption Parish, Cheltenham and St Agnes' Parish, Highett. publishes a bi-monthly Parish Update, circulated with the Parish Bulletin, which keeps the teachings of *Laudato Si'* before us and provides information and practical opportunities for parishioners to care for our common home. We have delivered two parish-based online forums on *Laudato Si'*, in conjunction with [St Dominic's Parish](#), Camberwell. These forums enabled us to learn from, and be inspired by, Australian and overseas leaders in integral ecology and ecological spirituality. Based on a proposal by our Group, our parishes have embraced the 2022 Season of Creation in our liturgies and parish communications. This has brought the Care for our Common Home message forthrightly to every parishioner attending Mass in our parishes.

Knitting Group

A group (mainly ladies) gather on a regular basis in the church to knit a wonderful range of goods which are displayed and offered for sale a few times each year. The proceeds all go to the local conference of St Vincent de Paul.



OLA PS Environment Leaders (photo used with permission)

Directions for Parish Action on the Sustainable Goals

Encouraged by what has been achieved to date, we are considering what actions the Care for our Common Home Group and the Parish communities can take in the coming year towards the realisation of the sustainable goals of the Laudato Si' Action Platform. Following are some actions we expect to take on our *Care for our Common Home* journey:

1. Response to the Cry of the Earth:

- Encourage parishioners to connect more closely with Nature;
- Investigate how we can reduce our parishes' carbon emissions
- Install one or more banners in prominent locations promoting support for the Earth

2. Response to the Cry of the Poor:

- Care for sick and elderly parishioners unable to attend Mass through home visits and ministering the Eucharist
- Contribute individually and as parishioners to assist the poor and vulnerable through Project Compassion;
- Support refugee and asylum seeker aid groups such as the Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project
- Seek ways to support the implementation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart

3. Ecological Economics:

- Encourage the use of Fairtrade and ethically produced products, including clothing

4. Adoption of Simple Lifestyles:

- Encourage people travelling to consider first the need for travel, and then less polluting means of travelling, such as walking, cycling, use of electric vehicles and reducing or offsetting the carbon cost of travel where practicable

5. Ecological Education

- Continue to promote news and education regarding ecological education through our bimonthly Care for our Common Home Parish Update
- Encourage, support and help publicise the initiatives of the Parish Schools in caring for our Earth and our neighbours.

6. Ecological Spirituality

- Continue to educate ourselves in this evolving field through reading, online symposia etc

7. Community Involvement and Participatory Action

- Explore opportunities for ecumenical outreach to other groups in our neighbourhood.