St. Kateri Tekakwitha Parish Reflection

**Who We Are**

St. Kateri Tekakwitha Parish is located in the town of Niskayuna and the City of Schenectady New York. We are a part of the Diocese of Albany. We are a suburban community of 1810 families. We support a Catholic grade school.

We live on lands along the Mohawk River once inhabited by the Mohican and Mohawk Native Peoples. The name Niskayuna comes from indigenous words meaning “fields of corn”. Our Parish is the result of combining two previous parishes and we chose the new name St. Kateri Tekakwitha. We are presently part of a cooperative endeavor with nearby St. John the Evangelist and St. Anthony Parishes to sustain the spiritual well being of our parishioners in this era of decreasing number of priests.

St. Kateri formed a Care for Creation Ministry within its Social Justice Ministry following Pope Francis' Encyclical Laudato Si’. We have joined with the USCCB-supported Catholic Climate Covenant as a Creation Care Team. We have registered with the Vatican Laudato Si’ Action Platform with the intent of becoming an ecologically sustainable Parish. We have completed the Platform Self-Assessment.

In this Reflection we consider how our parish mission and activities align with the Laudato Si’ goals.

**How we respond to the cry of the Earth**

St. Kateri Parish consists of eight buildings on two campuses (Union Street and Rosa Road). We have two church buildings, two school buildings, two parish centers, a parish office building and a rectory. Several years ago we had an energy audit performed, and implemented several of the recommendations. We installed LED lighting in many areas replacing less efficient incandescent and fluorescent fixtures. Several boilers have been replaced with more efficient units, as they reached the end of their useful life. These upgrades have resulted in reductions in annual electric and natural gas consumption.

The parish along with other parishes in the Albany Diocese have changed their electricity supplier to a Community Solar provider.

Our Ministry will continue to work with the parish administration to further reduce our use of fossil fuels.

**How we respond to the cry of the Poor**

St. Kateri Parish has several programs that provide support for the more needy people in our community.

One of these is our participation in the “Family Promise” program that assists homeless families in the Capital District, providing overnight lodging and meals as well as support and fellowship. Families are aided in obtaining social services and assistance in transitioning to more permanent residence.

Another is our support of several local food banks with volunteers, food and monetary donations.

Parish supports “Birthright of Schenectady” and Community Maternity Services, an agency of Catholic Charities, collecting needed babycare items like diapers, clothing, soaps and lotions to support newborns and young mothers.

Parish supports the Schenectady Area Roman Catholic Churches Works of Mercy Initiative through clothing donations for children, personal hygiene items and pastoral care for the homebound. The mission of the Works of Mercy Initiative is identifying those in need and connecting them with others to experience Christ’s healing touch.

The parish supports the Schenectady City Mission with volunteers and clothing donations.

Our Parish has a Sister Parish - Our Sacred Heart of Jesus in the Philippines. In addition to providing financial support, we have coordinated evenings of praying the rosary via Zoom.

As a sacrificial giving parish, six percent of our Offertory Collection is donated to selected local, national and international charitable organizations aiding those in need.

Our Parish holds an annual Work of Human Hands Fair Trade Market and Alternative Giving Fair each Christmas Season. This community event supports artisans, craftspeople and farmers from around the world. Fair Trade Coffee is available for shoppers and vendors. Their donations support the parish’s use of Fair Trade Coffee for after-mass Coffee Hours.

Our Parish Racial Justice Ministry advocates for improved understanding of Racial Justice Issues. Sponsoring events and articles in the Parish Bulletin highlight the many contributions of black, Asian, Latinx, and indigenous Catholics to our nation, community and Church.

**How We Practice Ecological Economics.**

Our Care for Creation Team has promoted sustainable living practices, such as reducing waste, recycling, reducing plastics and composting through bulletin articles and programs.

The Knights of Columbus sponsor several events throughout the year: pancake breakfasts, Annual Youth Free-Throw Contest and social gatherings in the spirit of community building within the Parish. They have also made a commitment toward reducing their use of plastics.

**How We Move Toward Adopting Sustainable Lifestyles.**

Our Parish has taken actions to lower their annual electric and natural gas usage. Our Care for Creation Ministry encourages Parish efforts to continue this effort.

**How We Practice Ecological Education.**

Our Parish School offers programs for area children from nursery (age 3) through Grade 5 as well as After School Care for elementary aged children from the Niskayuna Central School District. We offer financial assistance for families in need. The school has a Garden Club for students to experience growing flowers and food. Children plant, care for and harvest produce for their own use as well as sharing with others.

Our Care for Creation Ministry has also held information programs that encourage parishioners to switch their home electricity use to solar panels or community solar. We held a public meeting in support of our towns efforts to establish a Community Choice Aggregation Program that would provide electricity to the whole town from renewable sources.

**How We Practice Ecological Spirituality**

Our Parish has held special Masses to celebrate Earth Day and the Season of Creation, as well as a Stations of the Cross service emphasizing Social Justice and Care for Creation.

This year’s Earth Day Mass was celebrated with the St. Kateri school children. The homily encouraged us to “not be takers but be caretakers” - take only what you need from our Earth and be caretakers of its resources and environment so that they will be available for all forever.

**How We Facilitate Community Engagement and Participatory Action.**

Our parish strives to live our mission and the goals of Laudto Si’ through our support of programs like urban farming, community clean up programs and the annual Crop Walk.