A reflection on St. Francis of Assisi in relationship to Laudato Si’:

St. Francis of Assisi is a parish in southeast San Jose in the Diocese of San Jose which covers Santa Clara County, the heart of the “Silicon Valley”. The parish’s situation allows it to both be a space tied to nature and a place to take in, both from within the building and from outside, the beauty of nature in the nearby hills to the east. The design of the chapel, with the glass walls, the vineyard that produces wine for celebrations, and the memorial garden set surrounded in the natural landscape highlight the place of spirituality within the environment. It is located within a multicultural community that is well represented in the congregation. It borders other parishes and East San Jose that have many needs in providing basic needs and justice related priorities.

At present there are nine masses each weekend given in English, Spanish and Vietnamese; there is a monthly mass in Igbo. There is also a large Filipino community. It is a vibrant congregation combining Catholic traditions from many cultures, filling the church with activities. The mass attendees have a healthy span across age groups.

The parish faces the environmental and social challenges found in California: drought, storms, need brought on by the high cost of living and housing. The parish has addressed the environmental by incorporating drought-tolerant landscaping, installation of solar panels that supply 80% of it electrical needs and use of an electronic vehicle for property management. It has a social justice committee that acts as a center point for social justice activities and manages a healthy St. Francis fund that distributes money to help the individuals and families through crises and that provides grants big and small for social needs in the diocesan geographic area.

The COVID pandemic has disrupted some of the long-standing programs of social justice, in particular ones related to the homeless.

St. Francis of Assisi seems to suffer from what Bishop Oscar Cantu of our Diocese of San Jose characterized in speaking to the USCCB Summer Roundtable (2020): “I would say that locally it has not arrived deeply within the conscience of our … … community”. In this case it is an issue extending across the whole parish community. The community, pastor and staff support the general principles of Laudato Si and have acted on it as a “nice-to-have” rather than as a systemic problem to be faced in day-to-day decision making. The response falls significantly short of the level of crisis called out by Pope Francis in Laudato Si.

The challenge from St. Francis of Assisi as a participant in the Laudato Si Action Platform is the raising awareness so that “the cry of the Earth” and “the cry of the Poor” are considerations in the decision making of the parish and become a call to action for the members of our community. This can be furthered by linking these to the spiritual aspects to “Our Common Home” and through reaching out to work, both internally and externally, to nurture connections to like-minded communities.