**Laudato Si’ Action Platform reflection, October 2023**

**Church of the Resurrection, Dubuque, IA**

It has been a year since our parish enrolled in the Laudato Si’ Action Platform. We celebrate the achievements we have made, renew a commitment to those goals we fell short of reaching, and hope to establish a few new ways to reach out to more people in our congregation so they recognize our interconnectedness to the environment, to each other, and ultimately to God.

On October 4th, Pope Francis released his apostolic exhortation entitled “Laudate Deum.” In this reflection, we will use excerpts from this document as we evaluate ourselves using the seven goals of the Laudato Si’ Action Platform.



1. **Adoption of a Sustainable Lifestyle.**

One of the goals we had established was to return our sustainability practices to pre-pandemic levels, thus eliminating the use of all Styrofoam and plastics during church activities. This has been challenging, particularly during our fall parish festival that used to be proudly touted as a “Green Festival.”

One of the obstacles rested in the city of Dubuque’s inability to accept compostable cups and plates with our food scraps as they did in the past. However, we did succeed in obtaining reusable platters as an alternative to the Styrofoam dinnerware which our catering service provided, and with the help of our Green Team members, were able to wash all dinnerware and silverware for the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_guests served. There was an apparent lack of communication about using compostable cups, and plastic cups were ordered. These were appropriately recycled, but we are well aware that this is not the best practice, and we hope to correct this next year with better communication with the festival committee.

Food/beverage venues were allowed at our festival this year and we had little control over what products they used. In addition, bottled water was sold on the grounds, a practice that had been abolished several years ago. This again seems to be attributed to inadequate communication. While this is discouraging, we are aware that more education and better communication is needed regarding “best practices” and we are committed to making the necessary improvements going forward.

During the Christmas holidays, our Green Team collected approximately 700 pounds of Christmas lights and sent them to a local recycling center where the component parts are extracted for reuse.

1. **Community Resilience and Empowerment**

Certain members of our church continue to be involved with other community groups which were identified in our reflection from last year. A few parishioners have now become involved in the Citizens Climate Lobby. This is a non-partisan, international group that regularly notifies members of important climate legislation. These members then contact their lawmakers, requesting their support and influence. Advocating for appropriate climate legislation is important as Pope Francis cites in Laudate Deum, “unless citizens control political power—national, regional and municipal-it will not be possible to control damage to the environment.”

This year, our Social Justice Committee has launched our own Facebook page where we can educate and share important information about stewardship issues both in our parish and in the community at large. We hope this will engage more people to become involved and take action.

1. **Ecological Economics**

As noted above, our parish needs to improve when ordering materials that coincide with our sustainability goals.

ReStore, a Habitat for Humanity resale store opened last year and many of our parishioners volunteer there and utilize their services. This is also true of the St. Vincent de Paul Store in town.

1. **Ecological Education**

In the spring of 2023, members of our church along with the city-wide Dubuque Catholic Social Justice Network and the Dubuque Interfaith Green Coalition, sponsored a city-wide book study of “Laudato Si’-On Care of Our Common Home.” This was an interfaith event and was co-sponsored by Dubuque Area Congregations United, Dubuque Branch of NAACP, Green Dubuque, Loras College Kucera Center, Sinsinawa Mound Center, Catholic Women’s Religious Communities and Sustainable Dubuque. There were three separate sessions with 40-50 participants present at each. These gatherings helped to raise awareness of the Pope’s encyclical calling for an ecological conversion.



In September, members of our church were also invited to participate in several activities in celebration of the Season of Creation. The Season of Creation planning committee tabled a booth at the Summer Farmer’s Market and in cooperation with the city of Dubuque, distributed information about ways to be more sustainable in everyday practices, energy efficiency, tax rebates and credits, and information about various activities and events throughout the month.

On October 4th, the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi, a screening of “The Letter” was held at the National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium followed by a panel discussion from local environmental and community leaders. One hundred people were in attendance, including a number of people from our parish. This program was sponsored by the Archdiocese of Dubuque with the involvement of the Dubuque Catholic Social Justice Network and the Dubuque Interfaith Green Coalition, of which several members of our parish are involved.

1. **Ecological Spirituality**

In Laudate Deum, Pope Francis states, “…we know that authentic faith not only gives strength to the human heart, but also transforms life, transfigures our goals and sheds light on our relationship to others and with creation as a whole.” The theme for this year’s Season of Creation was “Let Justice and Peace Flow” with the symbol of a mighty river. Here in Dubuque, Iowa, we live along the third largest watershed system in the world, so we organized activities around it. We had an ecumenical contemplative walk along the riverfront to open the Season of Creation celebration. We also held an ecumenical prayer service and walk at Mount Carmel Bluffs, high on the bluffs overlooking the river. In Laudato Si’, Pope Francis states that we need to “discover God in all things,” and that there is “a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person’s face.” Our hope was that participants would feel this mystical interconnectedness while walking along our river’s path and appreciate with gratitude all that nature offers to us.

**Response to the Cry of the Earth**

Another goal for 2022-2023 was to form a committee to plan and develop a few acres of land behind our new school building into a green space. Our intent is to promote the education of our school children on the principles of Laudato Si’ and to generate an appreciation of the natural world. We succeeded in forming a steering committee which includes our pastor, members of our Green Team and Social Justice Committees, a landscape designer, an architect, our church manager, the principal of our elementary school and the head of the Holy Family School System. We have met several times and have generated many wonderful ideas which include community food gardens (which may serve to supplement our Food Pantry give aways,) pollinator gardens, food orchards, an oak savannah, pocket prairies, flower gardens, a Marian garden, bird habitat, raised beds, designated areas for benches for quiet reflection/prayer, stations of the cross, nature playscape for the children, and many other exciting possibilities. We are looking forward to beginning the actual work on at least part of this project in the spring. We are also exploring possible sources of funding for these projects through available grants, donations, etc.

Our parish has also enrolled in an “Adopt-a-Spot” program, sponsored by the city of Dubuque where we commit to an at least bi-annual cleanup of the properties along a mile stretch of road that runs past our church. On September 30th, members of our Green Team and Youth Group participated in this clean up.

Again this year, on the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi, our church held a “blessing of the animals.”

1. **Response to the Cry of the Poor**

Our parish continues to hold quarterly food giveaways. Groups within the parish also continue to sponsor meals at the Dubuque Rescue Mission for the poor and homeless. Our Social Justice Committee continues to make charitable contributions to a variety of local, national, and international organizations. We also offer a grant program twice a year to help other local charities.

On October 21st, we are holding a pancake breakfast in cooperation with the First Baptist Church with all proceeds going to People in Need (PIN) a local organization that provides emergency assistance for people who are unable to pay bills for housing, food, energy bills, etc.

We continue to provide ongoing support to the St. Vincent de Paul Society with food donations, financial assistance, and during the holidays, a “giving tree” where parishioners can purchase gifts/gift certificates for low income families and their children as well as elderly, homebound or nursing home residents.

Our parish also continues to provide financial support to St. Ignatius Parish in Wanblee, South Dakota, and to our sponsor child, Rosie, in Guatemala, Our parish continues to have an active Health Ministry, which includes an outreach program to the homebound, caregiver respite and a Be-friender ministry.

One of our greatest challenges seems to be how to engage more people in our parish to take the Care of Creation/climate crisis seriously. In Laudate Deum, Pope Francis very bluntly singles out the “irresponsible lifestyle connected with the Western model” as having the greatest impact on harmful carbon emissions. He also writes, “We must move beyond the mentality of appearing to be concerned but not having the courage needed to produce substantial changes.” (56)

Division and skepticism are present here as they are almost everywhere. Even the mention of climate change from the pulpit elicits anger in some individuals. The Pope addresses this when he says, “Once and for all, let us put an end to the irresponsible derision that would present this issue as something purely ecological, ‘green’, romantic, frequently subject to ridicule by economic interests. Let us finally admit that it is a human and social problem on any number of levels. For this reason, it calls for involvement on the part of all…. since every family ought to realize that the future of their children is at stake.”

Catholic Social Teaching mandates that “We show our respect for the Creator by our stewardship of creation. Care for the Earth is not just an Earth Day slogan, it is a requirement of our faith. We are called to protect people and our planet, living our faith in relationship with all of God’s creatures. This environmental challenge has fundamental moral and ethical dimensions that cannot be ignored.” This is not something new. Pope Leo began the process of Catholic Social Teaching back in 1891 with his encyclical “Rerum Novarum,” and many Popes since then have expanded on how Catholics should conduct themselves in our often hostile world.

Our parish has made some progress in our first year of enrollment in the Laudato Si’ Action Platform, and we embrace the challenges ahead with hope and prayer. We all need to do our part, even when the obstacles seem difficult to overcome. So, perhaps it is best to remember that “The world sings of an infinite love: how can we fail to care for it?” (65)