

## The Catholic University of America Laudato Si' Action Platform: Reflection FY 2023

As stewards charged with advancing the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, The Catholic University of America is committed to improving the environmental well-being of the campus and the greater community. All Catholic University community members are encouraged, engaged, inspired, and motivated to take steps to reduce their impact on the environment.

Catholic University's efforts towards environmental sustainability are guided by the University's 5-Year Sustainability Plan: FY 2021-2025, which was released in 2020. The Sustainability Plan was inspired by the teaching of Pope Francis in Laudato Si' and is organized around four pillars: Catholic Identity – Living Laudato Si'; Sustainability Leadership and Recognition; Campus Facilities and People, Planet, and Prosperity; and Engagement. In addition, the Sustainability Plan touches upon all seven goals of the Laudato Si' Action Platform: Response to the Cry of the Earth, Response to the Cry of the Poor, Ecological Economics, Adoption of Sustainable Lifestyles, Ecological Education, Ecological Spirituality, and Community Resilience and Empowerment. As such, Catholic University is submitting our Sustainability Plan as our Laudato Si' Action Plan. An overview of the Sustainability Plan's alignment with the Laudato Si' goals is below.

**Response to the Cry of the Earth.** The Sustainability Plan includes goals and milestones, grounded in the University's mission, which amplify the objectives of the call to Respond to the Cry of the Earth. The Plan includes benchmarking and transparency actions focused on monitoring and tracking sustainability progress, metrics, and environmental key performance indicators annually. It also includes actions focused on the implementation of best practices for energy, water, waste, grounds, and building management.

**Response to the Cry of the Poor.** The Sustainability Plan's actions related to the call to Respond to the Cry of the Poor include maintaining a year-round food pantry, operating an on-campus free thrift store, donating food that would otherwise be wasted, and establishing policies, resources, support, and accommodations for all families. This Laudato Si' goal represents an opportunity for Catholic University to expand on our sustainability actions and programs as they relate to highlighting social injustices commonly rooted in environmental degradation.

**Ecological Economics.** The Sustainability Plan focuses on Fostering Ecological Economics through procedural planning and financing integral ecology. This includes creating analysis protocols for proposed capital projects and funding sustainability initiatives through a green financing mechanism.

**Adoption of Sustainable Lifestyles.** Fostering the Adoption of Sustainable Lifestyles is included throughout the Sustainability Plan. The Plan focuses on communicating integral ecology through focus groups, stakeholder communications protocols, certifications, and educational opportunities. Topics include healthy foods, reducing food waste, zero waste best practices, alternative transportation, and commitments to a sustainable campus through achieving building certifications and protocols.

**Ecological Education.** The Sustainability Plan focuses on Ecological Education through the lens of educational planning and dissemination as well as promoting the campus as a living classroom. The Plan

includes actions such as hosting annual convenings of university faculty to assess the need for additional courses related to the environment, maintaining a sustainability peer group with student, faculty, and staff representatives, and promoting interdisciplinary collaboration among faculty and students on issues of sustainability. To promote the campus as a living classroom, the Plan also includes actions such as including sustainability attributes on campus tours; encouraging faculty-led student research projects related to sustainability; collaborating with student clubs focused on the environment; and developing courses specifically focused on improving sustainability on campus.

**Ecological Spirituality.** The Sustainability Plan connects our responsibility to care for creation with our spiritual life through environmental stewardship retreats, events coinciding with the October Feast Day of St. Francis of Assisi, and creating an annual forum for exploration and discussion of the Church's teachings on environmental stewardship.

**Community Resilience and Empowerment.** The Sustainability Plan incorporates a significant commitment to sustainability through collaborations, partnerships, and actions. Collaborations with other higher education institutions and partnerships with local and national organizations with a strong focus on sustainability and environmental stewardship help us on our synodal journey of community engagement. Engaging locally through adopting a neighborhood block for clean-up and hosting an annual environmental justice week addresses direct needs in our own community.

In FY 2023, Catholic University made significant progress on initiatives that extended to every aspect of campus life including lecture halls, residence halls, offices, and on the field. Our achievements are a reflection of Catholic University's ongoing pledge to Care for Our Common Home that extends from our leadership to our students.

The most significant sustainability developments in FY 2023 include earning STARS Silver Certification from the Association for Advancement in Higher Education and being named a Green College by the Princeton Review for the third year in a row. In FY 2023, Catholic University offset 100% of campus electricity use with renewable energy credits, planted 145 trees across campus, and began construction of the 7.5MW West Campus Solar Project. FY 2023 also included the completion of a new dining commons at Garvey Hall and the start of construction on the new nursing school, both of which will be LEED certified. To reduce waste across campus, Catholic University rolled out a back-of-house compost program for all food waste generated in the campus kitchens; hosted a community electronic waste recycling event; initiated a weekly food recovery program to avoid food waste; opened Cardinal Closet, the first on-campus free thrift store; and hosted the first move-out donation drive in recent years to collect items that students did not want to take home with them at the end of the spring semester. Catholic University has also maintained a year-round food pantry that expanded to offer baby items such as diapers and wipes through the new Guadalupe Project which is focused on ensuring campus provides resources, support, and accommodations to all families. The University also maintained the campus community garden to improve community access to healthy foods by donating the produce grown to the campus food pantry. Catholic University has created new opportunities to engage staff and faculty including a monthly conversation series focused on improving sustainability education across the University as well as a meeting series focused on improving sustainability in staff and faculty office spaces. Upcoming activities in FY 2024 will build on these initiatives as well as generate positive environmental change, promote education and research, preserve resources, raise awareness, and generate exciting dialogue.