



*May the glory of the Lord endure forever;
May the Lord be glad in his works! (Psalm 104: 31)*

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

As we begin the Jubilee Year of 2025, we do so rejoicing in the gift of the Savior who was born to reveal God's infinite love to the world. Early in our calendar year, the Feast of Epiphany celebrates the manifestation of this Child of Bethlehem not only as Israel's Messiah, but a gift to all of humanity. The traditional texts for the Mass and the Liturgy of the Hours on Epiphany celebrates God's saving action having effect in all of creation. In the central story of the adoration of the magi from the east, a story of pagans encountering the manifestation of God in the Child Jesus, these astrologers who studied the skies were guided by a star in the heavens. The Epiphany theme is continued in Jesus' manifestation at his baptism where we see God in the flesh bathed in the River Jordan, and by doing so making the waters holy. The magnificence of all creation is renewed by the birth and manifestation of Christ. Therefore, it is fitting that we publish the Catholic Diocese of Lexington's *Laudato Si* Action Plan in this special season of Christmas on the first day of 2025.

This Action Plan can serve as a kind of a diocesan New Year's Resolution for this Jubilee Year. We may recall that in the biblical legislation about jubilee years, found in the Book of Leviticus, even the land was to lay fallow to allow it to rest and rejuvenate. There was a concern about not over-burdening the land and depleting its richness.

In the decree announcing our present Jubilee Year with the theme that "*Hope Does Not Disappoint*", the Holy Father Pope Francis reminds us that forgiveness and release from debt are always a part of a jubilee "Year of Favor", as the one announced by Jesus himself in his first sermon in the synagogue of Nazareth. The pope tells us that we can also consider that we have an "ecological debt" towards those nations who have sacrificed a great amount of their natural resources, but fail to share in the benefits their consumption has brought to some countries.

As sacred Scripture teaches, the earth is the Lord's and all of us dwell in it as "aliens and tenants" (*Lev 25:23*). If we really wish to prepare a path to peace in our world, let us commit ourselves to remedying the remote causes of injustice, settling unjust and unpayable debts, and feeding the hungry (*Spes non confundi*, #16).

It is therefore in the spirit of the Jubilee and of our ongoing commitment to cherish the gifts of creation and the inter-relatedness of all life, that I am very happy to present this *Laudato Si* Action Plan for the Catholic Diocese of Lexington.

This plan illustrates in a beautiful way how the diocese really consists of its parish and mission communities in right relationship with each other. At the conclusion of the Season of Creation last year on the Feast of Saint Francis of Assisi, each of our parishes and missions presented a plan for implementing our Catholic teaching on the environment in their own local setting. These parishes and missions had their *Laudato Si'* teams come together in the fall and study the plans of each parish/mission which were shared with the other parishes and missions of their deanery. Together, along with some of the policies and practices already underway at the Catholic Center in Lexington, these parish and mission plans contribute to our diocesan plan shared here. I am proud of the good work and the deep discussions that led to the creation of these various plans. It is very inspiring to see how many people participated in this process. I pray that we may continue to engage more and more people from our faith community and beyond in the critically important work of caring for creation.

In addition to the parish plans, as a diocese we have already committed to being Net-Zero by the Year 2030 and are actively planning and working to meet that goal. We regularly monitor all diocesan investments to make sure that they are not with companies whose practices are harming the environment.

May 2025 truly be a year of Jubilee, of rejoicing in God's goodness, and of committing ourselves even more fully to freeing creation from its slavery to overconsumption by human beings. May the Spirit of the Lord be upon us as the Spirit was upon Jesus, who proclaimed a year acceptable to the Lord (*Luke 4:19*), and may our work for the health of our planet be found pleasing and acceptable in God's eyes.

Thank you to everyone who has participated actively in the work of implementing *Laudato Si'*. May the conversion of hearts and minds to the care of our common home also empower us to work for policy changes on state, national, and global scales, so that God's creation may be enjoyed and appreciated by future generations.

Peace and all good,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Bishop John Stowe, OFM Conv." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Bishop John Stowe, OFM Conv.

The Catholic Diocese of Lexington Laudato Si' Action Plan

In his 2015 Encyclical, *Laudato Si': On Care for our Common Home*, Pope Francis states that "Living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience" (217).

These words remind us that our call to care for creation is an essential part of Christian life and the life of the Church. In his 2023 Apostolic Exhortation, *Laudate Deum*, Pope Francis makes plain that this vocation requires the Church, at every level, to take bold, urgent, and faith-filled action.

In response to this call, and with firm trust in the work of the Holy Spirit, the Diocese of Lexington marks the 10th anniversary of *Laudato Si'* with its *Laudato Si'* Action Plan. The plan is comprised of two main components: 1) Diocesan Commitments and 2) *Laudato Si'* Action Plans from all 59 parishes/missions.

Diocesan Commitments

The Diocese of Lexington is committed to Net-Zero by 2030, as announced in 2024, for its scope two emissions. The Diocese is also committed to ensuring that its investments align with its values and promote care for creation. Additionally, as of March 1, 2024, the Chancery implemented The Catholic Center's Commitment to Care for Creation: Policies, Guidelines, and Next Steps. This Catholic Center Commitment, along with a description of the Net-Zero Commitment, can be found in the final section of this plan.

Parish Plans

The second dimension of the plan is the parish *Laudato Si'* Action Plans from all 59 parishes/missions. These plans articulate how each faith community, in its own context and with God's people, plans to pursue the Seven Goals of *Laudato Si'* in simple and profound ways. All plans can be found in the pages that follow.

The Parish Laudato Si' Action Planning Process

Bearing in mind the diversity of communities across the Diocese, the parish *Laudato Si'* planning process aimed to create a simple process in which all parishes could participate. The process emphasized subsidiarity, co-responsibility, capacity building, and concrete action.

The parish planning process consisted of the following steps:

- On Pentecost, May 19, 2024, each parish received a letter from Bishop John Stowe introducing the planning process.
- Each Pastor/ Parish Life Director was asked to enroll their parish in the *Laudato Si'* Action Platform and assembled a *Laudato Si'* Action Team. Teams consist of the Pastor/PLD and at least two other parishioners.

- Laudato Si' Action Teams completed the Diocesan parish assessment based on the Seven Goals of Laudato Si and hosted at least one parish-wide listening session.
- The Diocese provided seven webinars to support parish teams: Introduction and Enrolling in the Laudato Si' Action Platform, Conducting a Listening Session, Integrating Laudato Si' in Preaching and Liturgical Celebrations, Greening Our Parish Facilities, Developing Parish Policy and Guidelines, Encountering Affected Communities: The Global Reality of the Climate Crisis, Making a Laudato Si' Action Plan.
- Teams developed their plans and appointed a Laudato Si' Coordinator. The coordinator is charged with overseeing the implementation of the plan, monitoring progress, and each year during the Season of Creation, updating and evaluating the plan with support from the Diocesan Office of Peace and Justice.
- By October 4, 2024, all teams submitted their plans to Bishop John Stowe.
- On November 23, 2024, teams gathered for the first annual Laudato Si' Action Team Assembly. This was a time of prayer, reflection, and collaboration in deanery groups.

Laudato Si' Action Platform and the Seven Goals of Laudato Si'

The Diocese of Lexington is enrolled in the Laudato Si' Action Platform and requested that each parish enroll as well. The Laudato Si' Action Platform is an initiative of the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development with the goal of helping create Laudato Si' Action Plans based on the Seven Goals of Laudato Si.'

Goal 1: Response to the Cry of the Earth

The response to the cry of the earth is a call to protect our common home for the wellbeing of all, as we equitably address the climate crisis, biodiversity loss, and ecological sustainability.

Goal 2: Response to the Cry of the Poor

The response to the cry of the poor is a call to promote eco-justice, aware that we are called to defend human life from conception to death, and all forms of life on earth.

Goal 3: Ecological Economics

Ecological economics acknowledges that the economy plays an important role in protecting the well-being of our common home. Actions could include purchasing sustainability produced goods, ethical investments, and protecting the dignity of workers.

Goal 4: Adoption of Sustainable Lifestyles

The adoption of sustainable lifestyles is grounded in the idea that in our personal lives and in parish life, we can make intentional choices regarding our use of resources and energy that can promote the well-being of the planet.

Goal 5: Ecological Education

Ecological education prioritizes formation and educational opportunities that promote ecological awareness and transformative action.

Goal 6: Ecological Spirituality

Ecological spirituality springs from a profound ecological conversion and helps us to discover God in all things.

Goal 7: Community Resilience and Empowerment

Community resilience and empowerment promotes active and conscious involvement and participatory action to care for creation at the local, regional, national, and international levels.

The Parish Plan Format

Informed by the parish assessment and listening session, each parish plan is comprised of two main elements: the Laudato Si' Statement and Parish Commitments. The Parish Laudato Si' Statement articulates why caring for creation is important to the parish community. The Parish Commitments are new or continued concrete undertakings discerned by the teams. Parish teams were asked to follow the acronym SMART when developing their commitments. Commitments should be **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**elevant to the Goals of Laudato Si', and **T**ime-bound. Having measurable goals with timeframes will help each parish monitor their progress and, each year during the Season of Creation, update and evaluate their plans.

Building Capacity for Laudato Si' Ministry

The development of this Laudato Si' Action Plan offered an opportunity to engage the faithful in our Church communities, fostered participation and co-responsibility, and in many cases, called forth new leadership from among parishioners. The newly assembled Laudato Si' groups at parishes testify to the possibility of renewal, evangelization, and engagement through our care for creation ministries. The Diocesan Office of Peace and Justice will continue to support Laudato Si' coordinators, their teams, and parish leadership as they bring their Laudato Si' Action Plans to life in their home communities. This is only a beginning. We will work together to learn and grow as we implement our plans, opening our hearts to being transformed by the Spirit along the way. The Diocesan Laudato Si' Commission will also continue to offer Diocesan-wide programming in which parishes may take part, including the Appalachian Immersion Experience. Though each plan and each parish community is unique, we stand in prayerful solidarity with one another as we embrace the "vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork" in new ways across the 50 counties of the Diocese of Lexington.

This Laudato Si' Action Plan is a product of prayer, preaching, listening, sharing, and discernment in every parish in our Diocese, the Catholic Schools, and among Chancery staff and Diocesan leadership. This plan speaks to the Holy Spirit's activity among the People of God. For this, we give thanks. With joyful hearts, we echo the words of St. Francis in his Canticle of the Creatures, "*Laudato Si', mi' Signore!*" (*Praise be to you, my Lord!*).

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