St. Katharine Drexel Catholic Church

Frederick, Maryland

**Laudato Si’ Action Platform Reflection**

**Year I - 2025**

St. Katharine Drexel Parish (SKD) is an ever-growing faith community in Frederick, MD, located within the Archdiocese of Baltimore. In 1998, the archdiocese recognized the need to start a new parish and build a church to accommodate the influx of Catholics into the growing Frederick County, Maryland area. The parish began as a “satellite” of St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church located in crowded downtown Frederick City. Saint Katharine Drexel was chosen as the name for the church by the first members with hopes of growing a parish community that would embrace the values exemplified by the life of this American saint canonized in the year 2000, the same year the satellite community became a mission church.

Various sites were found within the Frederick community, with available space for Sunday and Saturday Masses as the community grew. Even though there was no permanent church building, the parish welcomed all, and membership quickly grew to include a thriving African immigrant community and choir as well as a partnership with St. Hubert parish in Haiti. After almost twenty years of persistent hard work by a dedicated pastor and faith community, a permanent building off Opposumtown Pike, St. Katharine Drexel Catholic Church, was officially dedicated on November 11, 2016. What started as a “satellite” group of a few hundred has grown to a vibrant, diverse parish of over 1,500 households representing the cultures of over 84 countries.

**Mission Statement / Values and Connection to the Laudato Si’ (LS) Goals:**

Parish Mission Statement: **“*St. Katharine Drexel pledges to be a Eucharist-centered, welcoming community, forming loving disciples, giving selflessly in realization of the kingdom of God.”***

The parish mission statement was developed by the first parish council in 2003 and continues to guide the work of the parish today. The SKD mission statement's four aspects align with the values exemplified by the parish namesake, St. Katharine Drexel. They can broadly be connected to the Laudato Si’ Goals as indicated, in parentheses, below.

***Eucharistic-centered****:* St. Katharine devoted her life to prayerful service of Christ embodied in the Eucharist. Her devotion to the Blessed Sacrament brought her solace and guidance as she encountered the many challenges of her service and advocacy for social justice. (LS Goal: Ecological Spirituality)

***Welcoming community****:* She demonstrated an unconditional respect for the inherent human dignity of all people with a sensitivity to cultural diversity. The prevailing racial injustices of her time fueled her advocacy for equality and justice for all people, especially the poor and marginalized. Her schools and missions were open to students of all religious backgrounds. (LS Goals: Response to the Cry of the Poor, Community Resilience and Empowerment)

***Forming loving disciples****:* St. Katharine believed that the best way to empower people was through an education that included both spiritual and intellectual aspects. She established and supported numerous schools and missions, as well as the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament religious order. By offering religious instruction, healthcare, and vocational training, the marginalized received the tools to fight the social and economic injustices of the day with hopes of achieving a better future. (LS Goals: Response to the Cry of the Poor, Ecological Education, Community Resilience and Empowerment)

***Giving selflessly****:* Despite being born into wealth and privilege, Katharine Drexel chose to enter religious life, devoting herself and her inheritance to selflessly serving those suffering from the racial and economic injustices of her time. Her philanthropic work centered around advocacy for social, financial, and educational justice. She not only wrote checks but also contributed by engaging directly with those she served for a deeper understanding of their holistic needs. (LS Goals: Response to the Cry of the Poor, Ecological Economics)

***Realization of the Kingdom of God****:* St. Katharine Drexel understood the Kingdom of God as a reality that begins here on earth. Her life demonstrates that while outward action is essential, an inner relationship with God brings about the transformation necessary to see humanity in all of God's creation.

The parish mission is actualized through the activities of numerous ministries focused on addressing the spiritual, social, and special interest needs of parishioners as well as outreach to those in need within the wider Frederick community and beyond.

Commitment to Social Justice

The Social Justice Ministry is the umbrella for many initiatives that provide parishioners with numerous opportunities to follow the footsteps of St. Katharine Drexel as disciples of Jesus. Through education, advocacy, and direct action, parishioners work selflessly to bring God’s Kingdom to those in need. Under the umbrella of this commitment to social justice, several ministries are established to meet the needs of parishioners and the community.

Most active ministries respond to the needs of the poor and marginalized groups within the parish and community, answering the call of Pope Francis to **"Respond to the Cry of the Poor."**

Environmental Stewardship Ministry (ESM)

In 2022, the Environmental Stewardship Ministry was formed by a small group of parishioners with shared interests in environmental issues. This new ministry wanted to open the hearts of parishioners to **"Respond to the Cry of the Earth."**

Mission statement: Guided by the Holy Spirit, the Environmental Stewardship Ministry commits to caring for our common home. Inspired by Pope Francis’ encyclical “Laudato Si’”, our team strives to live in harmony with all of God's Creation and to educate our parish community on the impact their actions have on the sustainability of our planet.

The goals of the ministry are to:

1. Promote ecological awareness and education (**Ecological Education)**
2. Advocate for Environmental Justice **(Community Resilience and Empowerment)**
3. Foster a spiritual connection with creation **(Ecological Spirituality)**
4. Develop youth and family programs that focus on environmental stewardship **(Adoption of Sustainable Lifestyles)**

The ministry's goals have been carried out through a variety of actions.

* Maintaining the rain gardens on parish grounds with parish volunteers.
* Recycling programs for batteries, x-rays films, and pill bottles.
* Participating in Adopt-a-Road community litter removal.
* Selling reusable church logo bags
* Sponsoring an Annual Community-wide Spring Recycling Event
* Team members attend parish-wide social activities to provide receptacles for recycling and waste.
* Each week, quick tips are published in the bulletin, giving individuals and families actions they can take to positively impact the environment.
* Speakers are invited throughout the year to educate on topics to include, but not limited to: recycling, composting, native plants/pollinator gardens, bees, solar panels, and environmentally conscious food choices.

**The Call to Join the Laudato Si’ Action Platform**

**Our Journey to Integral Ecology and an Ecological Conversion**

In the Fall of 2023, the Environmental Stewardship Ministry sponsored a 4-part discussion of the encyclical letter of Pope Francis *“Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home”.* The reflections of those in the small group who attended led to a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of all God’s creation and the moral obligation of Catholics to act by transforming hearts and lifestyles to ensure the sustainability of our planet for future generations. This group was motivated to find ways to bring life to the Pope’s message within the activities and initiatives of our environmental stewardship and to all aspects of parish life.

We became aware of the Laudato Si’ Action Platform (LSAP) via a Catholic Church in the area with a Care for Our Common Home Ministry. We contacted them and organizations like the Catholic Climate Covenant and the Laudato Si’ Movement for guidance. We participated in workshops on the spirituality of Laudato Si’, the scientific perspective on climate change, and a primer on the Laudato Si’ Action Platform sponsored by the Catholic Climate Covenant and the Association of US Catholic Bishops. This research led us to believe enrollment in the LSAP would give us the framework, resources, and guidance to initiate a journey towards “integral ecology” and “ecological conversion” within individuals and the St. Katharine Drexel faith community.

In 2024, the Environmental Stewardship Ministry was invited to join the Liturgical Ministry in presenting the Lenten theme "It's a Gift," providing an opportunity to highlight creation as God's gift deserving of our careful stewardship. Presentations were developed and shown before the weekend Masses during Lent. Each week, a different aspect of creation was highlighted. Content included a scripture verse, a quote from Laudato Si’, and examples of how the actions of humans harm God's gifts and practical actions individuals/families could carry out during Lent and beyond. After each Mass, posters were displayed to provide educational information for each theme to encourage dialogue with parishioners. Each week, there was an insert to the bulletin with practical suggestions for action by individuals or families. The themes were: (1) Water that Saves and Sustains, (2) Reduce, Reuse, Recycle Now for the Future, (3) The Air We Breathe, (4) Biodiversity, the Essence of Life on Earth, (5) Nurture Our Common Home so It will Nourish Us. The goal of this Lenten project was to open hearts and minds to the responsibility of all to cultivate and care for our Common Home, the earth, through mindful actions.

While the project was thoughtfully designed and well received by some, it also revealed communication challenges. References to climate change discouraged certain parishioners, though others were curious to learn more. Overall, many struggled to see how the themes connected to their Christian responsibility to care for creation.

As we reflected, it became clear that an ecological conversion within the parish would be a journey that required more than just the activities of our ministry. It would be necessary to have an integrated approach that included a commitment from the church leadership and other parish ministries. We wanted to proclaim the message of Laudato Si’ that as human beings we are part of God's creation. As Christians, we are to “realize *that their responsibility within creation, and their duty towards nature and the Creator, are an essential part of their* faith.” *Pope Francis (LS64)*.

Again, we discussed the benefits of enrolling in the Laudato Si’ Action Platform within our ministry. The challenges would be around educating and creating awareness of the LSAP within the parish leadership, ministries, and community. Although the parish is multi-generational, most of the ministries are led by older parishioners. Ultimately, the benefits are that the parish culture and worship reflect care for our common home.

In July of 2024, the founding pastor of SKD retired, and a new pastor was assigned. The pastor's approval was needed to enroll in the Laudato Si’ Action Platform. A core group of four from the Environmental Stewardship Ministry developed an overview of the Laudato Si’ goals, the LSAP process, and the connection to the parish mission statement. In January of 2025, it was presented to the pastor and parish council. Their approval for the enrollment of SKD parish was contingent upon the Environmental Stewardship Ministry administering the LSAP initiative.

**Current Status**

St. Katharine Drexel Catholic Church formally enrolled in the Laudato Si’ Action Platform in January 2025. The journey is currently being led by a planning team of four members from the Environmental Stewardship ministry.

Our enrollment in Laudato Si’ Action Platform preceded the establishment of a Parish Committee. Ideally, an LSAP committee would be formed with a multi-generational, multi-cultural representation of parishioners, church leaders, and religious and office staff.

The planning team continues to lead the LSAP journey; however, it has been challenging to conduct a thorough assessment relative to each of the seven Laudato Si’ goals without input from a broader representation of the parish. The current dashboard reflects the limited information gathered by this team. Most of the actions completed were because of the work of the Environmental Stewardship Ministry, which will continue deepening its activities in alignment with LSAP goals.

***“We must keep alive that little spark of celestial fire called conscience.”*** St. Katharine Drexel

Under the direction of our newly appointed pastor, Father Matt, the parish just completed a synod approach reflecting on the parish mission statement and how the aspects of parish life fit within it now, and in consideration for the future. The Synod concluded on June 7, 2025, and the input will be incorporated into a parish plan. With the pastor's support, this will be an opportune time to align the Laudato Si’ goals with the new parish plan.

Once a more representative Laudato Si’ committee is formed, members will be guided in understanding how Catholic Social Teaching, integral ecology, and ecological conversion connect with the LSAP process and the parish mission. This shared formation will shape our first-year Action Plan, helping us weave these principles into parish life and future planning.

***“The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change.” (Pope Francis LS 13)***

The Environmental Stewardship Ministry will spearhead the development of the first-year action plan and shepherd its implementation. The table below reflects the existing initiatives/efforts of the Environmental Stewardship Ministry relative to the Seven Laudato Si’ Goals**.**

**St. Katharine Drexel Catholic Church**

**Year I. 2025/2026**

**Reflecting on the Laudato Si’ Goals**

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| **Laudato Si’ Goal** | **Current Actions** | **What’s working well** | **Areas for improvement** |
| Response to the  Cry of the Earth | - Parish volunteers maintain the rain/pollinator and the parish office gardens on the parish grounds.  - Volunteers pick up litter 4 times per year in cooperation with the Frederick City "Adopt-A-Road" Program. | - Rain/pollinator gardens are certified by the Maryland Extension Office Baywise program, which verifies that the care given supports the wildlife in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. The gardens are also certified St. Kateri Habitat, which verifies that care supports wildlife in the location.  - Volunteers consistently pick up a minimum of ten 35-gallon trash bags full of litter. | - Enhance ongoing activities seeking young volunteers.  - Collaborate with youth ministry staff representatives.  - Gain a grant from Sheetz (the largest contributor to litter) to support our work with supplies.  - Develop a ready stream of volunteers to fill each team. |
| Response to the  Cry of the Poor | - Numerous Outreach activities sponsored by various ministries. | - Some activities are advertised through the bulletin. | - Collaboration with other ministries to identify and advertise all the opportunities to care for people experiencing poverty who are suffering. |
| **Laudato Si’ Goal** | **Current Actions** | **What’s working well** | **Areas for improvement** |
| Ecological  Economics | - ESM hosted an Annual Recycling event for parishioners and the community. | - Great response to the Recycling event. Results posted in the bulletin.  - Pastor is very supportive of exploring ways to purchase recycled and sustainable materials parish-wide. | - Increase youth participation in the annual recycling event.  - Raise awareness within Parish leadership and ministries of materials that can be purchased with the lowest impact on the environment or that support the environment. |
| Adoption of  Sustainable  Lifestyles | - Weekly ESM bulletin suggestions provide actions  for home participation.  - ESM attends parish social events to ensure recycling. | - Positive response to Bulletin tidbits.  - Dialogue with organizers of events to set up recycling bins. | - Work with ministries to reduce the purchase and use of plastic and styrofoam, as well as to decrease waste overall. |
| Ecological  Spirituality | - Pastor and Parish Leadership are planning the 2025 Season of Creation activities. | - ESM is willing to collaborate regarding the season of creation.  - Pastor is supportive of including LS themes in homilies and prayers of the faithful. | This goal will be the focus of our Year 1 plan.  Specific objectives will be developed by the Laudato Si’ Planning Team/committee. |
| Community  Resilience and  Empowerment | - ESM is leading and managing the LSAP journey. | - Persistence and patience of the planning team. | - Create institutional structures to manage Laudato Si’ initiatives. |
| **Laudato Si’ Goal** | **Current Actions** | **What’s working well** | **Areas for improvement** |
| Ecological Education | - ESM hosts Speaker Series highlighting practical ways to care for our common home. Recent topics have included:   * **Native plants** – easy ways to attract birds, bees, and butterflies to our yards. * **Bees** – why these little pollinators are so important for the food we eat. * **Composting** – turning food scraps into healthy soil for gardens. * **Solar energy** – how clean energy can save money and protect the planet. * **Mindful eating** – simple food choices that cut down on waste and pollution.   - Partnership built with the parochial schools' elementary and high school teachers to assist them with ecological education. | - Use of social media to bring in the community.  - The variety of topics chosen are of interest to participants.  - Elementary students studied and planned a pollinator garden.  - High school students assisted with Spring mulching during their service day, learning to care for gardens by mulching. | - Increase participation in Speaker Series; possibly change day/times.  - Consider topics related to understanding Laudato Si’.  - (HS) Better preparation of supplies and improved communication with students by breaking into smaller groups with an adult leader.  - Dialogue and educate parish leadership, ministries, and parishioners regarding the LSAP and Laudato Si’ goals and alignment with parish goals and Catholic Social Teaching.  **(This goal will be the focus of our Year 1 plan.)** |

Final 9/1/2025

SKD Reflection Yr. 1