



Laudato Si' at 10: Its Message Still Rings Loud

Ten years ago Pope Francis shook up the world with an urgent message from his *Laudato Si'* encyclical. In stark terms he described the state of the world's environment as a climate emergency. He identified the cause as originating from "an ill-considered exploitation of nature," where "humanity runs the risk of destroying it and becoming in turn a victim of this degradation." He did not hold back on his observation of our situation, saying, "The earth, our home, is beginning to look more like an immense pile of filth."

This wake-up call had both immediate and lasting impacts. It generated a significant increase in grassroots Catholic climate activism, with thousands of creation care teams springing up across the U.S. and around the globe. Dioceses, parishes, and religious communities developed and implemented eco-friendly initiatives, from actions such as installing solar panels to using church grounds as community gardens. Perhaps the biggest impact was the tens of thousands of "ecological conversions" by Catholics who moved towards a greater love of God, each other, and creation by acknowledging their contribution to the ecological crisis and making changes in their daily lives.

Laudato Si' also firmly embedded ecology into the core of Catholic social teaching, enshrining care for creation as an essential aspect of our faith.

In recognition of this impact Cardinal Michael Czerny, declared: "In the context of the Jubilee of Hope 2025, this tenth anniversary will be a



Dan Misleh addresses 10th anniversary celebrants

time to celebrate what has been achieved and to give thanks to God. A time to promote the encyclical among Catholics and people of all faiths who do not know it. A time to mourn- and struggle- with those who suffer, marginalized or impoverished, because of the damage inflicted on the Earth and unjust economic mechanisms."

Now, ten years after its publication, the Church around the world is mobilizing with events, moments of prayer, concrete actions and awareness-raising initiatives to celebrate this important anniversary and renew its commitment to urgent and profound change.

The Archdiocese of Louisville's Creation Care Team is playing a key part in this celebration that started with a special presentation by Dan Misleh, CEO and founder of the Catholic Climate Covenant. This Washington D.C.-based organization has been working at the intersection of Catholic social teaching and the environment for over

19 years. Misleh addressed a crowd of some 140 drawn from across the archdiocese at The Olmsted on June 17.

His presentation focused on people's disconnectedness from the environment. A point brought home to the audience when he asked what things came to mind when they heard the word "environment." Responses came back such as oceans, trees, animals, nature; no one said "people". Misleh pointed out that people are part of the environment. "Somehow we have become separate from creation and if we don't see ourselves as part of creation we are in big trouble," he predicted. In addition, he feels that "if we don't have our relationship right with the environment, we won't have our relationship with God right."

According to Misleh, a key insight of Laudato Si' is that everything is connected. The environment, other people, and God are all bound together. We cannot isolate ourselves from others or from God.

The attitude of separateness springs from our culture where we tend not to think of the common good but only what's good for us.

Misleh pointed out that, "We put too much emphasis on the individual and not enough on the common good. As Catholics we have to think about what's good for everyone. That's a core teaching of our Catholic faith and of the gospel."

Integral Ecology

This "integral ecology," is a central concept of Laudato Si'. It emphasizes that environmental issues are intrinsically linked to social, economic, and political problems. It calls for combating poverty and protecting nature simultaneously.

This is reflected in Laudato Si' where Pope Francis makes it clear that we do not have a social crisis and an environmental crisis, we have a complex crisis where those elements are linked inseparably. As an example, he speaks about how the world's external deserts are growing because people's internal deserts are growing.

Misleh showed his audience both sides of the environmental coin. One side is rife with ecological disasters such as more intense hurricanes, the spread of tropical diseases, rising temperatures, startling rates of species extinction, and sea level rises threatening

numerous coastal cities. On the other side of the coin, Catholic Climate Covenant has brought about over 35 energy projects all across the country. The growth of sustainable energy sources, such as wind turbines, have saved religious organizations money that they can put to use in their ministries. As an example, Catholic Charities in Washington D.C. installed a sustainable energy system that has saved hundreds of thousands annually, freeing up substantial amounts for their work in helping the disadvantaged.



Creation Care Team members Sr. Chris Hock and Jeanna Danhauer check out one of the informational displays at The Olmsted prior to the event.



Dan Misleh, Catholic Climate Covenant CEO

Over the past ten years, the Laudato Si' Movement has grown into a global family, united in a commitment to ecological and social justice. From intimate moments of conversion to bold collective actions, every step has been guided by a shared vision of hope and care for creation. While the climate crisis can seem overwhelming, Misleh encouraged personal actions by saying, **"We all can't do everything, but we can all do something."**

As celebrations of the tenth anniversary of Laudato Si' continue this year, people continue to look forward to the work that remains. In his Pentecost homily Pope Leo XIV focused on connection and unity, saying, "In a divided and troubled world, the Holy Spirit teaches us to walk together in unity. The earth will rest, justice will prevail, the poor will rejoice and peace will return, once we no longer act as predators but as pilgrims. No longer each of us for ourselves, but walking alongside one another. Not greedily exploiting this world, but cultivating it and protecting it, as the encyclical Laudato Si' has taught us."

No House? In Germany You Can Still Do Solar

Solar power does not have to be reserved for typical single-family houses or office buildings. Apartment dwellers in Germany can buy and install solar panels for their homes too. As many as three million apartments there now have "balcony solar" arrays. These easy-to-install solar panels can be bought for a few hundred euros (less than \$500) at the equivalent of Home Depot, hung from the railing of a veranda, and plugged straight into the wall, where they provide a reasonable amount of power.

Some German cities are even subsidizing balcony solar. In Frankfurt, a 60-year-old teacher, was provided half of the 650 euros (\$676) he paid for his kit. In three years he will make back the 325 euros he wound up paying for his panels.



Apartment dwellers are endorsing the concept saying as long as the apartment has a balcony and a bit of sun one or two panels can be put up. Installation is easy and there is a price for every budget.

The U.S. is a bit behind in this area. Underwriters Laboratory, which certifies appliances, hasn't bothered to do the work to approve such systems, which means legally they cannot be installed in most locations.

Lawn & Order: The American Front Yard

A Little History...

Today American lawns that stretch across the United States cover 40-47 million acres of land—about the size of Colorado. Stated another way, lawns cover about 63,000 square miles or nearly 2% of the continental United States. One source referred to our lawns as America's largest irrigated crop, using nine billion gallons of water daily.

The current American lawn began as an imitation of European manor houses, which colonial Americans sought to imitate. Consider Thomas Jefferson's Monticello, George Washington's Mount Vernon, or even the nation's White House. Such lawns required extensive manual/slave labor.

Into the 1860s most people could not afford lawns. Frederick Law Olmsted "father of American landscape architecture", planned green spaces which were accessible to all, not just the wealthy. He designed Central Park in New York and many parks in Louisville. In 1870 Frank J. Scott emphasized the open-faced front lawn as a symbol of commitment to community. After WWII the GI bill, with its provision of home loans, home ownership increased from 44% to 62% by 1960 and the green lawn of the suburbs became the ideal landscape.

Cut the Grass!

While lawns can function as "carbon sinks," soaking up carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, this benefit is often canceled by the heavy carbon cost of lawn maintenance. Environmentally the main "culprits" in lawn care are gas powered lawn mowers and leaf blowers, and synthetic fertilizers.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) off-road gas-powered equipment, like lawn mowers and leaf blowers, emit 242 million tons of pollutants each year. The 2020 EPA report found such lawn equipment emitted more than 30 million tons of carbon dioxide (CO₂) which is as much carbon



pollution as comes from 6.6 million cars over the course of a year. And that 30 million tons was more carbon pollution than was emitted by the whole city of Los Angeles in 2021.

In 2020 EPA also reported emissions of 68,000 tons of nitrous oxide (N₂O) and 21,800 tons of PM_{2.5} (fine particulate matter) which has known health problems ranging from cancer, reproductive ailments, mental health problems and premature death.

That precious grass suffers too. EPA estimates over 17,000,000 (that's million) gallons of gasoline are spilled each year while refueling lawn equipment!

How About A Rebate?

Thankfully, battery powered equipment is becoming more affordable and is attracting many to make the switch from gas to less polluting battery-powered items. Electric mowers produce zero emissions at the point of use, are lower maintenance, are easier to store, and have lower hearing damaging noise levels than gas-powered equipment. There is good news locally for those interested in making

the switch from gas to electric lawn equipment. The Louisville Metro Air Pollution Control District (APCD) has implemented a program that encourages local air quality improvement known as APCD's Lawn Care for Cleaner Air. This is a rebate program which offers rebates to Louisville residents and businesses that purchase electric equipment, and even higher rebates for those that also recycle their old gas-powered equipment. A rebate of \$50 is listed for an electric push mower. That rebate increases to \$100 for an electric push mower purchase which also has a gas equipment trade-in. Rebates are offered on electric leaf blowers, string trimmers, mower batteries, and trimmer/blower batteries. For details see the site below:

[Lawn Care for Cleaner Air Rebate Program | LouisvilleKY.gov](https://www.louisvilleky.gov/2023/04/12/lawn-care-for-cleaner-air-rebate-program/)

Fertilizers- Less is More

For every ton of nitrogen created to make commercial nitrogen based fertilizer, 4 or 5 tons of carbon are added to the atmosphere according to David Wolfe, Cornell professor of plant and soil ecology. Furthermore, the lawn does not need the amount of nitrogen nor can it hold the amount of nitrogen in the fertilizer. Soil microbes turn the additional nitrogen into nitrous oxide gas, a greenhouse gas with 300 times the heat trapping ability of CO₂.

EPA studies found 40-60% of nitrogen ends up in surface and groundwater causing eutrophication. In this process nitrogen and phosphorus in water cause algae to grow uncontrollably, depleting the water of oxygen as they die. The decay of algae by bacteria consumes the oxygen dissolved in the water, which is needed by fish and aquatic life to "breathe". These "dead zones" are toxic to wildlife and humans.

One alternative to synthetic fertilizer is organic fertilizer. Organic fertilizers still release nitrous oxide but their manufacturing process does not contribute to CO₂ emissions.



Instead of fertilizers, alternatives to benefit the lawn are: letting grass clippings decompose and return nutrients to the soil, cultivating grasses that work in your particular environment, aerating your soil, checking your soil pH, and mowing your lawn less frequently.

Rethinking the perfect lawn

Attitudes toward lawncare may be shifting. According to several surveys by the National Wildlife Federation and other garden related groups (from 2019 to 2023): 16 million adults took up gardening as a new hobby, 82% of homeowners were interested in improving their outdoor space, more people chose plants that would support wildlife. In 2021 60% of Americans reported they thought environmental sustainability was at least somewhat important in lawn care. The number of people buying native plants increased from 17% in 2020 to 25% in 2022.

Water restrictions due to drought in California, Colorado, and Arizona have forced owners to rethink a grass lawn. Arizona charges more for water in the summer and has a ban on lawns in new developments. In 2000, 80% of Phoenix had green lawns, now only 14% does. In Minnesota, homeowners have been offered rebates to replace lawns with flowering plants for bees. Montgomery County in Maryland has offered to pay families and Homeowner Associations to design gardens that collect storm water in water features and underground rain barrels.

And thus The American Front Yard story continues.

The Lighter Side of Climate

You know Global Warming is real when...



You notice the best parking place is determined by shade nearest to an entrance.



You want to take a shower but someone used up all the cold water.



You learn that a seat belt makes a pretty good branding iron.



You eat hot chilies to cool your mouth off.



The chickens are laying hard boiled eggs.

Hotter Than Normal Summer Expected

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration is predicting Kentucky will experience higher than normal temperatures this summer. It's serious news not just for the elderly, but for those with underlying illnesses including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, mental health, and asthma. Just as any infectious disease, heat is a health hazard.

Not unlike the mid-1300's when Europe was devastated by the bubonic plague, a killer invisible to its victims, global populations are being ravaged by a killer we can feel, but can't see. Each year around the globe the death toll from heat approaches 500,000.

Heat stress is not just a discomfort, it's life threatening. The leading cause of weather-related deaths is heat. Tornadoes, hurricanes and floods do not kill as many. And it gets worse every year. Climate change has added a month of dangerous heat for four billion people. That means more heatstroke, a medical emergency with a high fatality rate. In addition, high heat increases the risk of accidents and transmission of some infectious diseases.

According to a recent report from the



World Weather Attribution, Climate Central and the Red Cross Climate Centre, climate change has doubled the number of extreme heat days worldwide.

The earth's atmospheric blanket has kept our planet from freezing for eons but now that blanket has gotten too thick, thanks to the continuous and massive burning of fossil fuels all around the planet that's releasing mega tons of carbon dioxide and turning the earth into a run-away oven.

The longer fossil fuels (coal, oil, natural gas) are burned, the bigger and hotter the oven will get. Each day the need for more sustainable sources of power (solar, wind, geothermal) grows. Lives are depending on cooling the climate. Unfortunately, due to the strangle hold of the oil companies on global economies, the old joke continues to hold true: It's not the heat, it's the stupidity.

Get Ready For The Season of Creation

While there's plenty of summer yet to come, it's not too early to think about celebrating the Season of Creation. This is a global Christian celebration from September 1st to October 4th. This season originated in 1989 when Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios I proclaimed September 1st as a day of prayer for creation for the Orthodox church. The World Council of Churches was instrumental in extending the celebration of creation from September 1st until October 4th and has been promoting this theme since 2008. In 2019 Pope Francis too initiated celebrating the Season of Creation

This five-week period is a time for Christians worldwide to renew, repair, and restore their relationship with God, one another, and all of creation. Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato Si'* encouraged us to pray, reflect and take action on ecological issues, focusing on caring for our "common home". The Season of Creation, now a global ecumenical celebration, is the perfect time to do so.

Epiphany's Creation Care Team is working on two activities for this year's Season of Creation for our parishioners to raise their awareness of environmental degradation and climate change while fostering a deeper sense of responsibility and stewardship for the Earth.

Two Minutes With "Green Saints"

We are creating a five-week video series that each week will feature a "Green Saint," someone whose life in some way demonstrated their respect for God's creation. Each saint was chosen by a member of our team who then created a video profile of that saint. The video clips run two minutes and present an opportunity to find out more about some saints you know and to learn about some others you don't know. These clips promote understanding the impacts of climate change while showing the planet-saving impacts saints and saint-like people have made.



Two Minutes With Green Saints will start the week of September 1. Watch for where to view the videos in upcoming Epiphany Happenings and the bulletins.

Pilgrimage of Hope for Creation

This year is not only the tenth anniversary of *Laudato Si'*, it's the 800th anniversary of St. Francis of Assisi's *Canticle of the Creatures*. Across the globe pilgrimages will take place during the Season of Creation providing opportunities for personal transformation and for community-building.

Parishioners will be able to participate in a pilgrimage to the Sisters of Charity convent in Nazareth, KY. There, we will participate in a Tree Walk, along with a specially designed program.

The pilgrimage will take place on Saturday, September 20. From departure at Epiphany to return from the pilgrimage the estimated time on the pilgrimage is seven hours. Watch for how to join our pilgrimage in upcoming Epiphany Happenings and in the bulletins..

Archbishop Fabre To Celebrate “Green Mass”

On Thursday, September 25, Archbishop Fabre will celebrate the second annual Green Mass for Care of Creation. This special Mass will promote a deeper appreciation for the common home God has created for us and will ask for His guidance in helping all on earth to adopt sustainable practices in caring for it. With special prayers, readings, songs and a homily, participants will be inspired to respond to the cry of the earth and the cry of those suffering from environmental injustice.



The Mass will be celebrated at St. Raphael's (2141 Lancashire Ave, Louisville, KY 40205) starting at 6:30 p.m. Everyone in the archdiocese is invited to attend.

Following the Green Mass there will be a reception with light refreshments. During the reception, presentations by area high school student groups will highlight various environmental projects they have created in connection with their schools. Schools presenting include:

Assumption	Mercy	Sacred Heart	Trinity
De Sales	Presentation	St. Xavier	Bethlehem

Tree Planting Branches Out To More Schools



School starts back up next month and students going out for recess may not feel like playing anything that requires running, jumping or moving about in the sun. But thanks to Trees Louisville many Louisville area school yards do provide needed heat relief in the form of tree shade. It wasn't too long ago that many JCPS schoolyards provided scant relief from the sun. Playgrounds and pavements around some schools felt more like frying pans than play areas. But many schools have made a change, and more will as Trees Louisville and its volunteers work to keep kids cool.

Since 2015 trees have been planted at over 100 JCPS campuses. Thousands of volunteer tree-planters have brought shade, beauty, and a renewed sense of care to the places where students learn, grow and play.

The trees don't just cool pavement. They create spaces for reading, reflection, and activity. They also teach lessons, helping students learn that the environment matters. Some will even understand that by caring for the environment today someone is investing in their future.

A single tree can have a lot of power; it can generate healthier students, healthier schoolyards, stronger communities, and a greener city for generations of students.

The Creation Care Team would love your feedback on this issue of *Common Home*. In addition, let us know if there is particular climate change topic that you've experienced, have seen in the news or read about in *Laudato Si'* that you'd like to see covered. Email us at: commonhome914@gmail.com.

