

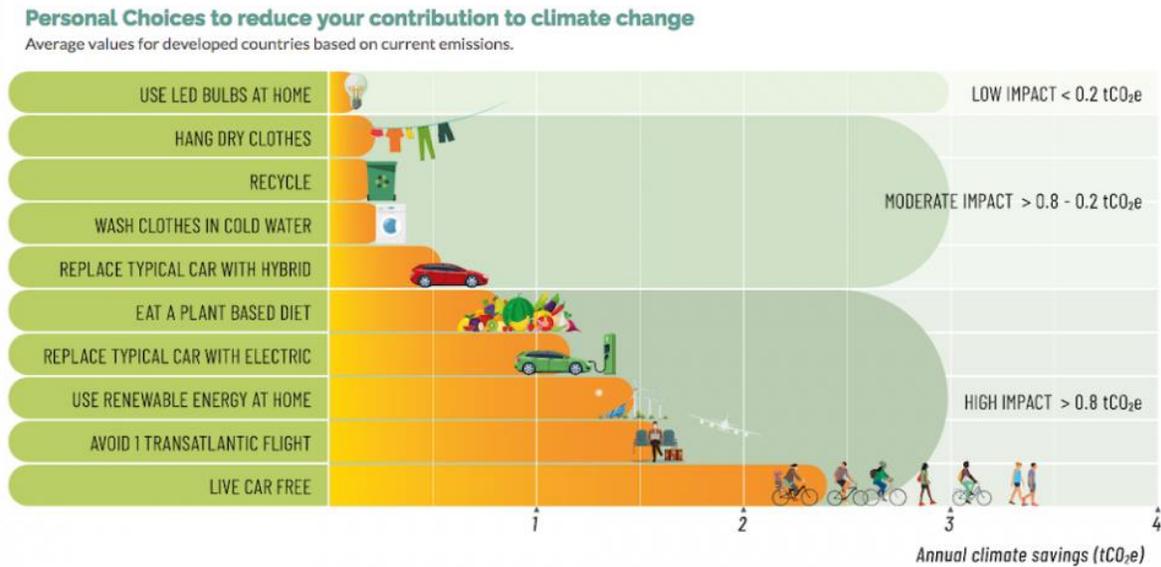
Laudato Si' and You: Ecological conversion in seven challenges

Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life.
~ Earth Charter (The Hague 29 June 2000) quoted by Pope Francis in *Laudato Si': On Care for our Common Home* (2015)

In celebration of Earth Day (April 22, 2022), we at Bellarmine Chapel are launching our *Laudato Si'* Action Plan which will be submitted to the Vatican along with plans from Catholic organizations around the world. Our plan lays out a path for three years, describing what our parish will do on behalf of creation in four categories: Pray, Learn, Act, and Advocate.

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis calls for this kind of collective action to bring about sweeping change. This cannot happen, he says, without personal ecological conversion. He writes: "Living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or secondary aspect of our Christian experience." (§ 217) This was confirmed in 2019 with the release of the Universal Apostolic Preferences of the Society of Jesus, specifically #4: Caring for Our Common Home.

To that end, we offer this list of seven "eco-challenges" to make the message of *Laudato Si'* come alive in *your* life. We suggest actions for those starting out as well as for those who are already practiced and want to do more. Taken together, our, individual efforts generate a flood of change.



(Graphic from National Catholic Reporter's Earth Beat newsletter -- courtesy of GreenFaith, adapted from Wynes and Nicholas, 2017, Environmental Research Letters)



Challenge #1: Change the way you think. And remember to think.

"...If we feel intimately united with all that exists, then sobriety and care will well up spontaneously." (Laudato Si' §11)

The paramount theme of *Laudato Si'* is that all of creation is interconnected and that, as Christians, our encounter with Jesus Christ recognizes this connection. If we do not understand this interdependency and our own proper place in it, Pope Francis writes, we act as "masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters."

While we may not think of ourselves as exploiters, most of us do lead lifestyles that our planet cannot sustain. We often operate on autopilot, prioritizing convenience, comfort, and conformity, overlooking how our choices are shaped by a disregard for their impact.

One of the most delightful ways to remember our true connection with creation is to spend time in nature with children. Whether in a park, on a camping trip, or in the backyard, our experience with children may help us recognize that, to secure their future, we must live with restraint.

[The Healthy Earth Team Resources Pages](#) includes many fun, educational, and faith formation activities for families.



Challenge #2: See, judge, act

"This is the way human beings contrive to feed their self-destructive vices: trying not to see them...delaying the important decisions and pretending that nothing will happen." (Laudato Si' § 59)

Starting Out:

- There is no end to resources available in every format. Bellarmine's Healthy Earth Team has put many in one place for you. [Please take a look!](#)
- The Healthy Earth Team suggests "green actions" each month in the [Social Mission Newsletter](#) which parishioners can try at home.

Moving On:

- Calculating your household carbon footprint can be eye-opening as well as help you to be more resilient in facing climate change. Here's a good one: [EPA Carbon Footprint Calculator](#)
- Join a team of local religious congregations (Faith Communities Go Green) in a fun effort to win points by choosing from activities such as: calculate your carbon footprint, make zero waste meals, know your smart seafood options, reduce single-use-plastics, choose clean renewable energy, and so on. You also choose your level of involvement. Every bit helps.
[Earth Month Eco Challenge 2022](#)



Challenge #3: Eat for change

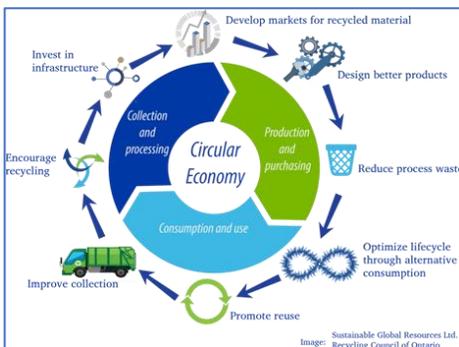
"Changing how we eat will not be enough, on its own, to save the planet, but we cannot save the planet without changing how we eat." ~ Writer Jonathan Safran Foer

The reasons for moving to a plant-based diet range from reducing greenhouse gases, to helping ease world hunger, to more ethical treatment of animals – not to mention improving your health. It's also one of the easiest, lower-cost, and most impactful changes you can make. Xavier Theology Professor John Sniegocki makes the case [here](#).

Starting out: Start with a few meatless meals per week and you may find yourself not missing it at all.

Moving on: Switch to organic produce as you can. Increase the portion of your food that comes from local sources.

Whether Starting Out or Moving On, you will find a lot information on our [Healthy Earth Resource Page](#) under the Food category. We include links to a list of farmer's markets and CSAs, info on reducing food waste, composting, and more.



Challenge #4: Be a waste warrior

"There is no such thing as away. When you throw something away it must go somewhere." ~Annie Leonard, Co-Executive Director of Greenpeace and author of [The Story of Stuff](#).

Our future lies in creating what is called a circular economy. That means extending the life of everything we produce and minimizing waste. It calls for more sharing, leasing, reusing, repairing, and recycling. It may apply not only to goods, but to energy from renewable sources.

Starting Out: Make a mini circular economy in your own home by:

- Minimizing single-use plastics, especially the most toxic to produce and hardest to recycle, such as clamshell containers (labeled #1).
- Recycling your non-Rumpke items at the [Cincinnati Recycling and Reuse Hub](#).
- Switching to LED bulbs.
- Shopping resale – outlets exist for clothes, toys, household items, office and craft supplies.
- Buying in bulk and bringing your own containers.
- Thinking before you buy. When you do buy, choose fair-trade, local and ethically-produced alternatives. If you can afford to pay a bit more to support such businesses, do so.
- Improving energy efficiency in your home. Free assessments from [Sustainergy](#).

Moving On

- Move to renewable fuel sources and/or more efficient models for your biggest energy gobblers and carbon emitters: vehicle, furnace, water heater, clothes dryer.
- Rent tools and/or share with neighbors.
- Urge places where you shop to switch to recyclable containers for prepared foods and produce, such as berries. Keep at it. Use your consumer power and things will change.
- Make your own household cleaning supplies from common natural ingredients. Find recipes online or in books such as [Simply Living Well](#).



Challenge #5: Go wild

Unless we restore native plants to our suburban ecosystems, the future of biodiversity in the U.S. is dim. ~ Professor and author Douglas W. Tallamy in *Bringing Nature Home*

Around the country, homeowners, businesses and institutions are turning vast acres of lawn into havens for native plants and wildlife. If you have any amount of greenspace around your home, you can join the movement.

Starting Out:

- Grave environmental harm is done by artificial pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers, especially because of overuse and build-up. Mother Nature provides alternatives if you take the time to learn and accept her ways. Lawn companies may claim their methods are organic, but excess nitrogen – regardless of source – is polluting waterways and suffocating aquatic wildlife.
- Plant native flowers and shrubs. Non-natives, such as many common ornamentals, provide nothing our pollinators need. For inspiration see [Healthy Earth Team Resources Page](#), Land Use.
- In a sunny spot, start a vegetable patch or grow in containers. Even a simple pot of chives looks pretty, adds spice to your food, attracts bees and comes back every year.

Moving On:

- Biodiversity cannot exist in the typical suburban yard. Let's not wait until our backyard creatures are gone to find out that we can't live without a wide array of bees, insects, spiders, birds, butterflies, moths, bats, amphibians and more. Here are five essentials recommended by the [National Wildlife Federation](#): Food, Water, Cover, Places to Raise Young, and Sustainable Gardening Practices. You can help even if your garden amounts to pots on a balcony! Certify your habitat through NWF and get a cool sign for your yard to help others join the cause.

- Through advocacy and volunteering, help create local wildlife habitats in your school yard, work landscape or roadside greenspace.



Challenge #6: Advocate, volunteer, support

“The natural environment and the human environment deteriorate together...(we must hear) both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.” (LS § 48-49)

Starting Out and Moving On:

- Reflect on whatever stirs your heart the most and raise your voice. Opportunities abound. Visit our [Healthy Earth Resources Page](#), Advocacy section.
- [Bellarmine’s Ignatian Advocacy Team](#) offers a monthly collection of advocacy opportunities in the [Social Mission Newsletter](#).
- Join Bellarmine’s quarterly Active Discipleship Days or the Healthy Earth Team. Contact Tim Severyn, Director of Social Mission, at severyn@bellarminechapel.org.
- Join volunteer community clean-up and recycling efforts through organizations such as [Keep Cincinnati Beautiful](#), [Millcreek Alliance](#), [Civic Garden Center](#), and the [Recycling and Reuse Hub](#).



Challenge #7: Pray

“But now ask the beasts to teach you and the fish of the sea to inform you. Which of these does not know that the hand of God has done this? In his hand is the soul of every living thing, and the life breath of all mortal flesh.” Job 12: 7-10

Our insistence that each human being is an image of God should not make us overlook the fact that each creature has its own purpose. None is superfluous. The entire material universe speaks of God’s love, his boundless affection for us. Soil, water, mountains: everything is, as it were, a caress of God. (Laudato Si”, § 84)

For one and all:

- Planning is underway at Bellarmine for an ecological spiritual series and retreat, beginning in fall, 2022. Stay tuned for more information.
- [Ignatian Ecological Examen](#)

- See our [Healthy Earth Resources Page](#) under Prayer and Bellarmine's online [Resources for Prayer](#).
- [Join the National Climate Prayer at noon on Earth Day, April 22.](#)
- Of the many prayers for the earth, [Pope Francis' prayer](#) is among the most beautiful. Also recommended:
 - Poetry collections by Mary Oliver, Wendell Berry and John O'Donohue
 - [Earth Gospel: A Guide to Prayer for God's Creation](#) by Sam Hamilton-Poole
 - [Earth Prayers: 365 Prayers, Poems and Invocations from Around the World](#), edited by Elizabeth Roberts and Elias Amidon.
 - [Laudato Si': On Care for our Common Home](#), Pope Francis

Although *Laudato Si'* has deservedly drawn accolades, caring for creation has long been a central teaching of the Catholic Church. This is nothing new, except, perhaps, the sense of urgency necessary to face the climate and ecological crisis of our day.

At Jesuit Spiritual Center in Milford, Ohio, there is a deck on the far side of the property overlooking the Little Miami River. On the railing is a plaque with a quote from the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola (composed 1522-24) It reads:

*Reflect on how God dwells in creatures;
in the elements, giving them existence,
in the plants giving them life,
In the animals, conferring upon them sensation,
in human beings bestowing understanding.*