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# LAUDATO SI' ACTION PLAN REFLECTION





February 21, 2025

Laudato Si Action Plan Review Members,

I am excited to present to you on behalf of Gesu Parish and School, Detroit, our 2025 Laudato Si Action Plan. This plan is a culmination of work for over a year that has engaged parishioners and staff multiple times and builds on the great work to care for people and the planet that is already being done here at Gesu. Our review used the synodal process we are in the first year of practicing.

In my early days at Gesu, I was approached by a group of parishioners who represented a variety of committees interested in creating a Laudato Si Action Plan for the parish. I was supportive, understanding that this initiative has the potential to help bring the current four Jesuit Apostolic Preferences to the forefront of thinking and action at Gesu. During our initial meeting, I requested that the group think big and wide in the development of this plan.

The Gesu Laudato Si Advisory Committee formed as a committee of that original meeting and has worked for over a year with the wider parish to create this plan. After reviewing sample plans and noting the components to include in our plan, they determined a set of core principles that would be used to guide the parish. In consultation with Ms. Maureen Villanueva, our LSAP contact we focused more on our reflection and plan, and less on our assessment, since response to Laudato Si began at Gesu in 2017. The committee worked to accurately describe the richness of our community, from our location and history of care for creation and social justice to our current welcome and mission statements. Activities tied to the seven Laudato Si Focus Areas were collected with input from parish commission and committee heads and organized to show strengths and gaps among them.

Based on this information and future aspirations, goals were identified along with several objectives and specific actions that are planned to be completed or likely attainable in 2025. These goals reflect the current work and interests in the parish; the needs of our community, the city and region we call home, and additional opportunities the Gesu community would like to explore to more fully to care for all of creation and facilitate the required conversion of heart needed for these actions to be sustainable. For example, San Mateo Parish in Puerto Rico: a parish that receives and cares for Haitian refugees who flee due to violence, land takeovers, and

the effects of climate change. We sent our first delegation there in February 2024 to begin building a relationship with the parish.

This plan summarizes the great work that is already being done here while also giving the parish direction and motivation to continue and evolve our efforts to best meet Pope Francis' call to care for our common home and each other. The Parish Leadership Council agrees and unanimously approved the plan for submission at the January 2025 meeting. The parish has been further fueled to act by Pope Francis' call for urgent action in his 2023 Papal Exhortation *Laudate Deum*.

I, and the Laudato Si Advisory Committee, look forward to your feedback on our plans for this year. Gesu hopes to be known as a Laudato Si parish.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Lorn J. Snow, SJ." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Fr. Lorn Snow, SJ  
Pastor  
Gesu Catholic Church & School, Detroit



## AN INTRODUCTION TO GESU: WHO WE ARE

Gesu is a Catholic faith community established by the Society of Jesus in 1922. We are located in Northwest Detroit among the four neighborhoods of University District, Martin Park, Bagley, and Fitzgerald. A Welcoming Community, we attract parishioners from at least 25 zip codes in the Metro Detroit area beyond our physical neighborhood. Our geographical location makes us part of the Rouge River and Detroit River watersheds, which drains into a major source of fresh water—the Great Lakes watershed, so we are becoming more mindful of our stewardship responsibility.

Gesu members describe ourselves as a prayerful community that delights in how our music ministry deepens our prayer. We are multicultural, growing to be a Beloved Community to one another, and reflect diverse ages, including both young families and older parishioners; we tilt more toward older than younger. We have a broad set of skills and talents given generously to more than 40 ministry committees. In the Spirit of James 1:22 we challenge ourselves to "...Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deluding [ourselves]," Our pastoral leadership is deeply supportive, which enhances our work together.

Gesu is not only a worshiping community, but also a school that ranges from Pre-K through eighth grade. As a parish in the Archdiocese of Detroit, we happily partner with another Jesuit parish, Sts. Peter and Paul, in what is named in the Archdiocese as a family of parishes.

## WHAT MOTIVATES US

*Laudato Sí: Care for our Common Home* and the Laudato Sí Action Platform motivates us and stimulates us to be more intentional about the seven goals of Laudato Sí. We have taken the goal description almost verbatim from the LSAP website and have modestly adapted them to become statements of action. We seek to:

- **Respond to the cry of the earth** to protect our common home for the well-being of all, as we equitably address the climate crisis, biodiversity loss, and ecological sustainability.
- **Respond to the cry of impoverished and underserved people** to promote eco-justice, aware that we are called to defend human life from conception to death, and all forms of life on Earth.
- **Incorporate ecological economics** by acknowledging that the economy is a sub-system of human society, which itself is embedded within the biosphere—our common home.
- **Adopt sustainable lifestyles** grounded in the idea of sufficiency sobriety in the use of resources and energy.

- **Promote ecological education opportunities** to enable re-thinking and re-designing curricular and institutional reform in the spirit of integral ecology to foster ecological awareness and transformative action.
- **Embrace ecological spirituality** that springs from a profound ecological conversion and helps us to “discover God in all things”, both in the beauty of creation and in the sighs of the sick and the groans of the afflicted, aware that the life of the spirit is not dissociated from worldly realities.
- **Promote community resilience and empowerment** that envisages a synodal journey of community engagement and participatory action at various levels.

## Three Foundational Statements

Gesu will continue to move in this direction because of existing **foundational statements** that guide our current action and capture the spirit of what motivates us to become a Laudato Sí parish. They include our:

- Mission Statement
- Welcoming Statement
- Description of who we are as a Laudato Sí parish.

The parish community was highly engaged in the development of both the Mission Statement and Welcoming Statement, and both are prominently displayed on banners at Gesu.

### This is our Mission Statement:

*Gesu Detroit, a Catholic Community in the Jesuit tradition, is committed to Welcoming, Praying and Praising, Enlightening, and Serving, all for the Greater Glory of God. Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam.*

The process language of our mission statement—welcoming, praying, praising, enlightening, and serving—provides a model with which we can check for the thoroughness of our continuing development of a Laudato Sí plan.

## This is our Welcoming Statement



### **You are welcome at Gesu!**

Just as Jesus welcomed all  
who came to him,  
Gesu Parish welcomes every person  
to seek full participation  
in our parish community,  
and within the Body of Christ.  
We believe that all are worthy  
of respect and love,  
because all are created in  
the image of God.

Our welcome is not limited by a person's  
age, sex, race, cultural background,  
physical or mental health or ability,  
sexual orientation, gender identity,  
social or economic situation,  
marital status, or faith background.

We do not seek to erase our differences.

Rather we lovingly embrace  
the rich and unique dimensions  
within each of us, as we strive  
to grow together in holiness.

This is the wholeness of life.

Moving with as much understanding,  
compassion, and humility as we can,  
we journey together in a safe,  
positive and nurturing environment,  
beyond tolerance, toward mutual respect,  
in grateful celebration of God's creation.

## Statement of Who We Are as a Laudato Sí Parish

Our third foundational document is new and responds to a widely asked question at Gesu: What is a Laudato Sí parish? The Laudato Sí Advisory Committee developed this description through an iterative process; our engagement process of developing this plan enables us to make this a more living statement.

Inspired by Pope Francis' 2015 Encyclical on the climate, a Laudato Sí Parish targets the effects of irresponsible human consumerism, waste and economic development that contributes to global warming and destruction of our planet. This destruction has been especially felt in marginalized communities causing much human suffering. A Laudato Sí Parish is one that commits to care for the Earth, our common home, and all its living beings, through a life that is sustainable and in solidarity with impoverished and underserved people. The parish promises to prayerfully and deliberately examine its use of all resources to support this commitment, and the parishioners promise to try to live more responsible and simpler personal and public lives. We, at Gesu, are committed to formally becoming a Laudato Sí parish. In this effort we join parishes worldwide.

Additionally, we have **mandates** that motivate Gesu to respond to Laudato Sí—

Catholic Social Teaching and Jesuit Universal Apostolic Preferences. We have a significant cadre of parishioners for whom the principles of Catholic Social Teaching are embedded in their hearts, and influential in their personal decision-making and collective advocacy. As a Jesuit parish, we also are guided by the Jesuit Universal Apostolic Preferences <https://www.jesuits.global/uap/> :

1. Showing the way to God
2. Walking with the Excluded
3. Journeying with Youth
4. Caring for our Common Home

## BRIEF HISTORY and ASSESSMENT OF OUR ACTIVITY

Gesu's **Green Team** formed in 2017 as the action that followed the parish-wide small group reading and discussion of Pope Francis' encyclical, *Care for our Common Home*.

By 2019 their mission statement focused their work:

*Creating a community which values God's creation and works  
together to protect and restore its just order for all living things.*

The **Green Team** began its work before the 2021 launch of the Laudato Sí Action Platform, an initiative of the Vatican Dicastery for Integral Human Development. The Team built on the inspiration of Gloryland Garden, a Gesu ministry that developed a garden for community members use. It was initiated in 2007 and has continued for 17 years. Community members have their own garden bed that uses water captured in a jointly used cistern. The Green Team's early work was in ecological education, investigation of solar potential, and ecological spirituality. Gesu celebrated its first Season of Creation (SoC) in 2018. It continues annually and has grown as the Green Team adds new parish ministry partners, such as the Gesu Book Club, Rosary Group, and the Art Installation on parish grounds that attracts neighborhood walkers. It is a major event celebrated from September 1<sup>st</sup> to October 4<sup>th</sup> that enacts the annual theme.

By 2020, recognizing the interrelationship of water and energy usage, with Gesu Elementary leading the way, a variety of rainwater capture, and energy-related projects were completed, through garnering significant grants. Here's a brief list of green infrastructure projects:

- native plant garden
- demonstration rain garden that captures runoff from the church roof
- two major bioswales to capture school roof rainwater runoff
- downspout relocations for water permeation
- solar panel installation on the school roof
- new thermopane windows for the school
- reimagination and reconstruction of the school courtyard as a learning center

In 2020 Gesu received a grant from Catholic Climate Covenant for public-facing Signage to explain the bioswales. In 2021 Gesu received its first national recognition



from Interfaith Power and Light as the first place “Cool Congregations” Renewable Role Model recipient.

Our journey toward formally working to become a Laudato Sí parish had several beginnings. In 2022 through collaboration with our family of parishes sister parish, Sts. Peter & Paul, both parish Green Teams began to educate themselves about becoming a Laudato Sí parish, and Gesu Green Team members participated in a variety of Laudato Sí Action Platform webinars on each of the seven goals. This work progressed in the context of pastoral leadership changes. In late Fall 2022 our new pastor, Fr. Lorn Snow S.J., convened a series of informal meetings that included representatives from existing Gesu ministries: Gloryland Community Garden, Gloryland Neighborhood Development, Peace & Justice Committee, Green Team, and Gesu's Circle of Support for Strangers No Longer.

In January 2023 the Green Team approached the **Parish Leadership Council** requesting long-term support for a process for Gesu to become a Laudato Sí parish. We received inspiring support and suggestions from the Parish Leadership Council to proceed in the development of this plan.

One outcome was the development of a **Laudato Sí Advisory Committee** whose initial projects include the development of a parish-endorsed Laudato Sí Plan and a relationship with Puerto Rico's San Mateo parish, a desperately poor parish which serves migrating refugees from Haiti. It was through Catholic Extension that Gesu was introduced to San Mateo, whose pastor, Fr. Olin Pierre-Louis, is Haitian. Catholic Extension supported the financing of a trip for our pastor and three parishioners to enable them to understand and help communicate San Mateo's needs. The Laudato Sí Advisory Committee is part of the Parish Life Commission which reports to the Parish Leadership Council. The Laudato Sí Writing Group, a subcommittee of the Advisory Committee, drafted this application and led a review and revision process with all the parish commission leaders and committee chairs before it was finally approved by the Parish Leadership Council. The Laudato Sí Advisory Committee and the Green Team have a very close working relationship; three members of the Green Team are part of the Laudato Sí Writing Group.

**Appendix A** visually connects the seven Laudato Sí Action Platform goals with both completed projects and on-going work **at Gesu**. It provides a snapshot that summarizes our parish self-assessment. We received recommended actions as a result of completing the Laudato Sí Action Platform assessment tool. As we plan for future years we will incorporate feedback from that assessment tool.

## **REFLECTION ON ASSESSMENT & ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

Reflection on this history highlights for us the value of the **Season of Creation (SoC)** as an annual moment when individuals make personal pledges about their behavior. It is becoming more embedded in liturgical celebration and creating opportunities for action and education. We learned the power of individual pledges of behavioral change at the conclusion of the 2022 SoC. With the participatory nature of the Art Installation in 2023, we could see a change in individual parishioner engagement.

It also reveals the synergistic impact of **partnering** between the church and school. It reinforces the reality that local, regional, and national stories about the Gesu parish and school journeys toward integral human development makes other communities interested in learning from us and that we have a responsibility to do as much as we can to share the hurdles we have faced and what might be helpful to others. We are seeing this year that the school cafeteria waste initiative is becoming a strong visual incentive for other groups in the parish to think differently about how to host waste-free or reduced-waste events. In addition, it was featured on a local TV news station, WDIV.

The **process of self-assessment** makes it clearer that both change of heart and implementation of our plan into the generational life of the Gesu community can learn from the long-standing practice of Gesu's St. Vincent de Paul Society (1937—present; 87 years) and the Peace & Justice committee's advocacy work of Bread for the World (mid 1980s—present; 40 years). Both groups have negotiated changes in project champions and necessary social and political adaptations.

Analyzing **Appendix A**, our table of activity from 2017-2024, enables us to see obvious places for new and more mindful action: ecological economics and adoption of sustainable lifestyles. In evaluating an early draft of this plan document, a parishioner reminds us of the challenge:

“...I bump on the word "simple" (from the phrase about members of these parishes living "a life that is simple...") for a couple reasons. First, I think ... we're called to a life that is COMPLEX, to develop a consciousness in the image of God, to engage the most complicated issues of our time, to use our own critical thinking and our own experiences and observations of the world to discern the best way to build the kingdom. Second, I'm not sure it's an accurate term. Most members of U.S. Laudato Sí parishes drive cars, use lots of utilities, and benefit materially (cheap food and gas and fast fashion prices, etc.) from the exploitation of the Earth's resources. I don't know that we've earned the right to claim we're living simply! I wonder if language on the lines of 'we try to live simpler and more responsible lives' or something like that would work?"

Having baseline information from our energy audit enables us to set goals that will enable more parish oversight into the changes we can make collectively and individually. It also shines a light on the significance of written standards that can be tested over time and survive through changes in pastoral leadership and staff. We anticipate that actions we aspire to, such as a more comprehensive zero waste initiative and cleaner energy usage, can strengthen both our individual and collective efforts. This reflection also highlights the possibilities of the moment of change we are in, as we learn how to become a **parish within a family** and how to use a **synodal approach to discern** our collective actions.

Beginning in 2024, Gesu's new leadership structure incorporates a synodal process that is being fleshed out with experience. The various committees and ministries have been organized into five major commissions: Worship, Outreach, Parish Life, Faith Formation/

Spirituality and Administration. The chairs of these groups report to the larger assembly at the end of each monthly leadership meeting and that information is consolidated for the Parish Leadership Council. A proviso: the synodal process is in its first year and there have been learning hurdles. It promises to be likely to improve the general perception of our historical weakness in parish-wide communication. It also facilitates problem-solving and discernment. The Laudato Sí Advisory Committee is committed to developing an enduring **engagement process** with parishioners.

## **GESU'S PLAN**

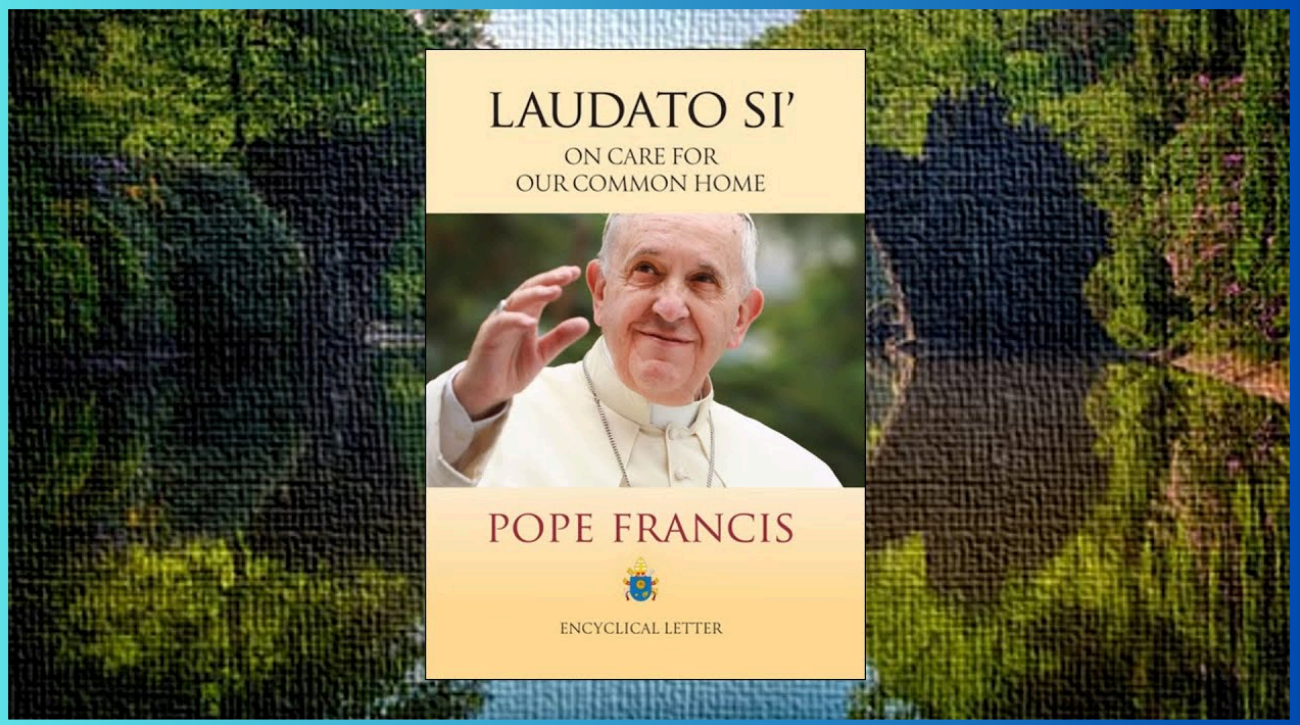
The **Laudato Sí Advisory Committee** spearheaded the development of this plan and will shepherd its implementation. The committee consists of an Advisory Board and a Writing Subcommittee drawn from the membership of the Advisory Board. When the committee began its work together, they articulated a set of core principles to guide the Laudato Sí Committee and the parish plan that would emerge:

- God created a world that is extraordinary in its glory and more than sufficient to support His entire creation.
- We recognize and honor the intrinsic value of all of creation and cherish our interdependency with all of creation.
- Loving God's creation is a way that ensures that all of God's people receive the life, distribution of goods and support necessary to not only sustain life but to sustain quality of life.
- All God's people and especially the youth need to be encouraged through education and involvement to the absolute wonder of what God has created for all His people as well as how best to share so that everyone can benefit from God's gifts.
- We have a responsibility to expose an attempt to rectify the destruction of God's creation by corporate and individual greed so that all can experience the wonder and glory of our Great Creator.
- Listening to what God is telling us through thoughtful prayer and discernment must accompany all action to renew, distribute, preserve and help rebuild this great earth for the glory of God and all His creation.

Our **more mindful and goal-oriented plan** will begin in 2025. Since Gesu parishioners are learning how to employ a more synodal decision-making process that will ultimately impact parish planning, the Laudato Sí Advisory Committee chose to identify new actions we knew were responsive to Laudato Sí goals that committees were in the early stage of brainstorming. Some of the actions were also identified in the commission and committee chairs' review of this application's reflection and assessment sections. Our synodal process is allowing us to see how committees are thinking about their work on behalf of Gesu.



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**2025  
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