

Reflection on Saint Joseph's University's Commitment to Laudato Si'

Honoring Our Legacy, Embracing Our Future

For more than 170 years, Saint Joseph's University (SJU) has upheld a tradition of academic rigor, social justice and a commitment to the greater good as articulated in our mission statement:

As Philadelphia's Jesuit Catholic University, Saint Joseph's provides a rigorous, student-centered education rooted in the liberal arts. We prepare students for personal excellence, professional success and engaged citizenship. Striving to be an inclusive and diverse community that educates and cares for the whole person, we encourage and model lifelong commitment to thinking critically, making ethical decisions, pursuing social justice and finding God in all things.

As we look to the future, we embrace the urgent call of Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'* to care for our common home. Drawing strength from our mission, this reflection serves as a reaffirmation of our deep commitment to sustainability, social justice, and the holistic well-being of our community and planet.

The President's Laudato Si' Sustainability Initiative:

Building on past and ongoing sustainability projects and the efforts of the [Saint Joseph's University Green Fund](#), President Cheryl A. McConnell, PhD launched the [President's Laudato Si' Sustainability Initiative](#) in July 2024. This initiative will be a key element of SJU's new strategic plan and will guide us toward becoming a designated Laudato Si' University.

At the heart of this initiative are three main principles rooted in Jesuit values that further build upon our mission and have guided us in developing our sustainability vision and goals:

- **Caring for Our Common Home:** Reducing our environmental footprint through energy conservation, sustainable construction, waste reduction and promoting green spaces.
- **Walking with the Excluded:** Recognizing the interconnectedness of environmental and social justice to build a more equitable world.
- **Care for the Person:** Fostering a culture that integrates environmental well-being with human health and dignity, especially for marginalized communities.

In October 2024, SJU solidified our sustainability vision statement and goals:

Vision Statement

Saint Joseph's University embraces its fundamental responsibility to [Care for Our Common Home](#) and is resolutely committed to building a lasting, action-driven culture of integral ecology. The University will cultivate and empower a community that champions social justice and boldly answers the cry of the Earth through Jesuit education, research, sustainable practices and impactful engagement.

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Goals

- Incorporate sustainability as a key element in the overall University strategic plan.

Ensure sustainability principles are perpetually embedded across all levels of the University's strategic plan, guiding long-term institutional growth and decision-making.

- Promote Laudato Si' Principles through institutional practices.

Actively integrate the principles of Laudato Si' into the University's operations, policies and campus culture, fostering a community rooted in ecological responsibility and social justice by following the University Pathways Guidebook.

- Expand sustainable practices in decision-making and apply transparent sustainability performance metrics.

Develop sustainability-focused frameworks that inform decision-making processes across administrative, financial and operational functions based on the AASHE Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System (STARS).

- Embed integral ecology into academics, research and across the campus experience.

Expand integral ecology-related content across curricula and research initiatives, ensuring that students and faculty engage with environmental issues meaningfully throughout their academic experience.

Embed sustainable practices, values and initiatives into all aspects of life on campus to ensure sustainability is a core component of the University's operations, academics and culture.

- Advance environmental responsibility through spirituality and justice.

Promote a holistic approach to environmental responsibility that connects ecological stewardship with Jesuit values of spirituality, ethics, and social justice.

- Strengthen collaborative engagement on sustainability initiatives among students, faculty, staff, alumni and the community.

Foster a culture of collaboration by engaging all stakeholders in impactful sustainability projects that drive positive change on campus and beyond.

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Integrating Laudato Si' into Our Campus and Community

The President's Laudato Si' Sustainability Initiative aims to embed sustainable practices and the principles of environmental stewardship, social justice stewardship and Cura Personalis Stewardship into all aspects of University life.

Guided by the seven Laudato Si' Goals, our approach includes four program pillars:

1. **Sustainable Campus Operations.** Creating a sustainable physical environment within the University that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions, conserve resources and create a healthier, more resilient campus environment. It covers topics such as energy and water management, waste reduction, green buildings and grounds, responsible procurement, sustainable transportation and resiliency.
2. **People and Spirituality.** Supporting human health, well-being and equitable access to resources. It aims to build a culture of inclusivity and spiritual connection to the environment through activities including retreats, service projects and faith-based environmental initiatives.
3. **Education and Research.** Embedding sustainability across curricula and research and making the University a living laboratory for sustainability that will equip the SJU community with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to understand and address the complex challenges facing the world today. It promotes critical thinking, interdisciplinary collaboration, innovation and a commitment to sustainable practices that can be applied both personally and professionally.
4. **Community Engagement.** Engaging with the local community to address environmental injustices and support sustainability efforts in Philadelphia and beyond. It includes fostering partnerships and sharing the University's resources and expertise to support regional sustainability goals.

A Collaborative Approach to Sustainability

Our sustainability strategy is being shaped by an inclusive and participatory process involving University leadership, faculty, staff, and students:

- **Guiding Coalition Formation.** We established the Guiding Coalition in July 2024 as a senior leadership group to spearhead and provide oversight and approval for activities related to the President's Laudato Si' Initiative. The Guiding Coalition convenes on a regular basis.
- **Materiality Assessment.** We conducted in-depth interviews with SJU leadership and other key stakeholders and provided a survey to the entire SJU community in September/October 2024. This dual approach provided both broad SJU community input and a deeper strategic institutional perspective on sustainability priorities and implementation considerations. This activity enabled SJU to align its commitment as a Laudato Si' university with action on

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sustainability. We gained valuable insights into the areas where we can make the most meaningful impacts.

- **Listening Sessions.** These internal stakeholder listening sessions provided students, faculty and staff with an overview of the President's Laudato Si' Sustainability Initiative and sought their input through facilitated breakout sessions/activities. We held two virtual sessions and two in-person sessions for students, faculty and staff in October 2024.
- **Visioning Session.** The Guiding Coalition participated in a collaborative visioning and goals development session in October 2024. We used the input from this session as well as the materiality assessment and listening sessions to create our sustainability vision statement and goals.
- **Baseline Activities Assessment.** We collected information from September-December 2024 about current and recent-past sustainability-related activities across the SJU campus and compiled them into a repository that will enable SJU to track what has already been accomplished and build upon these successes.

Through these collaborations, we have identified key sustainability priorities to focus our work over the coming year:

Priority	Laudato Si' Goal
Carbon footprint reduction and energy efficiency	Cry of the Earth, Ecological Education, Sustainable Lifestyles, Ecological Spirituality
Waste management and recycling infrastructure improvements	Cry of the Earth, Ecological Education, Sustainable Lifestyles, Ecological Economics
Sustainable infrastructure and responsible procurement	Cry of the Earth, Ecological Economics
Further integration of environmental and social justice in curriculum and research	Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor, Ecological Economics, Ecological Education, Ecological Spirituality, Community Involvement

By aligning these priorities with the Laudato Si' Goals, we are committed to translating our values into actionable change that reflects both our Jesuit mission and our responsibility as stewards of creation.

A Future of Hope and Action

SJU embraces the call of Laudato Si' as both a moral imperative and an opportunity for growth. As we embark on this journey toward sustainability under the President's Laudato Si' Initiative, we recognize that true transformation requires continuous learning, adaptation and collaboration. Through education, advocacy and action, we are building a culture that not only responds to the urgent sustainability challenges of our time but also empowers future leaders to champion ecological and social justice.

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Our commitment to Laudato Si' is more than an institutional initiative — it is a call to live our mission more fully. By integrating the principles of integral ecology into all that we do, we aspire to be a beacon of change, illuminating a path toward a more sustainable, just and hopeful world.