

LSAP Reflection for the Diocese of San José in California

The Diocese of San José encompasses Santa Clara County, California. Once known as the Valley of the Hearts Delight, with abundant orchards bounded by forested mountains on the west and grass-covered hills on the east, the county is now known as Silicon Valley, filled with high-tech companies and residential neighborhoods. Central to the valley is the city of San Jose, the 10th largest city in population in the United States. There are 1,924,000 residents, of which 689,000 or just over one-third, are Catholic. There are 54 parishes, with twenty-seven K-8 Schools, one Middle School, and six Catholic High Schools. Sunday Mass is celebrated weekly in 14 languages, including English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Mandarin, Cantonese, Korean, Portuguese, French, Croatian, Latin, Italian, Polish, Assyrian, and Igbo, and monthly in Tamil. We are a vibrant, diverse community.

The Diocese of San José faces several unique challenges and opportunities with respect to the call of *Laudato Si'*. The Tech industry has created great wealth for some. Yet, there is a great income disparity to be addressed both locally in the diocese and globally, as our primary industry is a trendsetter for technology development worldwide and a significant link in the world's economic web. The greatest cost impact of the tech industry is the high cost of housing which affects full-time students from out of the area and middle as well as low-income families. The most recent census of the houseless in just the city of San Jose is 7,000. As an integral part of California, Santa Clara County is impacted by the regional drought and at times reduced to dangerous air quality from local and distant wildfires. This fragile environment of the earth and the poor needs constant attention. Yet opportunities for innovation abound. In addition to the business community, we are home to six community colleges and three universities: Santa Clara University, Stanford University, and San Jose State University.

Our diocese was founded in 1981 on March 19, the Feast of St. Joseph. We belong to the Ecclesiastical Province of San Francisco. Beginning with the famous California missions, more than two centuries of Catholic life prepared Santa Clara County for its own diocese. On May 1, 2019, Bishop Oscar Cantú became the third Bishop of San José. The bishop and the chancery staff work diligently in partnership with parish and school clergy, religious, and lay staff to support the engagement of our people in evangelization efforts for the current and future generations. Our values include building a culture of encounter through collaboration in ministry, a spirit of service, and embracing diversity. These are done through full, open communication, transparency and accountability, and recognition of performance.

The groundwork for our engagement with the call of *Laudato Si'* began two decades ago. In 2002, in a comprehensive consultation process, the diocese developed a Pastoral Plan that focused on developing lay leadership, youth and young adult engagement, promoting our social justice teachings, and acting collaboratively. In the following years, a volunteer group formed a diocesan Green Team to focus on education and action on the social teaching, Care for Creation. The publication of *Laudato Si'* in 2015 gave new urgency to their workshops and articles in the diocesan newspaper. In December 2018, a new

committee, Stewards of Our Common Home (Stewards), was created as part of the Office of Life, Justice and Peace. Its mission is:

“to educate and motivate the Catholics of our diocese, and our neighbors, of the moral responsibility to take immediate action to address what Pope Francis has identified as the ‘social and environmental crisis of climate change.’”

On the 4th anniversary of *Laudato Si'*, all California Bishops signed a Pastoral Letter entitled *God Calls Us to Care for our Common Home*, <https://cacatholic.org/common-home>. They recognized that

“*Our Catholic communities have a special responsibility to bring the message of the encyclical to life in our worship, common prayer, and public witness.*”

They committed themselves to lead the call for

“*Ecological conversion across all aspects of life in church and society.*”

Some of these included offering clergy study days, adopting renewable and efficient energy and water conservation measures, and exploring opportunities to divest from fossil fuels. Others included respecting life by protecting nature, combatting poverty, ensuring environmental education, and participating in the political process to advocate for environmental justice.

That same month, May 2019, Stewards met with the new Bishop, who provided constructive support, especially regarding working with parishes. On October 4, 2019, the Feast of St. Francis, Bishop Cantú wrote a letter asking each parish to create a Green Team to bring the teachings of *Laudato Si'* to life: to raise awareness of the needs, to help parishes live more responsibly and to promote sustained advocacy for ecological policies. He encouraged collaboration with the Stewards.

In the following years, Stewards have built relationships with Catholic Climate Covenant and the *Laudato Si'* Movement, a local interfaith organization, Peninsula Interfaith Climate Action (PICA), and the Episcopal Diocese of El Camino through a local Episcopal congregation. A Mission Educator of the Maryknoll Young Adult Engagement Team joined the committee. Stewards facilitated a collaboration between Our City Forest and a parish for the planting of 26 trees. Stewards supported a successful national CCHD grant application for Valle Verde, a non-profit agency supporting low-income families vulnerable to food insecurity in San Jose.

In March 2021, the Stewards offered two programs for the diocese’s Institute for Leadership in Ministry (ILM), one for the English-speaking participants and a parallel track for the Spanish-speaking Students on *Laudato Si'* and how to bring it to your parish. 26 participants responded to the call to get involved, and we planned two July follow-up sessions for them. In May 2021, we invited five parishes that each took responsibility for one of five consecutive evenings of a half-hour program of prayer, song, a summary of one chapter of *Laudato Si'* with reflection questions and sharing what they-were doing in their parish to implement *Laudato Si'*. All of this was online and promoted with all of the parishes through the diocese’s outreach and promotion. In September 2021, we offered a 90-minute online session on *Eco-conversion* and an introduction to the *Laudato Si'* Action Platform with various audio and visual ways to engage the participants.

The Stewards have reached out to every parish and Catholic high school through different programs and communications, including the following for our youth: a site visit at the California Native Garden Foundation for 50 5th graders from St. Simon on Regenerative Gardens and farming, collaborating with youth ministers and the parish faith formation coordinators, to design a half-day nature retreat for Confirmation students and their sponsors, a *Call for Youth Warriors*, to partner with the Stewards, and, after publicizing with Catholic high school teachers who host Care for Creation Clubs, we offered a four-session online program in September 2021: *Confronting Our Throwaway Culture*.

Bishop Cantú presided over our 40th anniversary in 2021 and began a diocesan synodal and pastoral planning process to prepare for our 50th. The seven goals are a part of the reflection process and sharing in diocesan synod consultation sessions. We are now engaged in the three-year Eucharistic Revival. In the spring of 2022, Stewards presented a reflection on their experiences of the bond between the Eucharist and Laudato Si' to the Vicar for Evangelization and others on his team. We began our enrollment in the Laudato Si' Action Platform on May 24, 2022. This timing is fortuitous. Under Bishop Cantú's leadership, collaborating with other diocesan ministries, the Office for Life, Justice and Peace and Stewards of our Common Home committee will prepare annual action plans and evaluations.