

Caring for Earth, caring for you,

is focus for Catholic Sisters Week

Your Turn

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Guest columnists

Each year, Catholic Sisters Week gives us the opportunity to highlight the ministry and works of Catholic sisters in Erie, whether advocating for immigrants, caring for the poor, teaching children, fighting injustices, empowering women, promoting peace, and yes, caring for the Earth. This is why 'Caring for Earth, Caring for You' is our focus for Catholic Sisters Week, observed March 8 through March 14 this year.

In 'Laudato Sí', On Care for Our Common Home, Pope Francis reminds us that we live in a critical moment of history. This encyclical, released in 2015, has been described as one of the most influential documents of recent times and has drawn together people worldwide around the many issues threatening our common home. It also serves as a natural call-to-action for Catholic sisters. Why?

Pope Francis speaks of the need for the gospel message to be rooted in our own time if it is to have relevance today. This is at the core of the mission of Catholic sisters. He speaks clearly of how the degradation of the Earth impacts the most vulnerable and the environment and social and economic interactions. Drawing from God's relationship with creation and teachings from the Catholic Church's theological and spiritual tradition, he reminds us that 'Creatures exist only in dependence on each other, to complete each other, in the service of each other.' #86

'Integral ecology,' the notion that everything is interconnected, is a concept that permeates 'Laudato Sí': 'When we speak of the 'environment,' what we really mean is a relationship existing between nature and the society that lives in it.' #139 This requires an integrated approach to resolving the existing problems — seeking comprehensive solutions rather than quick, narrow fixes. We must draw on insights and wisdom from all cultures and traditions. Dialogue is key. All voices must be heard, and all parties must be involved, continually, to address the crisis.

As Catholic sisters who are part of a people of faith, together, our task is to transform the world, to align gospel values to the issues of today. We must challenge ourselves and others to live those values and be rooted in solidarity with one another and our own faith traditions because care for Earth transcends political and religious boundaries. It means we pursue social justice causes in legislation and the public arena. We must form new alliances and break through partisan divides that threaten the life of the planet and its people. We must create the political will to address climate change. We must address climate change from a moral and spiritual platform and instill this call to action in everyone.

A more recent initiative, the Laudato Sí Action Platform (LSAP) is a collaborative seven-year project rooted in the strengths and realities of communities around the world. It is designed to empower all of us to take decisive actions today. This year's Catholic Sisters Week local theme promotes this framework.

The LSAP goals encourage us to look at the socio-economic systems and the human roots of the ecological crisis, and they 'call for a spiritual and cultural revolution to realize integral ecology.' (laudatosiainactionplatform.org)

Those goals are: response to the cry of the Earth; response to the cry of the poor; ecological economics; adoption of sustainable lifestyles; ecological education; ecological spirituality; and community resilience and

empowerment. These goals, and caring for Earth, are nothing new for Catholic sisters who are putting together strategies in response to Pope Francis' challenge.

In the Erie Diocese, Catholic sisters demonstrate their commitment to the Earth in various ways: with environmental programs such as the one offered by the Neighborhood Art House ; and through community gardens and urban farms such as those sponsored by Emmaus ministries and the Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network . At Glinodo Center, the Benedictine Sisters are moving invasive plants from the woods, improving trails, and planting trees with Lake Erie Arboretum's ReLeaf project. There is now a fishing easement along the west side of Seven Mile Creek from East Lake Road to Lake Erie and restoration of the creek's corridor is underway. They are working towards carbon neutrality and their Care for the Earth committee has three working groups: waste streaming; carbon and energy; and woods and grounds.

The SSJ Neighborhood Network plans to construct a 1,000-square-foot, largely underground greenhouse. This walipini greenhouse will have a transparent roof and will be naturally heated and cooled by the earth. It will be used to grow herbs and produce year-round to support the Neighborhood Network's farmer's market, urban agriculture education, and food insecurity programs.

It's no wonder Catholic sisters are drawn to the call of 'Laudato Si'' and to embracing it to enhance the commitment already made.

We invite you to join us in celebration of Catholic Sisters Week (www.catholicsistersweek.org), and to consider what YOU can do to care for our common home — planet Earth. Let's proclaim that being kind, having faith, and working for the common good are great life goals that need courage and vigor and that we can all commit to.

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In this file photo, Musiq Pacley, 15, harvests okra on Aug. 23 at the Urban Farm at West 19th and Myrtle streets in Erie. The garden is run by the Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network and serves as a classroom for teens interested in gardening. JACK HANRAHAN/ERIE TIMES-NEWS



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