

Xavier University's Laudato Si Action Plan: Reflections and Plan Development

“Since everything is closely interrelated, and today’s problems call for a vision capable of taking into account every aspect of the global crisis, I suggest that we now consider some elements of an *integral ecology*, one which clearly respects its human and social dimensions.” (Pope Francis, Laudato Si, #137)

“Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live. We are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it. . . . We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental.” (Laudato Si, #139)

“A sense of deep communion with the rest of nature cannot be real if our hearts lack tenderness, compassion and concern for our fellow human beings. . . . Concern for the environment thus needs to be joined to a sincere love for our fellow human beings and an unwavering commitment to resolving the problems of society.” (Laudato Si, #91)

Since the beginning of 2022, Xavier University has embarked upon a process of communal discernment about how to convert these words of Pope Francis into action. The Xavier community has reflected upon how our educational mission, including our Strategic Plan for the future, and the goals of Pope Francis’s Laudato Si Action Platform converge and mutually support each other. As will be described in more detail below, Xavier students, faculty, and staff came together in multiple meetings over two years to discern how we could concretely move the University forward on the path towards robust sustainability in the spirit of integral ecology. Out of our meetings, not only did we come to see more clearly how our educational mission and the goals of the Action Platform are aligned, but we also identified concrete steps to take to increase awareness in our community of the ecological crisis and to respond to it with personal, communal, and institutional resources.

Xavier University’s mission, vision, and values

Xavier’s mission is “to educate each student intellectually, morally and spiritually. We create learning opportunities through rigorous academic and professional programs integrated with co-curricular engagement. In an inclusive environment of open and free inquiry, we prepare students for a world that is increasingly diverse, complex and interdependent. Driven by our commitment to educating the whole person, promoting the common good, and serving others, the Xavier community challenges and supports all our members as we cultivate lives of reflection, compassion and informed action.”

Xavier University’s vision is that “Xavier men and women become people of learning and reflection, integrity and achievement, in solidarity for and with others.”

As a Jesuit Catholic institution, we promote the Jesuit values of reflection, discernment, solidarity, service rooted in justice and love, *cura personalis*, and *magis*. As a community, we strive always to advance goodness for all of creation and to glorify God by our decisions. Commitment to integral ecology and sustainability helps Xavier to advance the Universal Apostolic Preferences of

the Society of Jesus, especially journeying with youth in the creation of a hope-filled future and caring for our common home.

Xavier University's Strategic Plan: Xavier 200 (2023-2031)

The four pillars of Xavier's current Strategic Plan are:

- *Cura studiorum*: Striving for excellence in innovation and academics
- *Cura propria*: Building a profound culture of belonging and inclusive excellence
- *Cura personalis*: An unsurpassed campus experience that transforms the mind, body, and spirit
- *Cura apostolica*: Operational strength and effective stewardship

Of the diverse ways in which the goals of Laudato Sí and Xavier's Strategic Plan converge, we would like to highlight two examples.

Cura studiorum: Xavier has made the moral and theological analysis of the ecological crisis a focal point in *Theological Foundations*, the first course in theology that every undergraduate student, regardless of college or major, must take. In this course, students read excerpts of Pope Francis's 2015 encyclical and discuss how they can contribute to protecting our common home. Responsible action in response to climate change is further studied in a variety of academic programs, such as Economics, Sustainability & Society; Environmental Science; Sustainability: Economics & Management; and Spirituality and Solidarity.

Cura propria: In accordance with Laudato Sí's emphasis upon the interconnectedness of humanity and the interdependence of all life on the planet, our Strategic Plan advances the priorities of *cura propria*: prioritizing the health and well-being of all Xavier colleagues, strengthening our culture of belonging, and enhancing partnerships across our local communities that advance the greater good in support of the shared goals of our partners.

Xavier's endorsement of the goals that underlie integral ecology: History and background

Sustainability and care for our common home have been concerns at Xavier University for many years. That work began in earnest in 2008, when then-president Michael J. Graham, S.J., signed the American College and University Presidents Climate Commitment, now called Second Nature, which was a promise to strive to become climate neutral. In the same year, the Sustainability Committee, representing a cross-section of the campus community, was established with the charge to help develop a comprehensive plan for achieving the long-term goal of climate neutrality and the short-term goal of initiating tangible actions to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases. Over the past decade, student groups, such as Xavier Students for Sustainability, and faculty-staff-student groups, such as the Climate Change Action Workshop, have joined their efforts to those of the Sustainability Committee to help advance the University's sustainability goals.

The beginning of Dr. Colleen M. Hanycz's tenure as President in 2021 marked a new and exciting moment in Xavier University's journey towards sustainability and integral ecology. In October 2021, she formally committed Xavier University to developing a Laudato Sí Action Plan in response to Pope Francis' invitation to participate in a Seven-Year Journey Towards Integral Ecology. Consultations were initiated shortly thereafter with members of the Sustainability

Committee, in particular with Committee co-chairs Dr. Kathleen Smythe (History) and Ms. Mary Lisa Vertuca (Education), to identify individuals to serve on a coordinating committee for the University's renewed sustainability efforts. Names were vetted with Provost Rachel Chrastil and individuals were invited by President Hanyecz to join a Laudato Si Steering Committee with broad representation from the University under the leadership of Dr. Bill Madges (Theology; Brueggeman Center for Dialogue). The formation of the Steering Committee was completed in January 2022.

During the spring 2022 semester, the Steering Committee (initially comprised of nine faculty, seven staff, and two administrators) convened 1) to explore the seven goals of Pope Francis' initiative, 2) to form working groups for each of those goals, and 3) to begin to identify plan priorities. Leaders of the seven working groups assembled teams comprised of students, faculty, and staff to generate ideas concerning their assigned Laudato Si goal. In all, approximately 60 members of the Xavier community engaged in planning Xavier's Laudato Si response.

During the fall 2022 semester, the Steering Committee intensified their work on a first draft of the University's Laudato Si Action Plan, which outlined a sustainability "roadmap" for the University to follow. Using the example of the University Strategic Plan, they identified priorities, intended to be stable and fixed over the life of the Laudato Si Plan, and initiatives, which would be identified annually to support those priorities.

To communicate the work of the Laudato Si Steering Committee and to receive input from the broader Xavier community, members of the Laudato Si Executive Committee met individually in late October and early November 2022 with university constituencies and stakeholders, including Faculty Committee, Faculty Assembly, Staff Advisory Committee, and the Student Government Association. In addition, an open forum for the entire University was held in November. To further broaden feedback opportunities, a survey was then made available to the entire Xavier community. A total of 274 individuals participated in the survey, including 125 faculty, 91 staff, 49 students, and nine administrators. The survey indicated strong support for the roadmap that the Steering Committee had created. The next task was to flesh out the details for the entire lifespan of the roadmap.

In spring semester 2023, therefore, the Steering Committee intensively set about the work of identifying initiatives and milestones for years 2023-2028. Each of the seven working groups formulated their respective multi-year plan, which was then collated and edited into a final version of the University's Laudato Si Action Plan.

As the end of the 2022-2023 academic year approached, the following steps were taken to ensure that the University's Plan would move forward toward effective implementation:

- Restructuring of the Laudato Si Steering Committee was proposed, with the intent of transforming it from a large ad hoc committee into a streamlined permanent university committee.
- A new university position was created—Associate Director of Mission & Identity/University Sustainability Coordinator—to which Mr. Timothy Sundrup was appointed. Effective July 1, 2023, he succeeds Dr. Madges as leader of Xavier University's Laudato Si Action Plan.

Xavier University is proud to submit its Laudato Si Action Plan to the Dicastery for Integral Human Development. We believe that our Plan responsibly addresses the existential crisis of climate change, expresses well fundamental aspects of Xavier's mission as a Jesuit Catholic university, and strengthens the University's Strategic Plan for the future. By our individual and collective actions, we affirm, in the words of Pope Francis: "Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth." (Laudato Si, #92)