Laudato Si Reflection

Madonna University is located in Livonia, Michigan, USA – part of the Detroit metropolitan area of SE Michigan. The mission of Madonna University, a Catholic institution of higher learning, is to instill in its students Christian humanistic values, intellectual inquiry, a respect for diversity, and a commitment to serving others through a liberal arts education, integrated with career preparation and based on the truths and principles recognized within a Felician Franciscan tradition. Our Madonna Commitment is to provide a caring, personalized, values-based learning community for students who seek knowledge and preparation to succeed in a life of service to others.

The core Franciscan values that inform our mission are: Respect for the Dignity of Each Person; Peace and Justice; Reverence for Creation; and Education for Truth and Service.

We have been richly blessed. God’s world has been richly blessed with a beautiful, abundant, life-giving creation. We at Madonna are truly blessed to find ourselves on a small piece of this wonderful planet. God has given us so much! How do we respond? How do we use these gifts to serve all those with whom we share this special planet?

In *Laudato si*, Pope Francis has called us to think about these questions. How do we use our gifts to respond to the Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor, to use our opportunities for Ecological Education to develop Sustainable Lifestyles, Ecological Economics, and Ecological Spirituality, and to Engage our Communities in working together to Care for Our Common Home?

All of these are connected. The biblical creation accounts “suggest that human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself” (LS 66). Our most fundamental reality is that we are loved into existence by God and thus are essentially related to God. “Every man and woman is created out of love and made in God’s image and likeness . . . . We were conceived in the heart of God, and for this reason ‘each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary’” (LS 65). Because of this, Madonna’s first core value is respect for the dignity, the infinite value, of each and every human person.

But our world still has a long way to go when it comes to respecting human dignity. Pope Francis reminds us that damage to the environment is to a great extent caused by the wasteful lifestyles of the well-off and disproportionately causes suffering for the poor and excluded, both around the world and in our own backyard. Our second core value – peace and justice – calls for reflecting upon our lifestyle choices and taking action to make a difference.

Faithfulness to our relationship with God and with each other requires caring for the one and only common home that we share with all living things. Our well-being is tied up with that of everything else. It is as simple as that. Our third core value is reverence for creation – respectful care for everything that is. Pope Francis encourages a mindset of integral ecology: caring for everything because everything is connected.

Our fourth core value is education for truth and service. Pope Francis says that God “wishes to work with us and . . . counts on our cooperation” (LS 80) in order to bring good out of the harm that has been done and to take up the process of healing the earth and its peoples. “Everything is connected. 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” (LS 91).

We are all here because of God’s goodness, called to treasure and share that goodness. Our campus is an oasis of natural beauty in the midst of an area seeing increasing land development, suburbanization, and industry. We provide a home for abundant wildlife and take intentional steps to protect that environment. We welcome students of diverse religious and cultural backgrounds and by doing so proclaim that our human community is far larger than our campus. We attempt to live out our care for the earth by building ecologically and developing sustainable practices in our everyday campus operations.

We know that we are part of something so much larger than ourselves. “When our hearts are authentically open to universal communion, this sense of fraternity excludes nothing and no one. . . . 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” (LS 92).