

Laudato Si' Action Platform (LSAP)

LSAP Synodal Journey Synthesis Participants' Reflections

“When I was called to be part of the LSAP Synodal Journey, like many of the people God chose in the stories we read in the Bible I asked, “why me?” Being chosen to represent my parish was a completely unexpected honor, and I wasn't sure what I would be getting myself into by answering the call. But I was inspired by a desire to help, and I offered my service with an open heart, carrying the thought “Here I am, Lord.” The Synodal Journey was an encounter with the Body of Christ in meeting and working alongside people from parishes and neighborhoods across the archdiocese. The opportunity during our first meeting to spend some time in Eucharistic Adoration also centered Jesus in my experience and allowed me to lay my thoughts and feelings at His feet, strengthening me for the next stages of the journey.

The Synodal Journey will no doubt lead to my continued engagement with my parish as it works to implement the recommendations that the Archdiocese LSAP Commission distributes based on the voices of myself and all my fellow participants. I am grateful for the opportunity to have participated in a movement within our local Church that has a greater purpose than just what I can do in living my day to day. It was an experience of giving of the first fruits of my time and talent; even though I have other obligations and in the times when I didn't feel I had the energy or focus, I delved deeper and resolved to put in the work for God's creation. That experience in itself is a humbling one, and a good reminder that God asks us for all we have. But when we are willing to give, we usually find we have more to offer than we knew.”

Alexandra Becker

Saint Clement Parish, Chicago, IL

“My experience with the Synodal Journey has been one filled with eye, mind and heart opening moments of the Holy Spirit working in my life. I often use the expression that I was born for such a time as this when I am asked to enlarge my ministerial life. When I first started to learn about *Laudato Si'* it seemed to be such a daunting task and I had feelings of being overwhelmed. The reading of the LS Encyclical and then trying to apply it to me and my community's everyday life didn't seem like it would work. After getting involved with the members of the LSAP Roundtable and listening to their stories and efforts to bring the ideas of *Care for our Common Home* a reality, I began to feel like the little girl in the story about saving the starfish. The story's meaning of one person making a difference and the prompting of the Holy Spirit within me keeps me wanting to do more.

The Synodal Journey sessions let me know that I am not alone in my thinking and that taking care of (being a steward of God's creation) both the universe and those that inhabit it is an attainable goal.

The sessions I attended were in themselves a work of the Holy Spirit. As people came in, they had a look and an attitude of what am I doing here and why am I here. Slowly, I was aware that through the careful and spirit-led discussions and sharing that the apprehension and doubt of most who were attending was beginning to go away and a sense of hope was permeating the room. Because I am a woman of faith and I believe that faith enables me to be a woman of service to what God is calling me to do as a missionary disciple. I came away from the Synodal Journey process with a strong feeling of love and hope. A renewed love for all of God's creation and a Spirit-filled hope that we can begin to be and do what God wants us to do with and for His creation."

Dee Dee Borum

St. Moses the Black Parish, Chicago, IL

"For me, Christ is best found in community (wherever two or more are gathered....), and the LSAP Synodal Journey process to date has been as solid and inspiring example of community in action that I have experienced in a long time. A diverse group of faithful people from different areas of the archdiocese and different backgrounds coming together around a common cause that impacts us all....beautiful!

Some new friends were made, some new ideas were shared, and the presence of the Holy Spirit was felt throughout. I believe the result will be an inspired and actionable roadmap to guide us in a recommitment to the call to action that is *Laudato Si'* and *Laudate Deum*. As we celebrate *Laudato Si'* week 2024, sharing the process with my Creation Care team has already refocused us on the valuable tool that is the *Laudato Si'* Action Platform to guide us in making a difference in our parish. Praise God!"

Jeff Hitz

Holy Family Parish, Inverness, IL

"For me the synodal journey experience had two distinct parts. The first part was the task of remembering personal experiences concerning the cry both of the earth and of the poor. The experiences I recollected caused me to recreate past feelings of the vastness and timelessness of creation. If I had any contact with the Divine during this journey, it was the sense that my life is not all about me and that my care and responsibility have to extend far beyond the immediacies of my own life.

The second part of the synodal experience concerned the generation of practical ideas and action items that can engage an activated sense of care and responsibility. The one word that comes to mind for this part is "consensus." Over the two meetings I was involved in, everyone starts off with specific ideas, but to win consensus, those ideas have to become more inclusive and less specific. Listening to the ideas of many different people made me feel part of a larger movement, sort of a groundswell of activism. I hope this sense of being part of something big will motivate our creation care team efforts to advance the goals of *Laudato Si'* in our parish."

Albert Wagner

Our Lady of the Woods, Orland Park, IL

“Since my awareness of *Laudato Si’* and the movement that has since arisen, I have sensed the Spirit of God laboring with humanity to become critically and spiritually aware of the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor we have caused. Together we are called to take bold and immediate action in creating a new mission. A mission to see and understand what our collective and individual actions have done to the earth and those with less. Then to undertake economic and personal lifestyle changes to build the kingdom that Christ intended for us.”

James Sweany

St. Mary of the Woods, Chicago, IL

“I was able to see the influence of the Holy Spirit. I was surprised how moved the participants were, how their eyes were opened to the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth by listening to each others’ stories. It reinforced in me the importance of sharing the message of *Laudato Si’*. It’s not just for me to live it in my own life. Just as on Pentecost, the message to me is that I need to go out and spread the message of *Laudato Si’*.”

Louise Przywara

St. Joseph Church, Libertyville, IL

“During our Synodal Journey of integrating the *Laudato Si’* Action Platform into our parishes and diocese, I had time to re-read parts of *Laudato Si’* (LS), reflect on the content of LS and pray. I was touched by the LS passage that read: ‘Many things have to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change. ... A great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set out on the long path of renewal’ (LS 202). Over these past few weeks, I experienced an energizing “interior” need for renewal and felt that my fellow Catholics from various parishes whom I met during this Journey had this same sensation. I pray that our energy can be contagious and spread throughout the diocese. With His wonderful Grace, it now seems easy to change. Love of God, God’s creation, and all people is all I need to change my behavior.”

Walt Wojcik

St. John of the Cross Parish, Western Springs, IL

“As a Synodal Journey participant, I was filled with satisfaction and peace knowing that my spiritual life, my experience of Christ, was synonymous with my love for all nature and its gifts to me. I left committed to continue my respect and care for Creation.”

Carole Colantoni

Holy Family Catholic Community, Inverness, IL

“The first session I attended featured an exposition of the Eucharist halfway through. The integration of the Gospel into practical application reveals immense potential for profound healing. I am drawn to ‘sanibatur,’ a Latin concept symbolizing holistic restoration across body, mind, and spirit—awaiting realization through Christ’s transformative teachings, embraced within our community. During moments of praise and adoration, I am grateful for the chance to actively listen to others, represent my parish, and enrich myself, preparing to contribute to my local community.

Engaging with fellow participants during this synodal journey has deepened my understanding of the resources available within each parish—time, talent, and treasure. Reflecting on our

collective journey, I am struck by our shared commitment to environmental stewardship and social responsibility, inspired by the teachings of *Laudato Si'*.”

John DeFranco

St. Clement Parish, Chicago, IL

“I experienced Christ during the journey while listening and reflecting on all the comments from others and I felt Christ working through us during those times. I also felt Christ when we were all together at the installment at Holy Name Cathedral, with leaders from different denominations all there for the same purpose. The synodal journey definitely was a call for me to further my engagement with the teachings of *Laudato Si'*. It has influenced me to want to make more of a change in my parish.”

Belen Babb

St. Mary of Vernon, Vernon Hills, IL

“The LSAP/Creation Care meetings in our parish have opened my eyes to the devastation and assault on nature that mankind has done. Watching the movie, ‘The Letter’, showed us that Pope Francis is well aware of the international scope of the problem. He is trying to raise awareness and spearhead a response to this global problem by showing us that God connects all of us to one another, and it is up to all of us to work together to try to resolve this damage to our planet.

Working with other parishioners from within the Vicariates to synthesize our collective response to the LSAP action plan helped me to realize how important our role was, to clearly identify the voices of the people in our diocese so that we can contribute to the action plan. Others will know what we have done and what we believe needs to be done. I feel Christ is with us on our journey and am energized by the team’s response. I am convinced that our collective efforts are critical in moving us forward to make the world a better place for future generations.”

Deacon Tom Westerkamp

Saint Anne Catholic Community, Barrington, IL

“From a very young age I felt a special connection with nature and all the various elements and complexities it entails. I find greater peace when I am surrounded by God’s creation; this is when I feel a stronger connection with Jesus and find myself in deeper conversation with Him with a grateful heart of all that has been given to us.

When I had an opportunity to participate with our Parish’s Creation Care Ministry, I was delighted that our church had such a ministry and focus. This led to another opportunity to engage in a *Laudato Si'* Synodal Journey where I witnessed strong and caring support for the Call of the Earth and Call of the Poor from the Catholic Church and our archdiocese. We are called to be stewards of all God’s creation and the *Laudato Si'* Synodal Journey is a vital component in serving the poor and healing our earthly home with their call to action. We need to act now and spread the good work of the *Laudato Si'* Action Platform Commission. We are all God’s children; let us join hands and hearts to help and heal those around us and our earthly home.”

Susan Dalton

Our Lady of the Woods Parish, Chicago, IL

“Christ was at the center of this experience for me. Both physically through the prayer table that stood at the center of the room, and spiritually as I reflected on the gift of being present at that journey and counted among the living. Christ gave us the gift of this earth to farm and feed our bodies but we have abused it beyond measure. And so as I reflected on my responsibility to repairing this damage, I realized I had to turn to Christ for answers for He alone gives me the strength.

The teachings of *Laudato Si'* are a reminder that nothing is indifferent on this earth and that ‘the book of nature is one and indivisible’ (Pope Francis, 2015, pg. 9). This reminder of our interconnection to nature, to Mother Earth, is essential for our own human survival and wellbeing, as well as for the survival of the more-than-human species and the planet. Therefore, my call to engagement is a kick in the butt and an intellectual nudge that I need to broaden my gardening skills and knowledge. It is more important now than ever to include school gardening as part of the curriculum as this creates a sense of belonging and community for a lot of children and students in low income neighborhoods while also addressing the issue of food deserts. This journey provides the right pathway for addressing the ecological-spiritual concerns we now face.”

Veronica Konglim, Ph.D

St. Moses the Black Parish, Chicago, IL

“I felt the presence of Christ when I opened my heart completely to truly listen to my brothers and sisters, their personal experiences, thoughts, and ideas. I felt the presence of Christ when I left my expectations and personal bias at the door, and could reflect honestly on my own experiences and others. I continue to feel the presence of Christ as I now understand that to grow in Christ is to grow in synodal community with one another.

My number one takeaway is to continue to cultivate relationships with all parish groups and parishioners, focusing not on our disagreements but on our common and universal goal: to Care for Creation and Our Common Home. It is essential to include them in our LSAP plans and activities, plus encourage them to create their own.”

Kerri DiMonte

St. John of the Cross Parish, Western Springs, IL

“The Synodal Journey experience was well thought out to try to engage all in sharing their experiences with the LSAP Goals. Looking forward to viewing the recaps.”

Paul Kalmes

Saint Anne Catholic Community, Barrington, IL

“I found fellow Catholics from all across the Chicago Archdiocese that shared their connection to the *Laudato Si'* Action Platform. They showed that they understood Cry of the Earth and Cry of the Poor...what was not right and some shared what needed to be done depending on which LSAP goal they responded to. It was energizing to have it placed in a spirit filled context.

The question I left each synodal journey experience with was ‘what is next?’ Hopefully the spiritual energy and the actions suggested will continue to happen and grow throughout the Chicago Archdiocese parishes if our parishioners and religious truly understand that we are truly on this journey together and are only a small part of God’s creation.”

Gary Schiappacasse

St. Mary of Vernon Parish, Vernon Hills, IL

“I did enjoy the afternoon more than I thought I was going to. For some reason, I was thinking it was more environmental, green energy. Glad it was not. My take from the afternoon was that all things are connected in some way. The small groups and speakers were solid. There was always mention of caring for creation is helping with the poor. I agree that if we can help others have better lives maybe they can keep helping other people have better lives too. This discussion can go on and on and on. The inner city of Chicago is a prime example of trying to help the poor but not going so well. All in all, a nice afternoon and would be happy to learn more.”

Brian Callahan

Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Glenview, IL

“I encountered Christ primarily through the synodal process itself: listening to each other, being heard respectfully, sharing in the Holy Spirit, revealing our hearts in trust, addressing difficult topics, accepting our differences in love and gratitude. We encounter Christ in each other.

The synodal journey has encouraged me to work towards unity across difference, trusting the Holy Spirit is guiding us, especially in a spirit of generosity. This is exactly what we need: mutual understanding and generosity to overcome our common challenges in unity. This is our Christian calling. Solidarity, in the best sense of the word.”

Tony Quintanilla

St. John XXIII Parish, Evanston, IL

“This journey reminded me to think about how my daily activities can affect the earth and its inhabitants – God’s creation. The gathering of people from different parishes interested in the teachings of *Laudato Si’* gave me hope that we can impact changes. I feel more confident that my little efforts will add to the collective goal of protecting the future of our planet.”

Barbara Adaikpoh

Assumption Catholic Church, Chicago, IL

“The LSAP Team designed a synodal journey that clarified the true meaning of synod. The experience of listening and being heard was heartfelt and humbling. The voices stirred my heart in different and unexpected ways. The experience was beyond what I could have imagined and nothing of what I expected. It was spiritually awakening and surprisingly hopeful in the face of what can seem to be insurmountable obstacles.

The Road to Emmaus perfectly captures the feeling I had of Christ walking with us. At times I felt His powerful presence as our voices began to resonate at the same frequency. In physics, we would expect the message to be additive, however, together in our holy space, the message was so extraordinary that it often seemed multiplicative and at times absolutely went exponential. The greatest takeaway was that walking together, we can better answer His call to ‘love one another’ by loving ALL that is His, including our Common Home – His Glorious Creation.

Thank you for inviting me to participate! Glory be to God!”

Becky Menich

Saint Anne Catholic Community, Barrington, IL
