

LIVING LAUDATO SI'
THROUGH A
MARIST LENS

MARIST BROTHERS USA

EDITED BY
BR. DAN O'RIORDAN AND SAM C. KING

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Selected concluding synthesis for various chapters and a few transitioning passages between essays were enhanced with the assistance of artificial intelligence. All such material is clearly indicated in *italics*.

This book is dedicated to all those around the world who, through their daily lives and quiet witness—often unseen—work tirelessly to care for our common home.

*“The future belongs to those who give the next generation reason
for hope.”*

— PIERRE TEILHARD DE CHARDIN

FOREWORD

As Marists of Champagnat, we stand at a graced moment in history—one in which the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor invite us to listen with renewed attentiveness and respond with generous, hope-filled hearts. *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis' profound call to care for our common home, offers the world a prophetic vision grounded in justice, compassion, and an integral understanding of our place within creation. This book, *Living Laudato Si'* through a Marist Lens, arrives at a pivotal time, encouraging us to deepen that vision through the spirituality, simplicity, and family spirit that define our Marist identity.

I wish to warmly congratulate **Br Daniel O'Riordan** and **Mr. Sam C. King** for taking the initiative to bring this important volume to life. Their leadership, creativity, and commitment have sparked a renewed sense of purpose among us. By gathering voices from across our global Marist family, they invite us not only to reflect on *Laudato Si'* but to rekindle our shared passion for caring for creation. Their work calls us to step forward with conviction and to strengthen the fire of our Marist commitment in these critical times.

Pope Francis reminded us of the vital role young people play in caring for our world: **“Young people have a new ecological sensitivity and a generous spirit, and some of them are making admirable**

commitments to the protection of creation.” Their energy, creativity, and courage call us to accompany them with hope, humility, and a willingness to learn from their example.

Across our global Institute, from bustling cities to remote rural communities, Marists—Brothers, Lay Marists, young people, and mission partners—are already embodying the seven principles of *Laudato Si’* in creative and life-giving ways. The reflections gathered here give voice to this emerging “new story”: a story of gardens cultivated, habitats restored, sustainable practices adopted, hearts awakened, and communities transformed. These chapters invite us to see ecological conversion not as a distant ideal, but as a daily commitment—as ordinary and natural as Marcellin’s own practical love for the young and most vulnerable.

This book shines a light on the many signs of hope blossoming within our Marist world: young people leading ecological initiatives with passion and courage; school communities reimagining their environmental footprint; mission projects prioritizing justice for those most affected by climate change; and formation programs nurturing a spirituality that recognizes God’s presence in all created things. These stories remind us that the Gospel is always both contemplative and active. It calls us to see differently, and then to live differently; to align vision and activity.

For us, as followers of Jesus in the way of Mary, the invitation is clear. Like Mary at Nazareth, we are called to notice the small, the fragile, and the overlooked. Like her, we are invited to nurture life patiently, tenderly, and with unwavering faith in God’s promise. And like Marcellin, we are compelled to act—simply, boldly, and in solidarity with those who most need our care.

As you explore these pages, you will find inspiration to continue the important work of ecological conversion in your own context. May this book spark conversation, encourage collaboration, and embolden each of us to walk more gently on the Earth. Above all, may it strengthen our shared conviction that caring for creation is not an optional extra, but a deeply Marist expression of our mission to make Jesus known and loved.

May we, together, continue to awaken energy and hope in our young people and our wider society, so that future generations may inherit a world where creation is honored, protected, and cherished.

Br Peter Carroll, FMS

Superior General

May 2026

INTRODUCTION BY SAM KING

Eleven years ago, Pope Francis issued the groundbreaking encyclical *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*, calling Catholics—and all people of good will—to undergo an “ecological conversion” in response to the profound social and environmental crises of our time. His prophetic invitation to hear and respond to both the Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor has reverberated across the world, inspiring a global movement to make integral ecology a lived reality and a deep expression of faith.

The urgency of this call has only intensified. Human activity has warmed the planet by approximately 1.3 degrees Celsius since 1850, contributing to rising sea levels, prolonged droughts, irregular rainfall, and increasingly severe storms—impacts that fall most heavily upon the world’s poorest and most vulnerable communities. Climate change, deforestation, overfishing, and unsustainable extraction have accelerated what scientists describe as the Earth’s Sixth Mass Extinction, marked by a dramatic loss of biodiversity. At the same time, extractive mines and fossil fuel facilities pollute soil, air, and water, causing severe health consequences that disproportionately impact impoverished populations. Meanwhile, microplastics now

pervade the oceans, human tissue, and even breastmilk. These realities underscore Pope Francis' insistence that ecological degradation and human suffering are inseparably linked.

As a global Marist family, we have received the call of *Laudato Si'* not as an external mandate, but as a summons deeply rooted in our own charism and history. This ecological sensitivity can be traced within our tradition to figures such as Brother François, a foundational leader in the early life of the Institute and the first Superior General of the Marist Brothers. An herbalist, gardener, and infirmarian, Brother François embodied a practical reverence for creation that continues to shape our Marist imagination. In recognition of this shared heritage, during *Laudato Si'* Week 2025, the Marist family gathered for an international prayer service honoring the “Three Francises”—St. Francis of Assisi, Pope Francis, and our own Brother François—celebrating an ecological spirituality rooted in simplicity, reverence, and care for life.

Seen in this light, Marist communities across the world are responding in diverse and creative ways to the seven principles of the *Laudato Si'* Movement: Response to the Cry of the Earth, Response to the Cry of the Poor, Adoption of Sustainable Lifestyles, Ecological Economics, Ecological Education, Ecological Spirituality, and Community Resilience and Empowerment. This volume gathers and reflects upon these responses, lifting up the lived experiences of Brothers and lay Marists who strive to embody these principles in their local contexts—from installing renewable energy systems and planting pollinator gardens, to developing circular economy initiatives and fostering ecological education within schools and ministries.

Many of these efforts have been animated and led by young people, including members of the United States Green Team, whose leadership is a tangible sign of hope for the future. Inspiring ecological gatherings—such as the annual USA Province-wide Earth Day Weekend and several Marist International Forums on ecology—have uplifted the creativity and passion of young people, empowering them to assume leadership in this vital area. Together, these stories testify to a Marist commitment to ecological conversion that is tangible, communal, and

rooted in hope. Through this book, we seek to share these witnesses—not as models of perfection, but as beacons of possibility—so that the Marist family, and all who walk with us, may continue to nurture a deeper care for our common home and for generations, human and more-than-human, yet to come.

CHAPTER 1

THE CRY OF THE EARTH



Student leaders and staff from Archbishop Molloy High School at the dedication of their new community garden at the St. Ann's Courtyard

“As a Marist young person, caring for our common home means to care and support God’s creations and offering aid to those who are most vulnerable while also being good stewards of the Earth.”

— EMILIE ALVEREZ, STUDENT AT MSGR. PACE AND USA
GREEN TEAM MEMBER

“The cry of the Earth is shown all around us. It has been prominent in the sweltering summers and frigid winters, in habitat loss, in the unknowing of how long fossil fuels will last. Through the efforts of Earth Day Weekend, I’ve realized the importance of caring for our only home. I do not purchase plastic water bottles, I recycle, and I try to ride my bicycle when I can. My sense of awareness has grown tremendously and I can only hope that others come to same realization. Answering the Earth’s cries is something that can be done, as long as everyone is willing to dedicate themselves.”

— MADDIE MARSHALL, ARCHBISHOP MOLLOY
ALUMNUS AND GREEN TEAM MEMBER

Section I — Introduction By Sam C. King

At the heart of *Laudato Si’* is the profound call to respond to the Cry of the Earth. This sense of anguish arising from the Earth has ancient roots in the Book of Genesis, when God tells Cain that, “the voice of your brother’s blood is crying to me from the ground” (Gen 4:10). In our own time, the Cry of the Earth has amplified under what Pope Francis calls the “dominant technocratic paradigm”—an anthropocentric worldview that reduces the more-than-human world as a mere resource to be extracted for human gain (*Laudato Si’*, 101). This technocratic paradigm has driven the subjugation and exploitation of creation for short-sighted economic and political ends, producing benefits concentrated among the few while distributing harm unevenly in ways that disproportionately impact the poor. Pope

Francis writes that, “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).

The urgency of this call has only intensified in recent years. 2024 was the hottest year in recorded history, while 2025 was among the three hottest ever recorded. Human activity has warmed the planet by approximately 1.3° Celsius since 1850, contributing to rising sea levels, prolonged droughts, irregular rainfall, and increasingly severe storms. These impacts fall most heavily upon the world’s poorest and most vulnerable, including those in low-lying island nations and subsistence agricultural communities. We saw this first-hand in our recent Ecology mission trip to Belize in December 2024 and 2025, where Mayan farmers described how they are altering ancient agriculture calendars because of changing weather patterns.

The combination of climate change, deforestation, overfishing, and unsustainable extraction have accelerated what scientists describe as the Earth’s Sixth Mass Extinction. Each year, more than 10,000 species are driven to extinction—more than 1,000 times the natural rate. According to a 2019 United Nations report, 30-50% of all species risk extinction by 2050. (IPBES Global Assessment, 2019) These are not just statistics. These are not just exotic creatures in distant lands and waters. As the Passionist monk Thomas Berry writes, “To wantonly destroy a living species is to silence forever a divine voice.”¹ We have a moral responsibility to protect these creatures as part of the beloved community of life. In the words of Pope Francis, “Living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience” (Laudato Si’, 217).

We are also faced with the pollution of air, water, and soil. A garbage patch twice the size of Texas drifts through the Pacific Ocean, leaching toxic microplastics that choke previous marine creatures such as sea turtles and whales. A byproduct of petroleum, microplastics now pervade human tissue, sperm, and breastmilk. A 2025 study suggests

1. (Berry, *Selected Writings*, 34. From *The Dream of the Earth* (1988), 46.)

that the average person has the equivalent of a plastic spoon's worth of microplastics in their brain. (Nihart, A.J., Garcia, M.A., El Hayek, E. et al., 2025)

Other modes of pollution are pervasive. Runoff from industrial factory farms pollutes the air and water with toxic chemicals, disproportionately affecting poor communities—as evident in the waste lagoons leached by hog farms in North Carolina. The fracking of natural gas fuels seismic activity and spills chemicals into underground aquifers vital for drinking water. Coal-powered power plants pollute the air with sulfur dioxide and particulate matter, causing higher local asthma rates in mostly poor communities. Meanwhile, mining for precious metals often clear-cuts forests and poisons local waterways, with a disproportionate impact on Indigenous communities. These realities underscore Pope Francis' insistence that ecological degradation and human suffering are inseparably connected.

Throughout the Marist world, a growing awareness is emerging in Response to the Cry of the Earth. For the last four years, the U.S. Province has convened an Earth Day Weekend bringing together student leaders in Esopus to promote education and action on renewable energy, native planting, biodiversity, water health, and environmental justice. We have also offered Ecology grants to schools to support student-led environmental projects such as community gardens and compost systems. In recent years, six schools in the United States have planted pollinator gardens to protect native plants and promote the health of pollinating insects. Renewable energy systems have been installed at the General House in Rome and on the rooftop of Marist High School in Chicago. At a time of ecological crisis, communities are awakening to the need to respond with prophetic vision and courage to the Cry of the Earth.



Sam C. King with students from Archbishop Molloy High School (NY) on an Ecology Mission trip to Belize.



During the Belize Mission trip, Marist students gathered with local students for a discussion on the impact of Climate Change.

Section II — Listening to the cries of the Earth from territorial experiences by Brother João Gutemberg Sampaio, fms (Brazil)

This heritage also belongs to the children and young people of future generations. Leave them, as an inheritance, a habitable home, better than the one you received (Rule of Life, 33).

In the time of Saint Marcellin Champagnat, there was no talk of ecology or the climate changes that came with the industrial age. However, the lifestyle of Marcellin and the Marist community already revealed care for nature as an important factor for the quality of human life. The Brothers provided for their sustainability, sought to have a healthy life, and took the utmost care not to waste the available resources. They had to help Mother Earth produce what was necessary for its beautification and sustenance, through the cultivation of vegetable gardens, flower gardens, and orchards, integrating the

elements of the earth with the landscape, the rock, and the waters of the Gier River.

When Marcellin expressed the desire for his educational/pastoral project to reach all the dioceses of the world, he envisioned that Marist culture could influence many possible scenarios. The Little Brothers of Mary would experience a culture of fraternity, simplicity, communion, and hardworking life everywhere. The Marist community and mission were born to be generators of full life, especially for children and young people of all times and places.

Pope Francis, with the publication of *Laudato Si'* in 2015, called on all inhabitants of the Planet to convert to a culture of care for people, in deep integration with natural ecosystems. In celebrating the tenth anniversary of the publication of the Encyclical, Pope Leo XIV confirmed the intuitions of *Laudato Si'*, almost relaunching it. In his speech, Pope Leo insisted that integral ecology cannot be seen separately from social justice and care for the poorest: "We cannot love God, whom we cannot see, while despising his creatures." And he added: "We are one family, with one Father. We inhabit the same planet and must care for it together." (Pope Leo XIV, speech at the opening of the Raising Hope Conference, in Castel Gandolfo, October 1, 2025).

In November 2025, COP 30 on climate change was held in Belém, in the heart of the Amazon. The COP30 program and the encyclical *Laudato Si'* were closely connected around the theme of integral ecology, which aims at caring for the Earth and the poor. In this context, Pope Francis' encyclical was considered an ethical compass for climate action. This event, which had great participation from the Catholic Church and civil society movements, sought to unite faith, science and justice for a global response to the environmental crisis. All analyses confirm that it is urgent to save Planet Earth from its destruction. Or rather, it is urgent to save the conditions for human life on Earth.

The Marist educational mission is present in the various biomes and ecosystems responsible for the planet's climate balance. It is also present

in areas of extensive exploitation or scarcity of natural resources, especially water. It is present in large areas that generate environmental pollution, affecting all of humanity. Given that "It is no longer possible to doubt the human – “anthropic” – origin of climate change" (Laudate Deum, no. 11), it is urgent that we ask ourselves: What is the Marist project, what are the educational and pastoral strategies for these different scenarios? If we are negligent today, “Those who will have to suffer the consequences of what we are trying to hide will not forget this failure of conscience and responsibility” (*Laudato Si'* 169).

The Marists of Champagnat, with their charism and educational project, feel highly involved with these challenges and this culture of socio-environmental care. We are called to develop a pastoral care, an education, and a spirituality that care both for people and for their vital environment: integral ecology. Because we are present in 80 countries across all continents and in different biomes, we can develop integrative actions at the local, regional, and international levels, connecting projects, actions, and experiences that focus on defending life.

The current socio-environmental crisis is more challenging for children and young people, the priority audience of the Marist charism. Embracing *Laudato Si'* from a Marist perspective suggests practicing ecological conversion at a personal, community, and institutional level. And it means including in educational and pastoral programs the knowledge, contemplation, and care for all forms of life, in an integration of personal, social, and environmental ecosystems. It is about immersing oneself in a socio-environmental culture that defends the living conditions for current and future generations. The encyclical itself challenges us: “What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?” (*Laudato Si'*, 160). This question lies at the heart of our Marist ecological conversion.

To that end, the Marist Rule of Life sets us the following challenge: “Commit yourself to preserving global harmony, the source of healthy life for our world. Develop a contemplative attitude toward the universe and protect the integrity of our common home: “And

God saw that everything he had made was good” (Gen 1:31; RV 33).

Nowadays, there is much talk about disorders. We can certainly include Nature Deficit Disorder (NDD) in this maladjustment. Many illnesses, imbalances, and aggressions occur because people are far from nature, do not live fraternally with it, and do not appreciate its benefits. Many people do not know how life unfolds, the origin of the products we consume, what it means to defend a tree, a spring, an animal, or people in vulnerable situations. It is not easy to leave our comfort zone to recognize the quality of the water we drink, how much plastic we ingest, how much fluoride and heavy metals are in our bodies, and where they come from and what the great dangers of the serious crisis are climate.

Caring for the future of the Planet also requires knowledge and appreciation of ancestral life forms and their original worldviews, sometimes more integrated with the sources of human existence. We have much to learn from the peoples and cultures that preceded us. It is worth emphasizing that Marist education, Marist spaces, and Marist spirituality are all about the environment, ecology, and Mother Earth: “Our educational and evangelizing programs primarily promote the cultivation of interiority, the development of spirituality, the search for the meaning of life, commitment to solidarity, justice, peace, and care for creation” (Marist Constitutions, 58.2). Therefore, the Marist educational project must be guided, first and foremost, by what it defends: life in all its expressions.

Marist simplicity, a legacy of our origins, is one of the fundamental values for living *Laudato Si'*. The witness of a simple life, using only what is dignified and necessary, can be an antidote to the accelerated world. Modern consumerism, which depletes natural resources and promotes systemic imbalance on the Planet. “We all know that it is not possible to sustain the present level of consumption in developed countries and wealthier sectors of society, where the habit of wasting and discarding has reached unprecedented levels. The exploitation of the planet has already exceeded acceptable limits and we still have not solved the problem of poverty.” (*Laudato Si'* 27).

To have a change of attitude, a change of consciousness is necessary. We must be aware that it is not the Planet that needs to be saved. But we need to save the possibility and quality of human life on planet Earth. It is urgent to remember that “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).

For change to occur, it is urgent to change the way we see and relate to nature and how we use the natural resources that make up the common good. The changes we want are necessary at various levels and scales of daily habits, education, science, culture, politics, economics, ethics, and spirituality. This occurs from small to large realities, from micro to macro.

Therefore, it is important that local reflections and mobilizations are effective in the territories and generate actions that influence structuring processes, especially in politics, economics, and law, at local, national, and international levels. We emphasize what the Marist Rule tells us in no. 79: “It encourages teamwork and cooperation; Join others in supporting the creation and strengthening of networks linked to our Marist mission” It is therefore worthwhile to participate in a coordinated effort between people and institutions, both ecclesial and non-ecclesial, from all areas of our work, who strive to safeguard our Common Home.

As an internationally recognized educational institution, the Marists also form a Marian-style faith community in the following of Jesus: “Like the first community at Pentecost, we recognize that Mary is with us. Her presence calls us to live Marist fraternity and helps us to understand that we form the community of Jesus” (C 35). To that end, our care for our Common Home also has a Marian dimension, wisely outlined in *Laudato Si'*: ““Mary, the Mother who cared for Jesus, now cares with maternal affection and pain for this wounded world. Just as her pierced heart mourned the death of Jesus, so now she grieves for the sufferings of the crucified poor and for the creatures of this world laid waste by human power. Completely transfigured, she now lives with Jesus, and all creatures sing of her fairness. She is the Woman,

“clothed in the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars” (*Rev* 12:1). Carried up into heaven, she is the Mother and Queen of all creation. In her glorified body, together with the Risen Christ, part of creation has reached the fullness of its beauty. She treasures the entire life of Jesus in her heart (cf. *Lk* 2:19,51), and now understands the meaning of all things. Hence, we can ask her to enable us to look at this world with eyes of wisdom” (*Laudato Si'*, 241).

It is in this context of urgent care for our Common Home that we are called to undertake actions that respond to the cries of the earth to ensure that our Planet remains “a home for all, a river of life!”



Br. João Gutemberg Sampaio leading an Ecology Conference in Amazonia

Section III —The Nature of Service by Danny Rodriguez

Service is not what we do to fix the world. Service is how the world was designed to work. I did not come to understand this through theory or study, but through time spent in rural communities where water is scarce, ecosystems are fragile, and people live closest to the consequences of environmental neglect. In those places, the Cry of the Earth is not an idea or a concept. It is something you can see, hear, and feel in everyday life. *Laudato Si'* gives language to what these communities already know. When we step out of relationship with creation and with one another, the Earth responds. It cries out. Service becomes the way we begin to listen and the way we start to return.

My earliest experiences in the Dominican Republic shaped how I understand that cry. I encountered communities surrounded by beauty. Mountains rose in the distance, the land was fertile, and culture was rich and deeply rooted. Yet many families struggled each day to access clean water. Rivers that once sustained life were contaminated. Springs had dried up. Children missed school because of preventable illness, and mothers spent countless hours collecting water that still made their families sick. What I saw was not simply a lack of infrastructure, but a deeper breakdown in relationship between people, land, and the systems meant to protect both.

Over time, it became impossible to separate environmental degradation from human suffering. When water is polluted or depleted, the consequences move quickly and touch every part of life. Health declines, opportunity narrows, and dignity is slowly eroded. The Cry of the Earth is heard first through the lives of those who carry its weight. *Laudato Si'* names this plainly when it reminds us that the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor are one and the same.

Water reveals this truth with particular clarity. It is essential to life, yet easily taken for granted. When ecosystems lose their balance, water sources dry up. When water is no longer available, communities suffer. Through our work at BLUE Missions, we have learned that providing clean water is not only a technical challenge, but also a moral

challenge. It requires patience, humility, and a commitment to stewardship rather than waste.

This understanding aligns closely with the Marist value of presence. True service begins by showing up and staying long enough to listen. Presence is not only physical. It is emotional and spiritual as well. It means resisting the urge to rush solutions and instead taking time to learn names, histories, and the rhythms of daily life. In the communities we serve, presence has taught us that trust must come before progress. When people feel seen and respected, change takes root in ways that last.

Presence also invites simplicity. In rural communities, complexity rarely helps. Simplicity brings focus to what truly matters: clean water, health, dignity, and opportunity. Marist spirituality calls for authenticity and humility, and those values have shaped our approach. We have learned to avoid unnecessary complication and to do the essential things well. Simplicity keeps service grounded. It keeps ego in check. And most importantly, keeps human connection at the center.

As relationships deepen, a sense of family begins to form. Towns stop feeling like project sites and start feeling like communities we belong to. This family spirit changes how the work is carried forward. Responsibility is shared. Success is collective. Water systems are protected, not because an organization installed them, but because the community claims them as its own.

Service becomes relational rather than transactional, rooted in belonging rather than obligation.

Living this way also forced me to confront my own assumptions about faith, justice, and service. In many of the communities we serve, two phrases surface again and again in everyday conversation. *Gracias a Dios* and *Si Dios quiere*. Thanks be to God and God willing. People say them when explaining how they are doing. They say them when talking about tomorrow. They say them in moments of joy and in moments of hardship. These words are not reserved for good days. They reflect a deep trust that life itself is a gift, even when it is fragile.

At first, this mindset unsettled me. I struggled to reconcile such faith with the injustice these communities were experiencing. How could people who lacked basic necessities like clean water and secure shelter respond with gratitude and hope? At times, I felt angry. I wondered whether this faith allowed injustice to persist, or whether trust in God might be preventing people from demanding the change they so clearly deserved.

That tension stayed with me and led me into deeper reflection. Over time, *my perspective shifted*. I began to see that what I was witnessing was not resignation, but resilience. These were some of the most faith-filled people I had ever met, not because their lives were easy, but because their hope had survived so much. Their faith did not make them passive. It grounded them. It gave them the strength to endure, to organize, and to imagine something better for their children.

Through that lens, I came to understand service differently. Service is not about saving others or standing above them. It is about honoring the dignity already present in a community and walking alongside people as partners. This reflects the Marist value of love of work, a commitment to perseverance, dedication, and care in all that we do. When people rooted in faith are met with opportunity, partnership, and the resources they deserve, their impact multiplies.

Their gratitude deepens. Their hope grows stronger. Their influence reaches far beyond their own communities and their faith is spread to everyone they encounter.

Our work has evolved alongside this understanding. Clean water cannot exist without healthy ecosystems. Deforestation, erosion, and climate instability threaten even the strongest infrastructure. In response, we have expanded our focus to include environmental education, recycling, and community-led sustainability efforts. This reflects the vision of integral ecology described in *Laudato Si'*. Caring for people and caring for the planet cannot be separated.

Young people give me particular hope. I have watched students arrive eager to help and leave changed by what they learned through listening. When they encounter water scarcity and environmental

injustice firsthand, the Cry of the Earth becomes personal and service becomes formative. It shapes how they see the world and their responsibility within it.

This is the nature of service. Rivers give water they do not drink. Trees bear fruit they do not consume. Service flows outward. The Cry of the Earth reminds us that we have stepped out of rhythm with the nature of nature itself, and service is how we find our way back. When we listen carefully, act simply, work faithfully, and care for one another like family, we begin to restore not only ecosystems, but relationships.

The challenges before us are real, and they are complex. Still, I remain hopeful. I have seen what happens when communities, young people, and organizations come together with humility and purpose. Service reconnects us to the pattern that sustains all life. In answering the Cry of the Earth, we are not fixing something broken from the outside. We are remembering who we are and choosing to live once again in right relationship with one another, with creation, and with God.



Marist students from Christopher Columbus High School (Miami) on a Blue Missions trip in the Dominican Republic.

“I had the opportunity to travel to the Dominican Republic with my school on a Blue Missions trip. We constructed clean water pipes for rural villages in the mountains. This experience really opened my eyes to the great diversity across our planet. It taught me so much about how many people in our world truly suffer and how everyone is loved by God.”

— MICHAEL BOBUN, STUDENT AT CHRISTOPHER
COLUMBUS HIGH SCHOOL (MIAMI)

Section IV — Buy a Tree: A Province at the Frontlines of Climate Change by Jeni Miller, Star of Sea Province

It is not an overstatement to say that the Star of the Sea Province - the largest Marist Province, comprising eleven countries - feels the impact of environmental degradation more acutely than most. Ten of these countries are island nations, surrounded by the vast Pacific Ocean. Among them is Kiribati, a nation of 33 atolls facing the very real existential threat of being submerged due to rising sea levels.

Life in the Pacific is deeply intertwined with the ocean, making environmental change not an abstract concern but an immediate reality. It is therefore unsurprising that, from its very beginning, the Province has prioritized environmental stewardship noting that the dangers posed by rising sea levels and the loss of natural ecosystems present challenges affecting the communities that make up this diverse and vibrant area.

In 2021, Br Peter Carroll FMS - then Provincial, now Superior General of the Marist Institute - wrote a paper urging the Province to take these concerns seriously. Inspired by Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'* where he invites the global community to an ecological conversion that is inseparable from social justice, urging all people to "hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor" (*Laudato Si'*, 49), Br Peter called for a renewed commitment to ecological responsibility.

It was from this call, and from the lived reality of Pacific communities, that the Buy a Tree (BAT) Project emerged. Initiated by the Laudato Si' Action Committee (LSAC), led by Jenifer Miller, BAT is a creative and practical response to environmental degradation - one that seeks to translate ecological awareness into tangible action, particularly for communities most vulnerable to climate change.

The concept is straightforward yet purposeful. Travelers are invited to "buy a tree" by visiting the website each time they undertake a journey. One tree is planted for a domestic return flight or car trip, and two trees for an international return flight or ocean cruise. Participants can also choose to offset multiple trips across the year.

Funds raised through BAT support the planting of native trees across eleven countries in Asia and the Pacific - from Timor-Leste to Fiji, and from Vanuatu to Cambodia. Each tree is planted and nurtured locally by Marist communities, ensuring that the initiative remains closely connected to the people and places it seeks to serve, particularly across the Asia Pacific region.

The project quickly gained momentum. Within its first year, BAT raised nearly AUD \$5,000, which has been directed towards planting native trees at The Hermitage, a Marist retreat centre in Mittagong, about an hour south of Sydney.

The first BAT trees were planted in November 2025 by student leaders attending the New South Wales/Australian Capital Territory Student Leaders Gathering (SLG). During the formal dinner, principals from eighteen Marist schools were each presented with a young tree on behalf of their school by Jenifer Miller, Chair of the Laudato Si' Action Committee.



In February 2026, the BAT Project was further integrated into Marist formation through the Footsteps 1 adult faith formation program, an introductory experience that invites participants to deepen their understanding of Marist spirituality and mission. As part of the program, Marist staff from across Australia were invited to participate in tree planting at The Hermitage.

For some, this was their first experience of planting a tree. Each participant planted two native trees.



Looking ahead, the BAT Project will continue to support tree planting at The Hermitage during Marist gatherings for both students and staff. At the same time, the Laudato Si' Action Committee has begun building connections with Marist schools in Sydney, Cambodia, and the Solomon Islands to extend the initiative further in to the Province.

As the project grows, there is a deliberate and renewed focus on directing its impact towards the Pacific, where the need is most urgent. Future BAT initiatives aim to prioritize tree planting and ecological restoration in island communities that are already experiencing the consequences of rising sea levels, coastal erosion, and environmental degradation. In doing so, the project seeks not only to offset environmental impact, but to stand in solidarity with Pacific communities whose lives, cultures, and futures are deeply tied to vulnerable ecosystems. This intentional focus ensures that the fruits of the initiative are felt most meaningfully in places where the “cry of the earth and the cry of the poor” are most closely intertwined.

Section V — Concluding Synthesis of Chapter 1

Throughout this first chapter, the Cry of the Earth emerges not only as a warning, but as an invitation to conversion, relationship, and responsibility. From global ecological realities to the wisdom of the Marist tradition, from lived experiences in vulnerable communities to tangible initiatives rooted in solidarity, we are reminded that care for creation is not an optional dimension of our faith, but an essential expression of it. The voices in this chapter reveal that the Cry of the Earth is a lived reality heard in changing climates, in polluted waters, and in the daily lives of those most affected by environmental degradation.

To hear this cry is to be moved to a compassionate response.

As we have seen, this response takes many forms:

- a deepening awareness of our interconnected world
- a commitment to simpler, more sustainable ways of living
- a spirit of presence and accompaniment among those most affected
- and the courage to act together through creative and communal initiatives that protect and restore our common home

To respond to the Cry of the Earth is to rediscover our place within God's creation—not as owners, but as stewards; as members of an interconnected Earth community. It is to choose, with humility and hope, to care for our common home and to become active participants in its healing.

And in listening to this cry, we begin to rediscover not only the Earth—but ourselves.



Student leaders at Marist High School in Chicago stewarding a pollinator garden.



USA Marist Students with local children during a Mission trip to the Dominican Republic



Students planting a fruit tree at the Marist Brothers Center in Esopus during Earth Day 2024.

CHAPTER 2

THE CRY OF THE POOR



Students in the recently constructed Marist Brothers school in Liberia, West Africa. This school, which opened in September 2024, was built with the assistance of the USA Province annual Solidarity campaigns. These campaigns allow young people in USA Marist schools to become educated about the Cry of the Poor across our Marist world and to raise needed funds to support these worthy projects.

“During a trip to Jamaica with the Marist Young Professionals, we visited a home in Kingston where children abandoned at birth now lived. We came prepared with games and face paint, but most importantly, we brought our presence. We held their hands, met their eyes, and sang with them. These were all effortless acts, yet I felt that by simply hanging out, we experienced something deeply human. In those moments, I hoped they felt the love of Jesus.

The day before, at Sunday Mass, the priest asked how many of us truly know someone who is poor, and not just in passing, but by name. How many of us would give them our phone number in case they needed help? Responding to the cry of the poor is more than donations or awareness. It asks us to slow down, see the people around us, and offer not just resources, but our time, presence, and willingness to walk alongside them.”

— ISABELLA DOUGLAS, USA MARIST YOUNG ADULT

Section I — Introduction by Br. Dan

St. Marcellin Champagnat, our Founder, strongly emphasized that the Marist mission be centered on the education and evangelization of young people, especially those who are most neglected. Today, Marists serve in more than eighty countries across the globe, often in some of the poorest and most troubled regions of our world. In fact, Marists are present in seven of the ten countries identified by the United Nations as among the poorest nations on the planet.

In addition, Marist ministries are found in the midst of numerous war zones, including Aleppo, Nigeria, and Sudan. While our ministries are primarily focused on education—with more than 600 schools worldwide—we also engage in many works that directly serve the most marginalized, including refugees, migrants, orphans, and street children.

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis reminds the Church that “the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor are one and the same.” For the Marist family, this truth is anything but abstract. It is encountered daily in the lives of children and communities who bear the consequences of ecological devastation, economic injustice, and violent conflict—realities they did not create, yet are forced to endure.

Our International Solidarity Office in Rome (FMSI) works closely to support many of these Marist efforts, particularly in the most remote and challenged areas of the world. Moreover, FMSI consistently brings the voices of children affected by extreme poverty, war, and other atrocities to the forefront. In its role as an official United Nations representative and advocate for the rights of children, FMSI regularly raises these concerns at the United Nations Office in Geneva.

Recently, I participated in a mission trip with USA Marist Young Professionals to Jamaica, West Indies. During this immersion experience, we encountered some of the most impoverished people I have ever met. One day, we visited the region of Black River, the area hardest hit by Hurricane Melissa in November 2025. Hundreds of homes, buildings, schools, churches, and hospitals had been completely destroyed.

That morning, we spent time at a makeshift school run by the Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary. The original school lay in ruins. Classes now take place in the shell of a nearby former church, with tarps serving as a roof.

While speaking with Sr. Elizabeth, one of the inspiring sisters serving at the school, about the hurricane’s impact on the community, she shared that the entire community simply cried together for weeks—until there were no tears left. Her words captured, in the simplest and most devastating way, what Pope Francis names as the cry of the poor. It was not a cry of anger or accusation, but a communal lament born of loss, powerlessness, and profound vulnerability. In that shared crying, the community gave voice to suffering too deep for words—a cry that demands not pity—but accompaniment, justice, and conversion.

The Marist mission calls us to remain steadfast in solidarity with those who endure such realities. A Marist response to this cry does not begin with strategies or solutions, but with presence—standing among the poor, listening deeply, and allowing their suffering to shape our hearts, our choices, and our mission.

Events such as Hurricane Melissa reveal an uncomfortable truth: environmental crises magnify existing inequalities. Those who contribute least to climate change are often those who suffer its harshest consequences.

I witnessed this firsthand in September 2025 when I had the privilege of attending our Institute's 23rd General Chapter in the Philippines. During that month-long gathering, we experienced the resilience of the Filipino people as they endured two typhoons and two major earthquakes. Like the Philippines, many of the world's poorest nations—despite having minimal impact on global warming and carbon emissions—are disproportionately affected by environmental disasters and are least equipped to respond to their devastating consequences.

The cry of the poor, so powerfully articulated in *Laudato Si'*, is not a distant echo for the Marist family; it is a daily reality encountered in classrooms without roofs, communities displaced by war, and children whose futures are threatened by forces beyond their control. To hear this cry is to be changed by it. Through a Marist lens, it calls us to stand close to those who suffer, to listen with humility, and to allow their lived experience to shape both our personal conversion and our communal response.

Our Marist document on spirituality, *Water from the Rock* (hereafter WFTR), further illustrates this point: “The cries of the world, especially those of poor people, touch the heart of God and ours as well. The depth of God’s compassion challenges us to be men and women whose hearts have no bounds since in his infinite love, God continues to be totally involved with all men and women and today’s world, with its disappointments and hopes.” (WFTR, 127)

As this chapter will explore, embracing *Laudato Si'* within the Marist tradition invites us not only to recognize injustice, but to recommit

ourselves—faithfully and courageously—to a mission rooted in presence, compassion, and hope for a more just and sustainable world.



Br. Dan reflects on the devastation wrought by Hurricane Melissa in the town of Black River, Jamaica during a mission trip with the Marist Missionary Sisters, the Missionaries of Christ, the Mercy Sisters as well as Mother Theresa's Missionaries of Charity in January 2026

The global reality of the Cry of the Poor also finds expression in local histories and communities. The following reflection grounds this call within the lived experience of Lawrence, Massachusetts.

Section II - The Cry of the Poor and Laudato Si' by Jim O'Neill USA

The Marist Brothers have been committed to the poor in the old mill city of Lawrence, Massachusetts, since 1892. The Marist presence in Lawrence began with a response to immigrant need:

“As the size of the French community in Lawrence increased, the parishioners of St. Anne's Catholic Church felt the need for a school where their children could receive a solid religious education while preserving the French language. Fr. Godin, pastor of St. Anne Parish, opened a school in a wood-frame building for both boys and girls in the 1880s. In 1892, a brick building was constructed for the boys, and instruction was entrusted

to the Brothers of Mary (Marist Brothers). The girls remained in the original building and were taught by the Sisters of the Good Shepherd.”

In 1935, Brother Florentius started Central Catholic High School “to make Jesus known and loved” through the education of poor children and young people.

The Central Catholic Marist community continues its mission today in responding to Pope Francis’ call to listen to the cry of the poor. Pope Francis highlights the key connection between the welfare of the planet and the welfare of the poor in *Laudato Si’*. For all Marists, this connection is clear. As Mary is our Marist Good Mother, so too is Mother Earth a good mother.

The poor bear the brunt of our climate crisis and are disproportionately affected by it. As has often been noted, *Laudato Si’* is a social encyclical, not merely an environmental one. Within this document, Pope Francis mentions “climate” 14 times, while “the poor” appears 59 times.

Lawrence, Massachusetts, is a classic example of how profit has come on the backs of both the poor and the earth. Of the children who went to work in the mills at age 14, a third died before age 25 from lung diseases caused by dust and poor living conditions—far below the national average at the time. This stark reality demonstrates how industrialization not only affects the environment but also devastates human life.

There were women mill workers who suffered severe injuries, including scalping, due to dangerous working conditions and inadequate training with industrial weaving machines. Tuberculosis, pneumonia, and lung damage from inhaling cotton dust were all too common. Environmental impacts included polluted brownfields from hazardous chemicals and asbestos contamination—effects that, in some instances, persist today.

“A single laundry load of polyester clothes can discharge 700,000 microplastic fibers that can end up in the food chain” (reported 9/12/2025).

For years, the Merrimack and Spicket Rivers in Lawrence were polluted by dye waste from the mills—chemicals that polluted water, blocked sunlight (harming aquatic life), and posed serious health risks, including carcinogenic and mutagenic effects.

Yet today, Lawrence is a city of hope. Mills have been cleaned and repurposed into housing, healthcare centers, nonprofit agencies, and businesses. The Merrimack River is considerably cleaner and more usable for recreation compared to its heavily polluted state decades ago—a success story of the Clean Water Act of 1972.

The Marist community continues to be part of that hope by lifting up the lowly, as called for in the Magnificat (Luke 1:46–55). Lazarus House Ministries, founded by a Marist Brother in 1980, provided critical services last year—food, shelter, and clothing—to over 30,000 guests.

The Marist Brothers continued that tradition by opening the Marist House of Hospitality in 2022. High school and college students, young adults, and adults stay for three to five days and volunteer at the Lazarus Shelter for the Homeless—cooking meals, playing with children, and supporting families. They also serve at the Cor Unum Meal Center, which provides approximately 300 meals per day, and assist with food pantry efforts that distribute 1,800 bags of groceries weekly.

As Matt Corrado, a Campus Minister at Archbishop Molloy High School in New York City, expressed: “Our students have encountered Christ through our volunteer work at Lazarus House.” They experience the motto of the Marist House of Hospitality: “Where strangers become friends.”

They have also worked at the Giving Garden in North Andover, an organic initiative that grows fresh fruits and vegetables for those facing food insecurity in the Greater Lawrence area.

At the Marist House of Hospitality, ecological practices have been implemented in response to *Laudato Si’*. The community composts, recycles, reduces plastic use, and has insulated the house to decrease

reliance on fossil fuels—with support from Mass Saves, a statewide energy efficiency program.

Laudato Si' challenges us to show special concern for the poor and the environment because they are so interdependent. Lazarus House in working with the “least favored” addresses systemic injustice. Their affordable housing program has been a game changer. People live in affordable housing, pay a small rent, are offered classes on finance, and are shown how to budget. These efforts lift the guests into independence after two years and offer them the dignity that comes from providing for yourself and others. These same people pay it forward.

Marist Spirit manifested in simplicity is alive in Lawrence listening to the cries of the poor and the groaning of the earth. This simplicity is needed now more than ever. It is countercultural to our conspicuous, consumerism that started over a 100 years ago as evidenced by this comment from Paul Mazur of Lehman Brothers in the Harvard Business Review in 1927.

“We must shift America from a need to a desired culture, people must be trained to desire, to want new things even before the old had been entirely consumed. We must shape a new mentality in America. Man's desires must overshadow his needs.”

That same Lehman Brothers, a major US investment bank, collapsed and filed for the largest bankruptcy in US history on September 15th, 2008 after having been in business since the civil war. This is what a consumer culture can lead to.

How amazing and timely would it be for us, Americans, to shift our thinking from Paul Mazur to Mahatma Gandhi's great insight, “There is enough for everyone's needs, but not for everyone's greed.”



Jim O'Neill and local Marists of Champagnat spending a day serving our Homeless Brothers and Sister at Lazarus House in Lawrence, MA.



Marist Young Professionals on their service trip to the Marist House of Hospitality in Lawrence, MA.

From North America, we now turn to the lived Marist experience in Asia, where the cry of the poor continues to shape mission in deeply personal ways.

Section III — The Cry of the Poor: A Laudato Si’ Reflection from a Marist Heart by Br. Nguyen Viet Bao, FMS – Vietnam

Among the many powerful invitations of Laudato Si’, the principle of the cry of the poor stands at the center. Pope Francis reminds us that the wounds of the earth and the wounds of the poor are inseparable; the suffering of one echoes the suffering of the other.

To hear the cry of the poor is not only to notice their needs, but to allow their lives, their wisdom, and even their vulnerabilities to shape our own way of living and serving.

For those of us, Marists of Champagnat, this call resonates deeply. Saint Marcellin Champagnat built Marist education upon a simple conviction: “We must love them and love them all equally.” The most fragile children, the most neglected families, and the most overlooked communities were always the privileged place of his mission.

Marist spirituality is, at its heart, a spirituality shaped by listening: to the young, to suffering, and to the margins of society where Mary herself stands quietly as a compassionate presence.

When we bring the principle of the cry of the poor into the heart of our Marist life, something profound happens: the people we serve become our teachers. Their resilience, their wisdom, and their way of living become a Gospel written not in ink, but in daily gestures.

Over the years of serving as a Marist Brother—whether with returnees from Cambodia, at the Ta Do project, or among ethnic minorities in Nam Nung—this truth has revealed itself repeatedly.

In many places where the Marist mission unfolds, we do not begin with big strategies or elaborate programs. We begin with presence. With the Ta Do project, our work with children unable to attend school was intentionally simple: teaching them to read and write, help

them with basic mathematics, and, perhaps most importantly, being presence among them. The slow, faithful rhythm of returning day after day for seven years became the real pedagogy. Our consistency told the children that their lives mattered, that learning was possible, and that they were not forgotten. Many of these children lived in situations where poverty was more than a lack of material goods; it was the experience of being overlooked. Our presence, even before our lessons, was a response to the “cry” they carried inside. In *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis insists that responding to the poor means more than offering services. It means acknowledging their dignity and allowing our lives to be touched by theirs. In the Marist world, this takes shape in the simple ministries that Br. François, Br. Laurent, and the first brothers lived, small acts, small schools, small communities formed around relationship rather than influence or prestige.

Living in Nam Nung, Daknong opened a different kind of classroom. Here, the people taught me a form of richness that cannot be counted or measured. Their sense of community, woven through sincerity, solidarity, and mutual care, revealed a way of living that stands in contrast to the fractured pace of modern society. When someone fell ill, the village came to visit. When a family mourned a death, neighbors stopped their work, gathering around the grieving family with prayer and presence. They said little, but their companionship spoke volumes. When there was joy, a wedding, a new harvest, a celebration, the whole community rejoiced. This was a place where wealth was measured in compassion, not possessions. Their generosity came not from abundance but from the conviction that life is only meaningful when shared. Living among them made me see more clearly the paradox at the heart of the Gospel: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven” (Mt 5:3). Their poverty was not simply economic; it was a doorway to God. In their simplicity, I recognized the face of a God who lives close to the earth, close to daily labor, close to human fragility. Their lives echoed the very poverty of Christ himself, who “though He was rich, became poor for our sake, so that by His poverty we might become rich” (2 Cor 8:9).

In the Marist world, this kind of wisdom shapes our spirituality. Marcellin himself was poor, limited in resources, lack of institutional

support and poor in security. But he was rich in trust, rich in determination, and rich in the conviction that God works through simplicity. The communities I encountered lived this same Gospel logic with an authenticity that humbled me. I came to help, yet I discovered that I was the one being taught. One of the transformations that *Laudato Si'* invites is a shift in perspective: to stop seeing the poor as people who “lack,” and instead to recognize in them a privileged presence of Christ. In Ta Do, this became real in countless moments.

There were days when families, despite having very little, would insist on sharing food with us. Their bowls of rice worked tirelessly under the heat, tasted of generosity far greater than the food itself. Their laughter, shared at the end of long days, carried a strength born not from comfort but from resilience. Their prayers, often simple and whispered, revealed a depth of trust in God’s care. And the children, barefoot, curious, full of life, became living reminders of the very heart of the Marist mission. They did not demand much: just a teacher, a friend, someone who believed they were worth spending time with. Teaching them letters and numbers was important, but listening to their stories, learning their songs, and simply being present with them often mattered even more.

Every gesture, every act of kindness, every shared moment became a place where Christ quietly revealed Himself. The cry of the poor is not only a cry of need; it is also a cry of revelation, a voice that tells us where God is waiting to be found. Working among the poor does not only change the lives of those we serve; it changes us. It alters the way we stand in the world, what we value, and how we understand God. The people taught me to slow down. They taught me to listen, not just to voices, but to wind threading through trees, to children’s laughter bouncing off the mountains, and to the subtle movements of grace in daily life. They taught me that mission is less about bringing God to people and more about recognizing God already present there, quietly and faithfully. This is the heart of Marist spirituality: to see the world with the eyes of Mary. Mary does not stand at the center; she stands beside. She does not impose; she accompanies. She does not speak many words; she listens deeply. Her way is a way of gentleness, humility, and hidden presence, a way deeply aligned with the

experiences of the poor and with the vision of *Laudato Si'*. To hear the cry of the poor, then, is to respond with a Marian heart. It is to allow ourselves to become smaller, quieter, more attentive. It is to discover that the poor are not only people we serve; they are people who reveal Christ to us and reshape our discipleship.

Across the Marist world, the cry of the poor continues to shape our mission. In refugee centers, informal schools, child protection programs, rural communities, urban margins, and migrant support initiatives, Marists commit themselves to the most vulnerable with a presence that is patient, compassionate, and sustained. This commitment is not only expressed in social projects; it is expressed in attitudes, listening, accompaniment, respect, shared life, and the belief that every young person, no matter how poor or fragile, carries an inherent dignity. The spirit of Champagnat lives wherever Brothers, lay Marists, teachers, volunteers, and youth walk beside the marginalized with the humility and tenderness of Mary. The cry of the poor becomes a guiding voice: not only calling us to respond but calling us to be transformed. To live among the poor is to enter a sacred space. Their lives reveal that poverty can be a place of deep grace. Not a grace that glorifies suffering, but a grace that uncovers what truly matters, relationship, trust, gratitude, community, and faith. In the Marist missions here in our side of the world, I witnessed this grace every day. Their poverty stripped away illusions and left behind what the Gospel treasures most: openness to God. In their lives, I met a Christ who is humble, gentle, and close to the ground, a Christ who invites us to become rich not in possessions, but in love.

In the end, the cry of the poor is a call to solidarity, but also a call to discipleship. They teach us, shape us, and remind us of who we are before God. They reveal the face of Christ. They offer us the chance to live the Gospel not in theory but in relationship. Responding to their cry is not simply a duty. It is a gift, a place where we discover our own poverty, our own need for God, and our own path toward becoming more deeply Marist.



Br. Dan with Br. Nguyen Viet Bao and Br. Réal Sauvageau, who lead our Marist Mission efforts in Vietnam.

In Latin America, this same call takes on new urgency within contexts of migration, inequality, and ecological fragility.

Section IV — A Reflection by Maryury Yurley Morales Pachón, Norandina Province – Colombia

Speaking of “Responding to the Cry of the Poor” from a Marist spirituality perspective is not a conceptual exercise or a programmatic statement. It is, above all, an embodied experience.

The cry of the poor is not an abstract category; it has a face, a name, a history. In Colombia, this cry resonates in the voices of migrant children in Maicao, in displaced families in Bogotá, and in communities living amidst social precarity and environmental fragility. Responding to this cry, from the perspective of *Laudato Si'*, implies recognizing that the ecological crisis and social injustice are not separate realities, but rather expressions of the same wound.

Pope Francis reminds us that everything is intimately connected and that environmental degradation cannot be understood without considering human and social degradation (*Laudato Si'*, 91 and 139). Where the land is exploited without limits, human beings are also discarded. Where ecosystems are fragmented, community bonds are also fractured. For this reason, the preferential option for the poor is not only a pastoral priority: it is an integral ecological imperative. The defense of human life, from conception to death, is inseparably linked to the care of all forms of life on Earth.

The Marist tradition, inspired by Saint Marcellin Champagnat, was born precisely as a concrete response to the vulnerability of children in contexts of exclusion. Champagnat understood that education was an act of justice and hope. Today, in the context of the socio-environmental crisis, this foundational intuition acquires a new depth: educating for dignity is also educating for the care of our common home. Integral ecology is not an added dimension to the Marist mission; it is its natural development in a time marked by planetary deterioration and global inequality.

In the Marist social works in Colombia, this principle is made concretely visible. At Corazón Sin Fronteras (Heart Without Borders) in Maicao, where complex migration dynamics and structural poverty converge, the response to the cry of the poor translates into educational processes that strengthen children and adolescents' knowledge and exercise of their rights. Through film screenings and discussions, rights walks, and parent workshops, a social awareness is fostered that links human dignity with environmental stewardship. It is not just about informing, but about forming critical thinkers capable of recognizing themselves as part of a community and an ecosystem.

The implementation of microclimates and educational gardens in this project is not an accessory, but a visible sign of integral ecology. Preparing organic fertilizer, reusing waste for composting, planting cassava and squash in prepared soil, and using natural insecticides made by the participants themselves: each educational gesture communicates that the land is not a resource to be exploited, but a gift

to be cultivated responsibly. In a context marked by scarcity and forced migration, producing food locally not only strengthens food security but also teaches resilience to climate change and social adversity.

In this experience, the cry of the poor and the cry of the land converge. Children who have experienced displacement and uncertainty find in the garden a space of symbolic stability. They learn that planting involves waiting, caring, and trusting. They discover that the cycle of life requires patience and collaboration. In the words of *Laudato Si'*, education fosters a “loving awareness” of our common home (*Laudato Si'*, 220), where moderation and care spring from a sense of belonging.

Similarly, at Corazón Sin Fronteras Santa Fe in Bogotá, the sociocultural dimension of the project integrates art, recreation, a gender-sensitive approach, and human rights to promote social transformation. The results show significant progress in communication skills, cultural participation, and family engagement. Beyond the percentage indicators—which demonstrate improvements in oral expression, active listening, and coexistence—a deeper transformation is perceived: the building of relationships based on respect and inclusion.

Strengthening dialogue and assertive communication is no small feat in contexts marked by structural violence. When a child learns to express their emotions without aggression and to listen to others with empathy, social peace is being sown. The encyclical reminds us that environmental deterioration and social degradation advance together (*Laudato Si'*, 48). Investing in communication skills, peaceful conflict resolution, and collaborative work is, therefore, a concrete way to respond to the socio-environmental crisis.

The recycling corner and the school garden in Bogotá reinforce this vision. Sorting waste, understanding the impact of garbage on the environment, transforming organic waste into useful compost, and connecting with the Botanical Garden and public entities like Social Integration: all of this forms a network of shared responsibility. It shifts the focus from a throwaway culture—which turns both people and things into waste—to a culture of care, where every element has value.

For many families, recycling is a means of subsistence; recognizing its positive environmental impact dignifies practices that have historically been made invisible.

The results show significant progress in dialogue skills (80%) and in strengthening interpersonal relationships (75%). These figures are not just statistics: they reveal processes of humanization. In environments marked by exclusion, the possibility of building respectful and collaborative relationships is a profoundly transformative act. Thus, integral ecology is not limited to the natural realm, but encompasses the quality of human relationships, educational justice, and social inclusion.

Responding to the cry of the poor also implies coordinating efforts with public and community actors. Collaboration with government entities to guarantee access to education demonstrates that the Marist mission is not self-contained, but seeks to have a structural impact. Pope Francis warns that it is not enough to alleviate symptoms; it is necessary to challenge the roots of inequality (*Laudato Si'*, 49). Facilitating school placements, supporting family processes, and overcoming structural barriers means working on those roots.

In this sense, the Colombian experience is part of a broader dynamic within the global Marist Family. The *Laudato Si'* Action Platform invites us to undertake long-term processes of regeneration, recognizing that ecological conversion is both personal and communal. Living this process in a Marist way means doing so with simplicity, closeness, and a family spirit. It is not about grand pronouncements, but about everyday practices that shape a new culture.

A culture of care: care for children, care for the earth, care for relationships.

Laudato Si' insists that access to water, food, and a healthy environment is a fundamental right linked to human dignity (*Laudato Si'*, 30). When a social project is implemented, Marist spirituality brings a particular nuance to this response. Mary, a woman of listening and availability, teaches us to perceive the cry before it becomes a roar.

Champagnat reminds us that education is the privileged path to transforming realities. From this twofold inspiration, the response to the cry of the poor becomes concrete. When a community garden is not merely a theory, when composting practices are promoted, when communication skills and values of equity are strengthened, that right is being defended in a concrete way. It is making visible that integral ecology is not a theory, but an educational practice.

As a global Marist Family, we are called to deepen this coherence. The response to the cry of the poor cannot be limited to isolated projects; it must permeate our institutional decisions, our lifestyles, our budgetary choices, and our pedagogical methodologies. The ecological conversion proposed by the Pope involves reviewing consumption habits, power structures, and educational models. It involves moving from indifference to co-responsibility, from fragmentation to interconnection.

In Colombia, the experiences described show that this path is already underway. Every microclimate created, every seed sown, every child who learns to dialogue without violence, every family that feels part of the educational process is a sign of hope. These are not spectacular actions; they are silent processes that regenerate social fabric and ecological awareness. In them, the intuition that caring for children is caring for the earth, and that protecting the earth is guaranteeing a future for children, is realized.

Living *Laudato Si'* from a Marist perspective is, ultimately, to accept that the cry of the poor is the theological locus where God speaks to us today. It is to recognize that the educational mission cannot be separated from environmental and social commitment. It is to believe that transformation begins with small, consistent gestures that, sustained in community, become culture.

Faced with the complexity of the socio-environmental crisis, the temptation to discouragement might arise.

However, the Pope reminds us that humanity still possesses the capacity to collaborate in building our common home (*Laudato Si'*, 13). The Marist social works in Colombia bear witness to this capacity.

Where exclusion seemed to prevail, hope germinates. Where the land seemed barren, life springs forth. Where dialogue was fractured, respectful speech is reborn.

Responding to the cry of the poor means listening, accompanying, educating, and transforming. It is choosing an integral ecology that embraces human dignity and environmental sustainability as inseparable dimensions. It is living, today, Champagnat's dream on a planetary scale: forming good Christians and virtuous citizens who, with creativity and enthusiasm, build a more just, compassionate society, reconciled with creation.

The following pictures highlight young children engages in our Marist efforts at Corazón Sin Fronteras (Heart Without Borders) in Maicao, Colombia







Section V — Concluding Synthesis of Chapter 2

Through the essays of chapter 2, the cry of the poor emerges as a unifying call within the Marist family—a call that is at once local and global, personal and structural, ecological and spiritual.

From Jamaica to Lawrence, from Vietnam to Colombia, the voices of the poor do more than call for response—they invite transformation.

To hear this cry is to be changed by it.

To respond is to become more deeply Marist.



Marist Young Professionals on a Mission trip to Jamaica, West Indies.

CHAPTER 3

ECOLOGICAL ECONOMICS



(Previous page: *Student leaders from Christopher Columbus High School with representatives from Campus for Green, turning plastic waste into hats, lanyards, pens, and benches. The student Green Team leaders and the school's administration have worked hard to create a vibrant and inspiring circular economy for their community's plastic waste.*)

“Caring for our common home means being good stewards of all our gifts and resources and using them wisely and responsibly to build a more sustainable future, so that God's creation can continue to flourish.”

— ALYSSA BISONO, GRADUATE OF ARCHBISHOP
MOLLOY AND USA GREEN TEAM MEMBER

Section I — Introduction by Sam C. King

The terms *economics* and *ecology* both derive from the Greek root word, *oikos*, meaning “home” or “household.” Economics, in particular, stems from the Greek, *oikonomia*, meaning household management. As we consider ecology and economics together, then, we must ask: how can we be better caretakers of the one planet we share?

There is a growing understanding that conventional forms of economics are unjust and unsustainable on a planet with finite resources. A “throwaway culture” is pervasive, with unchecked consumerism and limitless development fueling climate change, species extinction, and toxic pollution. As of 2026, we have also breached seven of the nine planetary boundaries essential for the Earth's integral functioning.”

Meanwhile, the richest 1% of humanity now holds more wealth than the bottom 95% combined, while emitting more than twice as much carbon pollution as the poorest half of humanity. In *Laudate Deum* (2023), Pope Francis reflects on this profound inequality: “If we consider that emissions per individual in the United States are about two times greater than those of individuals living in China, and about seven times greater than the average of the poorest countries, [44] we can state that a broad change in the irresponsible lifestyle connected

with the Western model would have a significant long-term impact. As a result, along with indispensable political decisions, we would be making progress along the way to genuine care for one another” (Laudate Deum, 72). It is clear that those with privilege in affluent nations have a particular responsibility to transform economic systems and curb excessive consumption.

Around the world, there is a growing movement toward new modes of ecological economics that sustain the health of both people and Planet. Many alternative models are emerging, such as degrowth, green growth, and doughnut economics—as well as alternative models to Gross Domestic Product as a measure of well being. This shift is at the heart of the Economy of Francesco, a global movement of economists, entrepreneurs, and changemakers spawned by Pope Francis in 2019 that seeks to build new economic systems in the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of ecology. In other words, how do we create an economy that ensures the dignity of people and the health of ecosystems?

New modes of economics are emerging that mirror the regenerative processes of nature by emphasizing balance, reciprocity, and circularity. In these systems, the outputs of economic processes are recycled into new inputs rather than thrown into landfills or other ecosystems. Such dynamics are present in compost systems, such as the one at the community garden at Marist High School in Eugene, in which the organic matter from paper, cardboard, and food scraps biodegrades into the inorganic nutrients necessary for plant uptake.

Another example can be seen in the initiative of Andrew Vasta ‘24 of Christopher Columbus High School, who recognized the problem of plastic waste on his school campus. Together with Ms. Christine Taylor, he forged a partnership with Geared for Green, turning plastic waste into new apparel such as lanyards, pens, hats, and even school benches. As a result, in the 2024 spring semester, the school diverted 1,295 pounds from a landfill, while recycling 5,022 aluminum cans and 28,809 plastic bottles. Such inspiring stories from student leaders are examples of what ecological economics can look like in practice.



Mr. Sam C. King presenting to Marist students at the USA Earth Day Conference held annually at the Marist Brothers Center in Esopus. During the conference, students are introduced to each of the seven principles of Laudato Si'.

Section II — A Reflection by Joe Clair USA

There are only two inexhaustible resources available to humanity: the energy of the sun and human ingenuity.

For the last thirty years of my environmental advocacy, that phrase has passed my lips more than any other. It conveys the simplicity of what we can aspire to as caretakers of our common home, while allowing for all the complexity and nuance of the systems we have built to sustain life. So much of the material we use for food, shelter, and maintaining health come from energy systems that rely on the sun. The methods by which we have made the most effective and efficient use of those materials – and the other gifts of the earth that complement them – to the betterment of human quality of life, spring from that grace we have received to observe, understand, and predict life and the world around us in a way that can make our lives better.

Let me pause here.

So, the first draft of this reflection just ran with that ethereal tone and got into how nearly three billion years of earthly development and ten thousand years of human evolution provided us clear principles for living within the means of the systems provided for us here on Earth. It talked about how we observed the natural world around us and used our intelligence to protect ourselves, sustain ourselves, and provide us with the ability to deliver lives of meaning to billions of people. Then how two hundred years ago, our ingenuity started to unlock secrets of the natural world in a way our ancestors could barely fathom. And how by unlocking chemical and nuclear energy and controlling that energy to provide electrical energy throughout our lives, we created an existence that not only changed how we interact with the natural world, but also how we interact with each other.

Then it dug deep into Pope Francis' *Laudato Sí* and how that changed the dynamic of the conversations for Catholics. How he sparked a conversation by encouraging us to take stock and re-examine what it means to be caretakers in dominion over God's creation. How through *Laudato Sí*, (and later *Laudate Deum*), we were charged with looking humbly at our existence, and considering whether a better approach to the relationship with our natural world was not only desirable, but possible. In addition, we were asked to look at how our actions affect the lives of others and hold ourselves accountable for those actions in meaningful ways.

Finally, it delved into the early conversations with Br. Pat McNamara around what a "green Marist school" might look like. About how it needed to be a place of learning, full of curiosity, but it also needed to recognize our limits, not just financial, but physical as well. Yet those limits could not drive the conversation. As with everything, we needed to look to Mary's example of bringing Jesus into every moment and really sit with the questions that surround us. On one hand, however imperfect the systems that support us may be, can we deliver on an education mission if the school does not exist because we exhaust our financial resources? On the other, what does it say about us as people if the only way we can support an important education mission is to cause harm to other people's lives through our hubris and lack of effort?

That reflection would have earned a stellar grade in any theology class.

And although all of that is real, it is not the reality of how things get done, or how people get motivated, or how we change things. It is not how Marcellin responded when he saw the need for a change in how we approach a shared life with others. And it is especially not how we do things on the South Side of Chicago.

The reality of the moment we face is that there is so much inertia from the systems that surround our lives, that simply being on the right side of an issue, or even having a good story, or even having a connection through a shared experience of loving Christ is not enough to make things happen.

It takes work – conversation, patience, perseverance and sometimes a bit of luck.

Within the last ten years, Marist Chicago has delivered a state-of-the-art, green science building, and Energy Star campus, and a nearly 600 kW solar project on a large portion of the main campus' roof. In addition, students have pushed the administration to change cafeteria and operational practices to align their school with the teachings of our faith. None of this happened without a lot of work and a lot of conversation and a lot of luck. It took people raising the questions fifteen years ago about how to make Marist greener while new Chicago Public Schools were building some of the greenest schools in the country. It took raising the issues around green buildings and clean energy to identify people who cared about the benefits and build alliances. It took regular questioning about the obstacles to improving Marist Chicago's ecological footprint, and humbly listening to the concerns to fully understand where the opportunities lie.

When we commit to treating others as “life made conscious” that means doing so even when they do not share the values we have or when they present an opinion that we disagree with. By sitting with those individuals and being present in those conversations and respecting the path they took to get where they are on an issue, we establish a foundation of communication on which action can build.

Again, I'm getting a little too fancy with the language. There was a lot of, "You really believe that" and "that's nice but we have to be realistic" and "that can't happen, do you want us to close". And in response, a lot of "Yes, I do" and "we both feel like we are being realistic" and "wanting us to be better is not the same as wanting us to close". But we kept coming back into the room, so to speak. Sometimes the conversation was light, sometimes a little heavier, and sometimes contentious. Still, even as some people left the school community and others joined, the conversations kept happening.

Looking back on how it all finally came together within this "rough and tumble" world of the South Side of Chicago, a couple of things come to the fore. First, those with the capacity to act, did so. Second, some stepped forward courageously and would not let the conversation die out. Third, people on all sides found common ground and turned the discussion away from why things could not get done to finding ways to make it happen.

And as was stated earlier, there was some luck involved.

It took a facilities manager looking for every opportunity to stretch their budget taking advantage of utility incentives to replace light fixtures and lower the energy bill.

It took the Brothers looking at a building that had been their home for over fifty years and realizing it was better used to serve the education mission.

Then it took builders and designers and advocates coming together to reuse as much of that gift of a building as possible to preserve both the history and the embodied energy of that building to provide a foundation for the next fifty years.

And it took faculty and alumni and students to keep pushing for a building that does more with less, innovating where it can while rooting itself in the core concepts of science.

It took those responsible for maintaining the campus to decide to build a culture of caretaking and thinking ahead so that the leaders could connect the dots between dedicating resources to maintaining as

a means to prolong the life and energy of a building so as to avoid the higher costs of neglect.

It took students traveling to join others in community, share stories, and bring those stories back to their classmates and school leaders.

It took a tenacious board member who refused to stop asking the question: “We know what’s right, the Pope told us what’s right, and Jesus told us what’s right, so why aren’t we doing anything about it?” Until no one had a good answer why.

And after all that and so much more, that’s when the luck came in. As the old saying goes, “*Luck favors the prepared,*” and prepared we were.

Once a faith leader challenged us to figure out “how” instead of asking “why”, we were ready. When they put their money where their mouth was and brought resources and inspiration, we were ready. And when they said, “Meet with some people and see if this is something worth thinking about,” we were ready.

When that happened, we had already built the base through conversation and listening. We understood why the wider financial system had failed us as caretakers, and how we might be able to leverage some new opportunities to get around those challenges. And when the dust settled, Marist Chicago had a highly energy-efficient building with a main building of simple but efficient elegance, a state of the art wing with innovative yet resilient support systems, and an on-site energy system that not only reduces the impact the school’s operations has on others outside our walls, but also does it in a way that saves financial resources and allows them to be funneled back into the education mission.

This process also showed the way for how we can continue pursuit of the audacious goal of eliminating the harmful impacts associated with our buildings and systems, all the while growing our education mission. Doing this in community demonstrated that caring for our common home does not mean neglecting our mission, it enhances it. As we consider how to fully electrify our building, add more clean energy, reconnect with the earth, and build a circular economy that sustains life while harming none...

We have the blueprint,

We have the ingenuity,

We have the sun,

And we have the Son and our bold and brave mother Mary to guide us and remind us that when we work as brothers, sisters, and siblings in Christ, we can accomplish anything.



An aerial image of the rooftop solar project at Marist High School in Chicago completed in 2025.

Section III — A Reflection by Br. Rick Carey, USA

The “Builders of a New Hermitage”, Message of the 23rd General Chapter, invites us to a conversion of heart and mind – one that calls us to adopt a strategic vision and comprehensive approach that prioritizes long-term sustainability. Amidst the multitude of challenges our mission faces each day, it is vital for us to utilize the expertise and experience of the Church and the Marist community to help shape the use of our financial resources to care for our common home.

The USA Province Finance Team is responsible for the protection and overall growth of our patrimony. We have integrated the Marist values into the principles and framework of our policies and seek to generate

the finances needed to sustain the life and mission of the province. This provides the foundation on which we can integrate the financial dimension into the strategic plan of the province as it navigates through the ever-changing demands of our world. Our journey is a shared responsibility and encourages us to expand our view to search for dynamic and life-giving alternatives that helps build a better world.

Our current policies include:

Socially responsible investments should positively contribute to the common good and be guided by the traditional Catholic ethical considerations. Balancing the consistent-life ethical principles and the prudent investor rule will require judgment on the part of each money manager and the Committee. Hence, the following are offered as some general guiding principles for the investing:

- i. *Sacredness of Life. The principle is to value the sacredness of life by not directly investing in corporations that have primary practices or develop products that are directly destructive of human life, most notably abortion and euthanasia.*
- ii. *Human rights. The principle is to foster rights for all people by not investing in corporations that do extensive business with governments that have a history of gross human rights violations – and in corporations that have consistently been recognized for grossly exploiting their employees or customers either in foreign countries, especially less developed countries, or in the United States.*
- iii. *Nondiscrimination and Equal Opportunity. The principle is to cherish each person, respecting his or her human dignity, by not investing in corporations that have consistently practiced racial, ethnic, religious or gender discrimination in foreign countries or the United States.*
- iv. *Nuclear Weapons. The principle is to preserve human life by not investing directly in corporations whose primary business is nuclear weapons research, production, deployment and servicing.*

- v. Environment. *The principle is to respect the environment and preserve it for the well-being of future generations by not investing in corporations that have been cited for repeated or gross ecological violations.*

The Province Finance Policy for the independent boards of our USA ministries challenges them to incorporate these strong principles as well. Our working relationship with them helps us ensure our Marist Spirit is vibrant and alive throughout the Marist community.

The outreach to children and young people of our world, especially the poorest and most vulnerable, requires an economy which fosters life-giving alternatives and business creativity. This can only occur if we humbly ask Mary, Our Good Mother, to enable us to look at the world with eyes of wisdom and create a synthesis between our faith and reason.

Section IV— Concluding Synthesis of Chapter 3

Across these reflections, a new vision of economics begins to emerge—one rooted not in exploitation, but in relationship; not in excess, but in sufficiency; not in domination, but in care.

Ecological economics calls us to reimagine how we live, how we produce, and how we share the gifts of creation. It challenges us to move from a culture of consumption to a culture of stewardship, from systems of extraction to systems of regeneration.

For the Marist family, this is not simply an economic shift—it is a spiritual one. It is a call to conversion, to simplicity, and to solidarity with both the Earth and the poor.

To respond faithfully is to build, together, an economy that reflects the Gospel—an economy of life.

CHAPTER 4

ADOPTION OF SUSTAINABLE LIFESTYLES



The Star of the Sea Province hosted the Student Leaders Gathering (SLG) at the Marist Center in Mittagong, New South Wales. During the conference, students planted trees as part of the Province wide Buy a Tree project (BAT).

“As a Marist young person, caring for our common home means recognizing creation as sacred and responding with responsibility, humility, and hope. It means living simply, acting sustainably, and loving generously, in the way of Mary, with quiet strength and faithful commitment. It means understanding that environmental justice is inseparable from social justice, and that protecting the Earth is part of making Jesus seen, known, and loved in today’s world.”

— SAMEERA ZAHEID, *STUDENT AT ARCHBISHOP
MOLLOY AND USA GREEN TEAM MEMBER*

Section I — Introduction by Br. Dan

The *Laudato Si'* call to adopt sustainable lifestyles is deeply rooted in our Marist roots and our founding in 1817. From our earliest days as Marists, the adoption of such a way of life has been central to our spirituality and communal living. Marcellin Champagnat and the first Brothers embodied the Marist virtue of simplicity in the way they lived, worked, and cared for one another. Our humble beginnings in La Valla, France, required the Brothers to make nails simply to earn enough income to provide even the most basic food for the table Marcellin himself had built.

As this small band of young men grew in number, the practical need for a larger house became increasingly urgent. Guided by the Marist love of work, the early Brothers found the courage and perseverance to carve into the side of a granite mountain to construct what would become our spiritual home, l'Hermitage. This five-story, 150-room structure remains a powerful testament to what young people can accomplish through hard work, cooperation, and shared purpose.

L'Hermitage was far more than a house of formation or the first General House of the Institute. It became a model of sustainable communal living that would shape Marist life for generations. The Brothers cultivated extensive gardens, tailored their own habits, farmed the land, practiced beekeeping, and lived attentively to the rhythms of

creation—practices that continue to inform our Marist tradition more than two hundred years later.

Our recent 23rd General Chapter calls all Marists to be “Champagnats for today” by building new living Hermitages in our own time and place. The Chapter’s Message Document reminds us, “*The Hermitage was never only a building. It was a home of fraternity, a school of the Gospel, and a springboard for mission. The river Gier that flowed beside it carried timber, refreshed the Brothers, and symbolized the Spirit’s constant presence.*”

Under the theme *Home for All, River of Life*, the Chapter invites us to build a New Hermitage—not a fixed structure, but a living, dynamic reality that flows wherever Marists live their faith, foster fraternity, and bring life to others. To do so requires walking together in a spirit of synodality: listening attentively to one another and to the Spirit, discerning our common path, and sharing responsibility for the mission entrusted to us.

This vision reflects the Marian Church we seek to grow. Mary, our Good Mother, teaches the attitudes necessary to sustain this call: openness, attentiveness, transparency, empathy, care for our common home, and deep listening. These values are not optional - they are the very foundation stones of the New Hermitage. Embracing this vision invites us to move forward with boldness, tenderness, and hope.

As Religious Brothers, we profess the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Our vow of poverty, in particular, calls us to live simply and in solidarity with the poor and with creation. As our Marist Brothers Constitutions clearly remind us: “*We live personal and community poverty by adopting a simple lifestyle. We avoid consumerist attitudes and we use natural resources responsibly. We value the small things of life and feel in solidarity with all of creation. We are serious about our commitment to care for the earth, which is our common home*” (Constitutions, Article 30).

In recent years, the Marist Brothers USA Province has taken significant steps toward a more intentional and communal commitment to sustainable living. A Province-wide *Laudato Si’* Action Plan has been

developed and adopted, with ministries and communities committing to concrete ecological practices. This Action Plan is not about perfection or compliance, but about ongoing conversion—personal and communal—to living these principles. These efforts include a comprehensive carbon-offset program that tracks airline and automobile travel across the Province, solar panel installations at multiple schools and at the Marist Brothers Center in Esopus, and the conversion to LED lighting as a required standard for all Marist properties. Several Marist schools have also initiated community and pollinator gardens, beekeeping projects, robust recycling programs, and numerous student-led ecological initiatives. These concrete practices give visible expression to an inner ecological conversion that must be continually renewed.

Grounded in this tradition, across the Marist world today, we are blessed with individuals and communities who embody the virtue of simplicity in ways that resonate deeply with the *Laudato Si'* call to adopt sustainable lifestyles. For each of us as Marists, adopting sustainable lifestyles is not only an ecological responsibility, but a formative witness that shapes the consciences, habits, and hopes of the young entrusted to our care. In the pages that follow, this chapter will highlight further examples of how we, as Marists, are striving—imperfectly but faithfully—to live in harmony with creation, for the sake of the poor, the young, and generations yet to come.

Section II — A Reflection by Br. Yohan Oh, Korea

Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'* calls humanity to change in the face of unprecedented challenges: the ecological and environmental crisis, the rapidly widening gap between rich and poor, and the social fragmentation that follows (*Laudato Si'*, 202). This change is rooted in ecological conversion and takes concrete form in a new way of living: **simple lifestyles**. In a world marked by consumerism, relentless competition, individualism, possession and accumulation, a throwaway culture, and growing polarization, the transition to simple living can feel like a small candle set before a violent storm. Yet I believe that this candle can become a pillar of fire that lights the way

(Exodus 13:21), guiding humanity toward a more mature transformation and leading all of God's creatures within our common home to sing a song of praise—*Laudato Si'*.

Adopting Simple Lifestyles goes beyond a moral appeal to reduce consumption. It is a choice about human identity and our way of being: how we live with other creatures in our common home, and how we embrace sustainability as a fundamental orientation of life. A simple lifestyle, as I understand it, is a spiritual and cultural conversion that shifts the center of life from possession, achievement, and speed to relationship, moderation, and care.

Simple Living in the Marist Tradition

The Marist tradition speaks of the spirituality of simplicity in these words: “The spirituality of simplicity shapes the whole life of the disciples of Marcellin” (WFTR, 36). The same spirit encourages “a simple style of life,” avoiding consumerism and its waste, and choosing responsibility for creation (WFTR, 38). I have drawn inspiration from the life of Mary—a “woman with dust on her feet” (WFTR, 29)—from our founder and the first Brothers, and from the tradition in which this simple lifestyle has been embodied. Looking back, it seems more accurate to say that I did not so much choose this way of life as I was gradually shaped by it and drawn into it. In this way, the Marist practice of simple living has guided the direction of my nearly thirty years of religious life.

Simple Lifestyle as a Conscious Choice

To choose the simple lifestyle described in *Laudato Si'* is not the same as pursuing convenience or efficiency. It is a **conscious choice**: moving from growth-centered living

to relationship-centered living; from possession to being; from consumption to gratitude and moderation. A reflective life—discerning what we consume, what energy we use, and what relationships we sustain—is an expression of care for others and for our common home. To live a simple lifestyle is to respond more

responsibly in our time to Jesus' words: "Watch and pray, so that you will not fall into temptation" (Matt 26:41). In this way, simple living becomes a concrete path of ecological conversion.

Manual Work toward Simple Lifestyles

One key insight for moving towards simple living, I believe, can be found in the value of **manual work** emphasized by our Founder and tradition. His emphasis was not on labor for its own sake, but on the human, spiritual, and ecological values embodied in work done with our hands. The document *Water from the Rock* states: "The Marist tradition places great value on manual work. Such labor affirms the value of work with our hands" (WFTR 39). It adds that the love of manual work reveals a deeper attitude shaped by "making do, frugality, service, industriousness, and devotedness" (WFTR 40). For me, this points beyond *doing* to *being*: becoming a certain kind of person—grounded, grateful, attentive, and capable of genuine care.

Manual Work and Contemplation

Through experience, I have discovered precious values in manual work. Simple tasks—cleaning, cooking, tending a garden—often lead me into silence and contemplation. When I work with my hands, my mind grows quiet; I am freed from tangled thoughts and can remain present in the here and now. In that space, I often find an inner dialogue that draws me beyond self-centeredness into greater trust in God and a more receptive spirit. This is not something I produce intentionally: it feels like grace, given while I am working. Over time, manual work has become a spiritual practice that integrates prayer and work, fruitfulness and pace. It has taught me that a simpler life is not mainly an idea to affirm, but a rhythm to inhabit.

Manual Work and Community Building

Manual work also has the capacity to shape community and help it grow into a place of life. When I first arrived at the Marist community in Kobe, the grounds around the house had been largely neglected.

Little by little, I cultivated the space as a garden and small vegetable plot, guided by a simple desire: to share with neighbors—most of whom are not Catholic—the beauty of God’s creation and the joy it brings. For me, this became another way of proclaiming the Gospel.

Without spending much money, I propagated plants through cuttings and enriched the soil through composting, with the conviction that the earth itself needs to be nourished. Over the years, the surroundings were transformed, yet I continue to care for them, as if echoing the way God’s creation continues without interruption.

As I worked outdoors, neighbors I did not know began to stop and speak with me. Some expressed gratitude; others occasionally left flowers at the gate for me to plant. Many may not know that I live in a Catholic religious community, but almost everyone recognizes “the house with many hydrangeas.” Children, in particular, approach with curiosity and questions, and my heart fills with simple, genuine joy. Vegetables from our small garden are shared within the community and with neighbors. In these quiet ways, our community has naturally become part of the wider neighborhood.

Manual Work and Communion with Nature

Another value of manual work that I cherish is **communion with nature**. Because this appears in our formation guidelines, I learned early in religious life to take it seriously. What deepened it most, however, was work that brought me close to the soil. *Water from the Rock* says: “Manual work brings us into direct contact with creation, with other living beings, and with inanimate objects. It involves caring for nature, and conserving and transforming it” (WFTR 39).

When we place our hands in the soil—not in theory, but in real contact—we begin to see and understand the earth, plants, and the many forms of life that dwell there. To know in this way is to enter relationship; and once relationship is formed, we cannot treat the other carelessly. In this way, manual work “awakens an awareness of the deep unity of all living beings and of our interconnectedness with all creation” (Rule of Life, 33). This experience leads me to reflect on

the Creator God who formed the human being from the soil itself. When we recognize deeply that we are earth creatures, shaped from the ground, humility becomes unavoidable.

Humus, the soil and source of life; **human**, the being born from that soil; and **humility**, the way of living that does not forget where we belong—these are inseparably linked. For this reason, ecological conversion is also connected to the restoration of humility. I have come to believe that ecological conversion arises less from deliberate effort alone and more as grace—unfolding when we open our hearts to our neighbors in the common home, both human and other-than-human, and extend our hands with care and affection.

Tradition as a Gift for the Future

Some years ago, I spent time at the Hermitage, sensing the presence of our Founder and the first Brothers and tracing the contours of their lives. What struck me most was their simplicity, groundedness, and commitment to manual work. This heritage is not merely a past to preserve. Rather, in this era of transition—when we are being invited to care for the poor and our common home—it is a resource for the future that we are called to live more consciously.

“The manner of simple lifestyle comes from a Marist tradition that seeks to live from the work of our hands. This chosen simplicity of life creates a greater capacity to minister with the poor” (WFTR 40). I believe manual work is one vital component of a simple lifestyle closely connected to integral ecology.

As I wrote this reflection, I found myself repeatedly thinking of our Founder and the first Brothers. Their simple way of life seems to shine even more brightly today than it did in their own time. As we listen to the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth, Mahatma Gandhi’s words return to us as a question: “Live simply so that others may simply live. You must be the change you want to see in the world.” In our own lives today, what small acts of simplicity are we willing to choose, so that we may truly become **brothers to the whole of creation**? (Rule of Life. 40)



Br. Yohan Oh working in his garden

Section III — A Reflection by Maureen Hagan USA

“What’s good for the planet is good for us. What’s good for us is good for the planet.”

For many years, this mantra has run through my mind whenever there is talk of our health and the health of the planet. I didn’t think it up. I must have heard it somewhere, as I journeyed through alternative health care and lifestyles, and it has stuck with me ever since.

“Pope Francis’ 2015 encyclical, *Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home* is more than a theological treatise on ecology—it is a moral summons to reimagine our relationship with the Earth and with one another. At its heart lies a call to **integral ecology**, a vision that recognizes the interconnectedness of environmental, social, cultural, and spiritual well-being. One of the most practical and transformative responses to this call is the choice to **live simply**. Living simply is not merely about reducing consumption; it is about cultivating a way of life that honors creation, fosters solidarity, and resists the culture of

waste.” (Copilot, 2026 – January 21, Living Simply for the Sake of the Environment: A Reflection Through the Lens of Laudato Si.

So what does “living simply” actually look like? What difference can it make? Is it something I can do?

For me and my family, back in the ‘80s, living simply wasn’t so much a conscious choice as it was a necessity. Our early years of raising children meant borderline poverty. I was either not working or working part time. My husband taught at a Catholic school, making just enough to pay our bills. This was a choice we made – for me to be home with the children as much as possible. But there was no extravagance in our lifestyle. Luckily, we both had large families, so no worries about being destitute. We got lots of free meals, lots of hand me down clothes, and lots of free childcare. We were rich in many ways. But it did teach us about frugality, or simplicity, if you will.

We hear a lot about the “throw away” culture. Our house was more of a “can we fix it?” culture. We had handy people in our lives, so there were lots of things that did indeed get repaired, rather than thrown out.

As time went on, our financial picture improved somewhat. But the habits remained. I began being more conscious of using organic food whenever possible. (Good for us, good for the planet!).

I was becoming more educated about industries and corporations that were doing the most damage to the environment or to people’s health. We avoided using products that were harmful – again, good for us, good for the planet.

And eventually, during the early 2000s, we came to a place of being educated about Marcellin Champagnat and the Marist brothers. As in many things, Marcellin was ahead of his time. Simplicity was and continues to be, one of the hallmarks of Marist spirituality.

In *Water From the Rock*, on the topic of simplicity, we read:

“Our desire to be in communion with nature is expressed in a number of ways. The Marist tradition places great value on manual work because it brings us into direct contact with creation, with other living

beings, and with inanimate objects. It involves ... caring for nature, in conserving and transforming it. It teaches ... patience and precision. As well, such labour affirms both the value of working with our hands and the example of indigenous peoples who live with great respect in close relationship to their land.

This love of manual work reveals a wider attitude in the heart of the Marist that encompasses the values of making do, frugality, service, industriousness, and devotedness. In summary – a simple lifestyle. This manner of living comes from a Marist tradition that seeks to live from the work of our hands. This chosen simplicity of life creates a greater capacity to minister with the poor.” (WFTR, 39-40).

Now, generations later, we continue to carry the torch of the early brothers. In the message of the 22nd General Chapter, we were challenged with five calls, all of which can be related to the tasks before us as we ponder *Laudato Si* and our mother Earth and climate change and being Marist.

1. To be a beacon of hope – educating ourselves can sometimes create an overwhelming feeling of helplessness, but action brings hope. Let us find ways to take positive action, in any way that we can. *“Reduce, reuse, recycle”*
2. To be the face and hands of tender mercy – recognizing the gifts around us and reciprocating with tender love toward our mother earth and all those who teach us to act with care.
3. To be creative bridge builders –the topic of climate change often brings division. We can find creative ways to “move away from a culture of EGOS to that of ECOS, as in ecosystems, ecology, economy of solidarity (Brochure on the Calls of the 22nd General Chapter)
4. Journey with those on the margins – being conscious of how climate change affects those on the margins, and recognizing that those causing the most damage are furthest removed from those effects.
5. Respond boldly to emerging needs – Marcellin and his fellow seminarians had “The Project” – their recognition that the Church needed a Marial face, as they then set out to make

that a reality. Today, more than ever, we need this Marial face—a matriarchal emphasis where the well-being of the children is first and foremost. Our planet is in dire straits, yet the leaders of the largest economies still think war is a good idea.

When the children are the priority, war would be recognized for what it really is, an absolute waste of life, money, and resources, as well as utter destruction of nature.

When the children are the priority, they would be out in nature—education would make a priority of ecology, environmental studies. We would have children who could identify not just corporate logos, but also the names of the plants and trees around them. To want to protect something, you must first love and appreciate it. You must feel a part of it.

When the children are the priority, the future would be planned for and destruction of the environment would be halted. Indigenous voices would be at the table, sharing their knowledge and wisdom.

In The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World, Robin Wall Kimmerer, speaks of an alternative to our current economy, one she calls the gift economy. My recommendation is to read this little book—it definitely opened my eyes to another vision of “doing business.” There are many gems of wisdom in there, but I will share just a few.

The author uses the serviceberry bush as an example of the gift economy that rules in nature. The gift economy is based on reciprocity. The bush gives without seeking anything in return. The birds and other animals, including humans, take from the bush the delicious berries. A human might bake a pie with those berries to share in community. Said human might also reciprocate by bringing water to the bush or by creating a habitat for the pollinators that the bush needs, or by donating to a local land trust to protect that environment or by voting for healthy land use. We take from the bush with gratitude, the practice of which “puts the brakes on hyper consumerism”. Ms Kimmerer says of gratitude that it is “Not just an

automatic ritual of manners, but also a recognition of indebtedness that bring you to the realization that your life is nurtured from the body of Mother Earth.”

For Francis, ecological conversion is not just about changing habits—it is about changing hearts. Simplicity is deeply spiritual because it reorients our desires toward God and away from the false idols of consumerism.

In *Laudato Si'*, he writes:

This echoes the wisdom of saints like Francis of Assisi, who saw all creatures as brothers and sisters, and who lived with joyful detachment from material wealth. Simplicity fosters:

- **Gratitude** for the gifts of creation.
- **Mindfulness** in how we use resources.
- **Solidarity** with those who have less.

It also deepens our sense of wonder. When we are not constantly chasing the next purchase, we have more space to notice the beauty of our world. A sense of wonder and gratitude, experienced by a critical mass of people on this planet, may be what saves us.



Maureen Hagan with fellow Marists during a Mission trip to Magnificat Farm in Kentucky.



Maureen Hagan with fellow USA Marists during a pilgrimage to L'Hermitage in France.

Section IV — Concluding Synthesis of Chapter 4

The call to adopt sustainable lifestyles emerges during chapter 4 not as a burden, but as a path to deeper freedom, deeper relationship, and deeper joy. Rooted in our Marist tradition of simplicity, nourished by spiritual practice, and lived out in daily choices, this way of life invites us to rediscover what truly matters.

In a world shaped by excess, speed, and consumption, simplicity becomes a prophetic witness. It reminds us that less can be more, that relationships matter more than possessions, and that care for creation is inseparable from care for one another.

To live simply is not to live with less meaning—it is to live with greater intention. It is to walk gently on the earth, in solidarity with the poor, attentive to the gift of creation, and open to the quiet presence of God in all things.

CHAPTER 5

ECOLOGICAL EDUCATION



Two young Marist students from the Philippines led a workshop on the impact of Laudato Si' on their lives and the need for more Ecological Education across our Marist world.

“Through my involvement in Molloy’s ecology efforts in high school and my time at Earth Day Weekend in Esopus, I started to understand ecological education in a more meaningful way and how it connects to my faith. Being in nature gave me time to slow down and appreciate God’s creation in a way I don’t always do in my everyday life. I remember walking by the river and just feeling how peaceful everything was. It made me realize how important it is to take care of the world we’ve been given. These experiences showed me that ecological education is not just about learning facts. It is about becoming more aware and responsible for caring for our common home. Since then, I try to share that with others in different ways, like encouraging my friends to be mindful of waste or just to spend time outside enjoying the nature and appreciate what God has created.”

— DEIRDRE O’TOOLE

Section I — Introduction by Sam C. King

The experience of ecological conversion rests on a foundation of ecological education. In other words, we must introduce young people—and all of us as adults—to the lands and waters where we live, the air we breathe, the soil that nurtures our food, and to the larger Earth community in which we dwell. We must teach this reality of interconnectedness at all levels of schooling. Education is far more profound than preparation for a test, acceptance into college, or training for a career. It must be, in the words of Passionist monk Thomas Berry, a “pervasive life experience.” (Thomas Berry, “The American College in the Ecological Age,” in *The Dream of the Earth*, 96). Through systems thinking and direct experiential education, we can shift our awareness from seeing the Earth as something separate from ourselves to a vast and vibrant home we inhabit. In the words of Berry,

“Education and religion, especially, should awaken in the young an awareness of the world in which they live, how it functions, how the human fits into the larger community of life, the role that the human fulfills in the great story of the universe, and the historical sequence of developments that have shaped our physical and cultural landscape. Along with this awareness of the past and present, education and religion should communicate some guidance concerning the future.”

—Thomas Berry, “The Viable Human,” in *The Great Work*, 71.

This commitment to Ecological Education is visible in the outdoor classroom at St. Joseph Regional in Montvale, New Jersey, which Joanne Cavera has helped steward alongside students for decades. The classroom is a vibrant learning environment with native plants and a water feature for birds. Through experiencing and studying the biodiversity of the region, students gain an appreciation for local flora and fauna and cultivate an ethic of care for the natural world.

Ecological Education has been a major focus of the Marist Brothers’ annual Earth Day Weekend in Esopus, New York. This unique experience brings together more than forty student leaders from over eight schools to engage in interactive workshops on renewable energy, birdwatching, and native planting. In the past two years, we have also convened a case study on the health of the Hudson River—a biodiverse, estuarine habitat—in which students sampled leaf litter and tested water quality. They also participated in a town hall event representing key stakeholders in addressing two pressing issues: PCB pollution and landfill leachate runoff. By teaching students about the river and threats of pollution, students developed real-world skills of environmental problem solving and nurtured an ethic of care for local ecosystems.



Mr. Sam C. King was a keynote speaker to Marist students in Guatemala



The Environmental Classroom at St Joseph Regional in Montvale, New Jersey

Section II — A Reflection by Marist Educator, Christine Taylor, USA

As I sit on the sand, the day after my 65th birthday and listen to the pulse of the ocean waves waiting for the first rays of sunlight to sparkle on the horizon, I realize that this feeling, this life force is a reminder of the energy transfer I've tried to convey to my students for decades. Today, however, it feels different. Today it feels like a prayer for this earth, a prayer for tomorrow, and all the tomorrow thereafter.

As an environmentalist, environmental science teacher and researcher, I have spent my career quantifying the “how” of the natural world. I have analyzed ancient populations of diatoms and their fluctuations in order to understand how the climate has changed. But, as I watch the plovers dart into the retreating sea foam to feed, I am reminded that ecology is more than tracing the numbers of species: it is a spiritual connection with God. To study the environment is to study the craftsmanship of the Creator. My faith has never conflicted with my research, only given it a soul. We are stewards assigned to the garden that was never meant for us to degrade.

My research will fade and my papers gather dust in archives, but my legacy will live in the students I have taught and their subsequent relationships with nature. They will be the ones to view our world as a sacred space worth respecting. We often talk about “saving the planet” but I am realizing it's more about saving our relationship with God. “The Earth is the Lord's and everything in it.”(Psalm 24:1). As a Christian, it breaks my heart to see the Earth treated as a dumping ground. As I watch the first rays of the sun sparkle on the water and the plovers dance with the waves, I am struck by how simple my task is. I am a witness. A witness to the beauty of nature and its correlation to the beauty of my relationship with God. My legacy will be found in the quiet, persistent hope that those who have been touched by my life will treasure the sounds of the birds feeding on the sparkling clean sand, the salty smell of pristine ocean, and the morning sun's diamond-like sparkle upon the water.



Student leaders stand with Ms. Christine Taylor to celebrate the completion of a LEED-certified building at Christopher Columbus High School in 2023.

Section III —Blueprint for a Green Future: The Five Pillars of Ecological Literacy by Joanne Cavera, a Retired Marists Educator (USA)

Environmental education doesn't just focus on environmentalism, sustainable development, and the moral imperative to care for our common Earth and its people—it shapes the human heart for selfless ecologically conscious decision making. People can't simply be told to avoid single-use plastics, reduce water usage, or to compost; rather, each person must be shown *how* those actions produce significant collective effects. This insight is both easiest to instill, and most helpful to learn, as a young adult. But how does one come to understand its importance?

To that end, we've identified five core concepts that illuminate the path forward for young adults, highlighting why ecological education develops an informed perspective essential for the preservation of the Earth—and of life itself.

Informed Decision-Making and Citizenship

Young adults are in a unique phase in their lives, and this isn't just because they're learning to drive, or preparing for college. In this phase they start to gain significant purchasing influence (which *must* be grounded in scientific reality, rather than being driven by industry-provided rhetoric), and autonomy, as they begin to build the person they'll become for the rest of their lives.

Ecological education provides young adults with the tools to make better decisions about everyday choices, from selecting energy-efficient appliances to reducing food waste through composting. In my high school engineering classes, students investigated daily cafeteria food waste, instituted a composting program, and even created low-cost healthy meals that could be utilized by local soup kitchens. After collecting data from the cafeteria, students were *shocked* by the rampant disregard of their classmates who frequently failed to sort recyclables, and by the sheer volume of daily food waste they generated.

And our school is not an outlying example! Rather, it exemplifies a problem which is widespread in the United States, as roughly 40% of all food in this country is wasted each year. According to the 2024 UNEP Food Waste Index Report, the United States ranks among the top five countries globally for household food waste, and in the top three for per-person annual waste.

It's this experience, not merely passively learning about food waste in the classroom, where a person experiences an *outright disbelief* about the actions others take right in their own community, and is the first critical element of ecological education.

Developing a Systems Thinking Mindset

Ecology and sustainability are fields about making connections. Learning how ecosystems function—understanding that changes in single variables can reverberate throughout the wider food web—teaches young adults systemic thinking. A common misconception holds that certain predators which could pose a safety risk, like coyotes, should be actively hunted. However, coyotes consume medium-to-small prey species, including deer, rabbits, squirrels, and mice, and without this critical predator, these populations would grow unchecked, leading to an overconsumption of plant species, increased roadside wildlife accidents, and to a higher frequency of disease.

Systems thinking teaches young adults to evolve from linear thinking (A causes B) to multi-step conceptualization (A interacts with B and C, which affect D, ultimately affecting A). Seeing multiple examples broken down step-by-step enables us to ask questions like “how does this part influence the system as a whole?” or “how will making this change to the environment affect our society?” To demonstrate the impact of food web disruption, I took my students to a local estuary, where they used dip nets to collect local species (like fish, worms, larva, and crabs). After examining how these populations had been impacted by pollution, we observed that key species in the food web were missing, illustrating systems thinking in a real ecosystem. The development of this transferable skill is the second critical element of ecological education.

Awareness of Public Health

Watching the sun set is one of the most universal experiences which every person on Earth shares—but not all sunsets are built the same. Hazy skies or suspiciously red sunsets, for example, often result from particulate matter, including tiny particles from car exhaust, factories, or wildfire smoke. When the planet's lungs become polluted, many aspects of our lives are impacted in equal measure.

Ecological education guides young adults in understanding how environmental factors, such as air and water quality, affect their food, potable water, and in turn, their community's quality of life. We see this in some students walking to school, where increased air pollution triggers asthma and allergies, or in athletes, who find it harder to perform at their best due to poor air quality reducing their lung capacity.

In one lab I designed, students were tasked with collecting soil and lichen samples from around our 33-acre campus in order to determine the percentage of particulates in lichen, as well as pH levels in the soil. Students found that lichen on trees closer to the road had much higher percentages of particulates, and that the soil samples they had taken near the parking lot had significantly lower pH levels. From this exercise, we could see that there was a clear, direct link between planetary and human health. Understanding how these two intersect in a tangible way is the third fundamental aspect of ecological education.

Economic Preparedness for a Green Economy

Young adulthood often represents the plateau where individuals first develop autonomy over their lifestyle choices, buying phones, clothes, food, and medications—as well as determining where they'll go after the last cap at graduation hits the ground. Forming environmentally-conscious habits during this stage is critical due to the “habit window”, a concept which suggests that habits formed during this transitional period are more likely to persist throughout life than those which are adopted later.

In essence, education compounds for individuals at a young age, but most crucially, learning at this age has the highest potential to create the greatest, longest-lasting impact in communities—and notably, on our economy.

As the global job market continues to shift toward sustainability, companies in every major industry increasingly seek people with ecological literacy, and the “green skills” which stem from it. Ecological education prepares young adults for emerging careers across industries, enabling them to remain competitive in an economy that prioritizes renewable energy, circular supply chains, and sustainable development, as well as associated cost considerations.

Throughout my thirty years teaching life sciences and engineering, I designed countless student projects, but perhaps my most favorite ones involved creating small-scale prototypes of sustainable technologies. In my classes, students didn’t just read about these technologies—they built them, constructing solar-powered cars and wind vanes capable of generating electricity, right there in the classroom. This hands-on experience is the fourth critical element of ecological education, transforming abstract concepts into concrete understanding, as well as allowing students to see systems thinking in action, and further, its implementation within society.

Intergenerational Responsibility Drives Action

Ecological education doesn’t just show us how what we do affects our own country, it also fosters moral stewardship and understanding of far-reaching environmental impacts beyond our own communities. Between 2023 and 2024, for example, The United States’ most lucrative export, fossil fuels, was also its most environmentally-damaging. Given that we can’t outright halt operations in this industry without removing over \$320 Billion from our national GDP, concerned citizens feel helpless. Many young adults experience this same “eco-anxiety”—a chronic dread of impending environmental collapse—which they feel powerless to change. But this feeling largely exists because most people don’t understand climate change, biodiversity loss mechanisms, or intergenerational responsibility.

Realizing this, I created an assignment called the “Leaf Them Be” project. At the start of fall, students were tasked with explaining to parents why leaving the leaves (a key habitat for insects and small birds) around their property is important. In the spring, many parents and students were surprised, noticing less weeds, more wildlife, and even healthier plants around their properties at home as a result.

What we found was: equipping students with environmental knowledge, and tasking them with preserving something—even if it were small—gave them the confidence that their actions could make a difference.

It is the empowerment to act which is the fifth and final element of ecological education, driving productive stewardship by fostering a sense of intergenerational responsibility, and by reframing the environment as a shared inheritance to be preserved, and cherished.

A Message of Hope

Getting out in nature and creating green spaces serves as an essential precursor for instilling a desire to preserve our environment, and helps to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Over the course of nearly two decades, I developed an outdoor environmental classroom in a courtyard at our school, where students could learn about insects, plants, and animals in their native habitat. In addition, I would take my students on seasonal hikes across the campus, to show them how living organisms adapted to changes in their environment throughout the year.

In *The Laudato Si*, Pope Francis emphasizes that “all is not lost”, and the notion that young people can be empowered to create modern solutions which support environmental longevity—here and now—aligns closely with his message of hope.



Joanne Cavera leads students in a birdwatching workshop during Earth Day Weekend 2024

Section IV: From Disconnection to Care: An Educational Transformation Through The Buen Vivir Program by Javier Dimas Sánchez, Área de Solidaridad Provincial Maristas México Central

Ecological education, in the light of *Laudato si'*, doesn't begin with content or with activities, but rather from an uncomfortable and revealing reality: we are disconnected. Disconnected from nature, from other people, from what happens around us and even from ourselves. This disconnection is not accidental; it is the result of cultural, economic and social dynamics that have privileged speed, productivity, excessive consumption and individualism over care, relationship and meaning.

In this context, educating implies reestablishing bonds. Today more than ever, it is necessary to pause, to feel ourselves part of the world we live in and to relearn how to inhabit it. Amid daily routine, we move through our spaces guided by alleged urgent matters: arriving on time, fulfilling responsibilities, responding to constant demands, etc. Without realizing it, we let what connects us with life pass by, things like the sunrise on the way to school, the shade of the tree during recess, the water we use throughout the day, the sound of birds or the waste we generate.

Little by little, the system has led us toward an isolated routine, where nature has become a resource, and meaning and awareness have faded. Two simple words, but with great depth, are “to pause” and “to perceive”. We must see ourselves as part of a whole, not as individuals, because we all live in the same Common Home. From the awareness perspective of naming and trying to understand what we see, of listening to what surrounds us and of attending to the everyday, it is possible to begin to transform.

In prospect, the encyclical *Laudato si'* clearly states that there is “a great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge that will entail long processes of regeneration” (*Laudato Si'*, 202). It is not merely a matter of incorporating new contents. The challenge will not resolve only from books or in the classroom, nor with isolated activities. To fulfil this challenge, we must implement a profound transformation in the way we educate and in the way we understand life itself.

From the Marist perspective, this call resonates strongly. Education doesn't consist only of transmitting knowledge, but to accompanying life processes. It is forming people capable of acknowledging their place in the world, relating to others and building community. In this sense, ecological education is not just another bullet point to cross off the curriculum; it takes part of the Transversal Approaches that comprise Marist integral education.

In the Province of Central Mexico, this perspective is carried out through the commitment to Marist Education for Buen Vivir, a comprehensive way of looking at and understanding life that promotes simpler lifestyles. This approach leads us to believe that

there is a way of inhabiting and connecting Mother Earth and as a society.

Through the processes of our daily lives, this comprehensive way invites us to dream and make possible a planet in harmony, parting from the awareness of a common origin and promoting solidarity, awareness and responsibility. This does not mean living better than others, but living in balance, in community, with purpose and respecting times. This approach implies a change in the way of valuing nature by acknowledging its intrinsic value and understanding it as a subject of rights. In this way, caring ceases to be an obligation and becomes a form of relationship.

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the Buen Vivir Marist program. A path in which students, parents and guardians, teaching staff, administrative staff and service staff, as well as the Brothers, and from the different educational works and social works, have participated and have been strengthened through concrete experiences. Multiple educational communities actively participate in processes linked to comprehensive ecology and permaculture, solidarity economy, construction of peace, alternative justice, local consumption, healthy living and sustainability in spaces of formal, non-formal and informal education for Buen Vivir.

“Spokespersons of our Common Home” is the motto used in this school year which forms part of the Solidarity Days of the Province. The proposed activities make it possible to know the perceptions of children, adolescents and young people about their environment, as well as to identify problems and acknowledge practices (positive and negative) present in their educational communities. The goal is to make visible that which often goes unnoticed, to give voice to nature and to promote a critical view of everyday reality.

In this process, it is essential to acknowledge students as protagonists of their own stories, giving them the opportunity to interpret their environment and act within it. Every day we make decisions, from sunrise to sunset. The initiative consists in carrying out a concrete action each day to procure our Common Home, to change the narrative.

For a long time, the environmental narrative has been marked by the idea of “saving the world.” This vision can generate an excessive burden and, in many cases, evoke feelings understood as eco-anxiety and helplessness, since it places the person as savior and nature as object.

For this reason, it is important and necessary to change the narrative. It is not about saving the planet, but about learning to coexist with it. With our values in mind, humility, simplicity and modesty, change is promoted at a personal level, in order to learn about coexisting with the world and about lifestyles that acknowledge interdependence with all forms of life.

Along this path, art has walked with us hand in hand. Strengthened and accompanied by Youth Ministry, art has become a means of expression that denounces and releases what outrages the community and what the very same community seeks to transform. Artistic creations allow people to channel emotions, give voice to nature and announce the possibilities of imagining alternatives to problems.

Forms of expression such as drawings that recount the traceability of food and recognize the flora and fauna students found in their schools or homes; verses that express fear of the future with a spirit of tearing down structures and that also somatize emotions that move to the rhythm of music; and models made from recycled material that acknowledge the elements of creation are just some of the thousand examples. This is how ecological education is not limited to denouncing but also builds and makes proposals.

A main element in this process is to act from awareness. Acting without understanding the meaning of our actions often reproduces the very same dynamics we seek to leave behind. Each action, such as consuming, discarding, moving or feeding oneself, has an impact, direct or indirect, that must be acknowledged.

We have exceeded our planet's limits, and, being interconnected as we are, the consequences of the complex socio-environmental crisis are evident, as Pope Francis said. The lifestyles we have normalized are unsustainable. The solutions start with the idea of thinking globally

and acting locally, beginning with the everyday within your own capacity.

The educational challenge is deeply countercultural. How to break these schemes? How to generate practices that, parting from awareness, are truly sustainable? The answer is not immediate, but we can build realistic paths in the classroom, in the community, from a concrete experience that reminds us of and keeps us connected with the Earth.

In Marist schools, this translates into practices that integrate the ethical principles of permaculture: care for people, care for the Earth and always favor equal share. This is created from practices that integrate learning processes with life, those practices that challenge teachers and students. An example is school gardens. They connect our origins as an Institution with people and where the knowledge and wisdom of indigenous peoples such as herbal medicine are recovered.

One strategy is to also see the classroom as a Common Home. To make the classroom a place where waste separation is incorporated as a solidarity project, healthy and sustainable eating is adopted as a life option; student life is organized through committees and assemblies, tasks are shared, and murals are created to express love for the biodiversity of our country. These practices are not isolated activities; they are joint experiences that seek to rebuild bonds with nature, with other people and with oneself.

It is not about changing the world in just one day. This process requires time, perseverance and community, just like nature. The goal is to relearn how to inhabit the world consciously, remembering, in everyday gestures, that caring for life is also developing a sense of belonging.

Ultimately, educating for the care of the Common Home is, at its core, educating for life. Inspired by the ecological education of *Laudato Si'*, we are called to accompany and form people that care, minds that create and hearts that do not lose the capacity for wonder. We seek to form people capable of generating life in abundance. In this way, we ourselves build the Common Home we dream of, a place where we can achieve Buen Vivir.



Javier Dimas Sánchez

Section V — Concluding Synthesis of Chapter 5

Ecological education is not simply a subject to be taught, but as a way of forming the human person.

*It begins with awareness,
deepens through encounter,
and matures into
responsibility.*

*From classrooms and laboratories
to shorelines and gardens,
from scientific inquiry
to contemplative wonder,
from individual learning
to shared experience,
from disconnection to renewed relationship—
ecological education reveals its true purpose:*

- *to shape how we see the world,*

- *how we relate to it,*
- *and how we choose to live within it.*

Each voice in this chapter reminds us that education is never neutral. It either reinforces patterns of consumption, disconnection, and individualism, or it awakens a deeper sense of connection, responsibility, and care.

Ecological education invites us into that awakening. It forms not only knowledgeable students,

*but attentive observers,
critical thinkers,
and compassionate stewards.*

It teaches that the health of the Earth and the dignity of the human person are inseparable realities.

It helps young people recognize that their daily choices—however small—participate in larger systems that shape the future of our common home.

The experiences shared in this chapter—from outdoor classrooms and scientific inquiry, to contemplative encounter, to the transformative vision of Buen Vivir—remind us that true ecological education is both deeply personal and profoundly communal.

It is not simply about acquiring knowledge. It is about restoring relationships:

- *with the Earth*
- *with one another*
- *and with God*

For the Marist family, this work is essential to our mission. To educate ecologically is to:

- *accompany young people in discovering meaning and purpose*
- *foster a sense of belonging within creation*

- *cultivate habits of simplicity, gratitude, and responsibility*
- *empower them to become agents of transformation in their communities*
- *and help them relearn how to inhabit the world with awareness and care*

In a time marked by ecological crisis, education becomes a sacred task. It is through education that we awaken wonder.

Through wonder, we cultivate care.

And through care, we begin to transform our world.

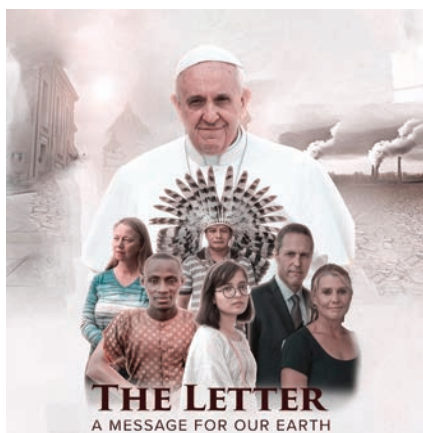
And perhaps most importantly, ecological education reminds us that hope is not taught as an idea — it is formed through experience, lived in community, and sustained through relationship.



Sam C. King presenting to young people at Mt. St. Michael Academy.



Students from Marist High School attend the Youth Climate Summit at Saint Viator High School



The Letter, an inspiring ecological based film, released in 2022, showcases Pope Francis' groundbreaking encyclical, Laudato Si'. The film follows ecological leaders from many impacted areas including Senegal, India, the Amazon and Hawaii as they journey to the Vatican for a meeting with Pope Francis to share their unique stories of how they live and promote Integral Ecology. The Letter is now part of curriculum for a number of USA Marist schools.

CHAPTER 6

ECOLOGICAL SPIRITUALITY



Native Mi'kmaq teacher Evan Pritchard an Elder of the Native American Munsee Tribe leads a morning prayer for Marist students on the banks of the Hudson River. The prayer recognizes these sacred grounds which were first inhabited by his Indigenous tribe many generations earlier. Much of Native American Spirituality focus on our deep connection to all of creation.

“Caring for our common home is not just about nature, it’s about justice, compassion, and living in a way that reflects our faith and concern for others...We are called to recognize that caring for creation is not just about the environment, but about faithfully responding to God’s call and living out our faith in action...It means living with humility, simplicity, service, and leading by example just as Saint Marcellin Champagnat taught us.”

— ANDRES VIDAL, GRADUATE OF CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS AND USA GREEN TEAM MEMBER

“At the Marist Brothers Center in Esopus, I have learned that ecological spirituality is not only about protecting the Earth but about recognizing God in everything and responding with reverence.”

— SAMEERA ZAHEID, STUDENT AT ARCHBISHOP MOLLOY AND USA GREEN TEAM MEMBER

Section I —Introduction by Br. Dan

At the heart of *Laudato Si'* lies a call not only to ecological action, but to ecological conversion—a conversion that is fundamentally spiritual. For the Marist family, ecological spirituality is not an added dimension to our mission, but a deepening of who we already are. It shapes how we see the world, how we pray, how we accompany the young, and how we remain rooted in hope amid the fragility of creation and the suffering of the poor.

From its beginnings, Marist spirituality has been grounded in attentiveness, simplicity, and presence. St. Marcellin Champagnat was not a theologian of spirituality, but a man deeply attuned to God’s action in ordinary life. His trust in God and Mary, his perseverance amid hardship, and his reverence for the daily realities of work, land, and community reveal a spirituality that was profoundly incarnational. Creation was not something to be dominated or

exploited, but a context in which God's providence was experienced and trusted.

The Marist tradition has always understood that care for creation begins with the formation of the heart. Ecological spirituality invites us to slow down, grow attentive, and recover a sense of wonder and gratitude for the gift of life. In a world marked by speed, consumption, and indifference, this spirituality calls us to resist the temptation to treat creation as an object to be used, and instead to receive it as a sacred gift entrusted to our care.

Our Marist spirituality document, *Water From The Rock*, speaks powerfully to this interior disposition. It reminds us that contemplation is not an escape from the world, but a way of seeing it more truthfully. "As brothers and sisters sharing in Life, we want to grow in care for our planet and all creation. With others, we foster the hope that all humankind will come to appreciate the world as our home, where nature is delicately balanced. This requires our living together in an atmosphere of reverence, mutual respect, justice and participation." (WFTR 122). Such contemplation awakens in us a deep sense of connectedness—with God, with one another, and with all living beings. It is from this awareness that authentic ecological commitment flows.

Mary, our Good Mother, stands at the heart of this spiritual vision. Her life was marked by attentiveness, humility, and trust. She pondered events in her heart, listened deeply to God's word, and remained faithful even when the path forward was unclear. Mary teaches us how to dwell gently within creation, not grasping or controlling, but receiving and caring. In her presence, we learn that ecological spirituality is sustained not by anxiety or fear, but by trust, patience, and hope.

Ecological spirituality also sustains us when the weight of environmental degradation and human suffering feels overwhelming. As Marists, we regularly encounter communities devastated by climate disasters, poverty, and violence. Without a deep spiritual grounding, such realities can easily lead to discouragement or paralysis. Ecological spirituality anchors us instead in hope—a hope that is neither naïve

nor passive, but resilient and faithful. It reminds us that our call is not to save the world by our own efforts, but to remain faithful to God's invitation to love, to care, and to accompany.

For those entrusted with the education and formation of young people, ecological spirituality takes on a particular urgency. Young people today are keenly aware of the fragility of our planet and often carry a heavy burden of anxiety about the future. Our role as Marists is not only to teach sustainable practices, but to model a spirituality that offers meaning, rootedness, and hope. By fostering silence, reflection, gratitude, and reverence for life, we help young people discover that caring for creation is not merely an obligation, but a path toward deeper joy and communion.

Ecological spirituality, then, is the wellspring that nourishes all other *Laudato Si'* commitments. It shapes our choices, sustains our perseverance, and continually calls us back to what matters most. As Marists, embracing this spirituality invites us to walk gently on the earth, to listen attentively to the cries of the poor and the planet, and to trust—like Mary and Marcellin—that God continues to bring life, renewal, and hope, even in the most fragile and wounded places.

Section II —Brothers to All Creation by Jose Nacianceno, Philippines

Introduction

Who are they brothers to? A not-so-often asked question, but like a similar question, “Who are the Marist Brothers?”, it seeks to understand the brotherhood. The Marist Brothers would likely respond to the former: “We are brothers to our fellow brothers, the children and the young people, particularly the poor and marginalized, and everyone we encounter.”

The *Marist Brothers' Rule of Life (Rule)* states: “Your primary mission is to be a *brother* and to promote brotherhood” (71, emphasis supplied; see also *Constitutions and Statutes*, 2). The Brotherhood springs from Baptism. The baptized become brothers of Jesus Christ,

children of the Father, and members of God's family. The Brothers live out their brotherhood by making "Jesus Christ known and loved," 'especially to children and young people most in need'" (4 & 16) through "evangelization and education" (4, 53, 55, 58, 59 & 78).

The *Rule* answers the question "Who are they brothers to?" by an enumeration. It says the Marist Brothers are brothers to:

. . . your *brothers*,
as well as to all to whom you are sent:
children and young people, every person you encounter...

(40, emphases supplied)

The list may seem familiar. However, another item in the list might have been read but glossed over, so it has not received the attention it deserves. The following completes what was stated above. The *Rule* continues that the Brothers are brothers:

... ultimately, to *the whole of creation*. (40, emphasis supplied.)

This is remarkable because the *Rule* diverges from the complementary text in the *Constitutions*, specifically No. 2. The phrase "to the whole creation" is not present in the *Constitutions*. The *Rule* introduces a new element and meaning to the idea of Marist brotherhood. The Brothers, who are challenged to extend their love "to the maximum" and "build *an ever-expanding universal brotherhood*" (41; emphasis supplied), are to be brothers "to the whole creation." This expands their brotherhood to children, young people, and fellow humans. While this fundamental principle remains the same, the tent has widened to include all creation.

Brotherhood to all creation recalls St. Francis of Assisi's *Canticle of Creation*. In the *Canticle*, he refers to the sun as brother, the stars and moon as sisters, the earth as sister, mother, and fire as sister. His deep love for creation and the poor inspired Pope Francis to write the encyclical *Laudato Si'*.

This article aims to focus on this phrase “brothers to the whole creation” and the calls it presents to the Marist Brotherhood. It will clarify its importance to the Brotherhood’s identity and ministry. The interconnectedness and communion of the universe, as revealed through scientific and theological perspectives, are essential for understanding humanity and the world, thereby fostering a view of humanity as kin to all of creation. Insights from St. Francis and *Laudato Si’* will play a key role in this explanation. Additionally, the article will suggest ways to revitalize the Institute in harmony with the Brotherhood with creation.

The focus of this article is the Marist’s brotherhood with all creatures. Kinship and brotherhood/sisterhood will be used interchangeably. It is a model of a relationship with other creatures that defines the Marist Brothers as introduced by the *Rule*. But it needs to be embraced by everyone, especially in this era of planetary devastation, primarily caused by a lack of love and respect for fellow creatures. The reflection extends beyond the Brothers. Marist Brothers, together with the rest of humanity, are brothers to all creatures.

Communion

God is communion.

We can see that fact reflected in creation... -*Rule*, 38

The universe encompasses both the paradoxical particles in the quantum realm, the innumerable massive galaxies, and the billions of stars and trillions of planets in each galaxy. All these originated from the “great flaring forth,” or the Big Bang, 13.7 billion years ago. They are interconnected and form one universe.

Einstein insisted that thinking of humans as separate or superior to the universe or creation is “a kind of optical delusion of his [human’s] consciousness.” *Laudato Si’* affirms humans as intertwined with the natural world: “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” (139). Humans

are constitutive of nature. They cannot exist on their own outside the universe.

Thomas Berry (1914-2009), who pondered about the universe and humans' role in it, reflected, "The human is neither an addendum nor an intrusion into the universe. We are quintessentially integral with the universe" (*The Great Work*, 32). That is why Pope Francis quipped: God did not create humans magically. They were not parachuted from heaven as finished products. Rather, they are born from the great evolutionary forces of an ever-expanding universe. They are the universe that has become humans.

Moreover, humans are the self-reflective consciousness of the universe. Berry described this profound human phenomenon: "In its human mode, the universe reflects on and celebrates itself in a unique mode of conscious self-awareness" (*The Great Work*, 56). This highlights the deep interwovenness of humans with the universe. Humans are not merely a form of the universe; they are essential to the fulfillment of its capacity for self-consciousness. Humans and the universe make each other meaningful. The celebration of this "conscious self-awareness" manifests in various forms, including grateful awareness, reflections, rituals, storytelling, songs, dance, and arts, among others.

The interconnectedness of the universe is a reflection of the communion of the Triune God (see *LS* 239-40). Thus, *Laudato Si'* describes the universe as linked by "unseen bonds" (89) and "manifold connections" (40). It is a "web of relationships" (240), "a kind of universal family, a sublime communion" (89), and "a splendid universal communion" (220). God's self-giving love binds the universe.

Brothers to all Creation

Communion assumes a deeper meaning when expressed in terms of kinship. Kinship defines the relationship that ensues from communion. It is how we live communion. The *Rule* emphasizes a spirituality of communion (see especially nos. 31, 34, 36-41) and simultaneously fosters kinship. St. Francis of Assisi's life and his *Canticle of Creation* provide valuable insights into kinship.

Kinship with all creation is rooted in the origin of all beings in the Creator. All, without exception, are ultimately from Him; they are His children, and therefore, brothers and sisters, and form one family. This same foundation of kinship applies to the Brothers and Christians. They are brothers to people because they recognize their shared origin in the Father. St. Francis of Assisi extended kinship to all creatures, no matter how small, by referring to them as “brothers” or “sisters.” St. Bonaventure, the great interpreter of St. Francis, explained that St. Francis knew that all creatures shared the same beginnings (*Care for Creation*, pp. 49-50).

The *Canticle* is a harmonious melody of brotherhood and sisterhood among all creatures (*Care for Creation*, p. 82). It emanates from the deep spiritual love of a mystic who praises God with and for brother Sun, sister Earth, sister Moon and stars, among others. These creatures are members of the universal family of creation. God’s love binds all of them in a family of relationships that are rightly termed “brother” and “sister” (*Care for Creation*, p. 84).

St Francis’s bond with creatures deepened as he came to understand Christ as the Word of God and creatures as expressions of God’s love. “Growing in love in union with Christ led Francis to embrace creation as family. Through union with Christ, Francis stood amidst creation as a brother, and in turn, all creation spoke to him of Christ.” (*Care for Creation*, p. 83). Also, Marists believe: “*In him* [Christ] we find our communion with each other, and with all of creation” (*Water from the Rock*, 94; emphasis supplied). The *Rule*, echoing Galatians 3:28, says that Brothers are sent to “announce that *in Christ*, we are all brothers and sisters, children of the same Father” (36; emphasis supplied). Living in Christ means loving all other creatures, for all exists in him.

St. Francis’s brotherhood with creatures was a practice of humility. He didn’t consider himself a steward of creatures for whom he was responsible. He didn’t relate to them as lord and master. He rejected power, ownership, and authority for himself. Instead, he related to them as a brother. “He wanted to be humble and live in solidarity with creation just as Christ did through the Incarnation,” (*Care for Creation*, p. 77). He considered himself a “lesser brother” among creatures,

recognizing his humility and poverty. He was aware of his dependence on the goodness of God mediated in the goodness of creatures.

Apropos St. Francis being a “lesser brother” among creatures, the Marist Brothers are similarly called “Little Brothers of Mary” to keep in mind their devotion to Mary, to be a brother with those with whom they work, and to live a life of humility and simplicity. Like St. Francis, they can humbly and simply be “little brothers” among creatures, recognizing their unity and dependence on them.

Conversion

What needs to change? A transformation of hearts and minds that results in a shift in awareness, convictions, attitudes, and ways of life. The *Rule* advocates for an “authentic spirituality” that fosters “*openness to communion*” and “*awakens an awareness of the deep unity of all living beings and your interconnectedness with the creation*” (33; emphases supplied). What concrete challenges does kinship with all creation present to?

Transcend human-centeredness. The *Rule* emphasizes awareness of all living beings and the whole creation, leaving no ambiguity. The XXII General Chapter in 2017 encouraged Marists to move from the “ego” to the “eco,” perceiving themselves as part of the Earth community and the universe. This challenges individualism and anthropocentrism, freeing them from narrow human concerns and fostering relationships with other creatures.

Respect the inherent value of all living beings. In this regard, creatures possess their own intrinsic value before God. Their goodness is not independent of their usefulness to humans; neither their relationship with God needs human mediation. “By virtue of our unique dignity and our gift of intelligence, we are called to respect creation and its inherent laws, for ‘the Lord by wisdom founded the earth’” (Prov 3:19) (*LS*, 69).

“Develop a contemplative attitude toward the universe” (*Rule*, 33). The *Rule* encourages a contemplative attitude toward it and its communion. It enhances awareness of God’s love, goodness, and word

in all creatures. Reminded of humanity's communion with the universe and God, the Brothers' contemplation of their vocation takes on a cosmic dimension:

Your deepest call in life is to be at one with yourself, others,
God, and *all that God has created*.
Your vocation as a brother is a meaningful sign
of God's presence in all people and *things*. (38; emphases
supplied)

At this point, examples of St. Marcellin Champagnat and Brother Francois, particularly on contemplation of the universe, are offered as an inspiration for living out a sense of kinship with other creatures.

Champagnat prayed with the universe. His cosmic and inclusive practice of the presence of God involved believing in God's omnipresence, "filling the universe with goodness, mercy, and glory" (*Life of Joseph Benedict Marcellin Champagnat*, Marist Brothers, Rome, (ed. 1989), p. 336). His prayer was communion with God and the universe. It was not restricted to narrow human concerns and petitions.

Francois contemplated nature. Br. Francois, a contemplative and intimate brother to nature, advised the early Brothers to "watch, listen, and hear" to appreciate the natural world. He marveled at the profound bond between humans and nature, writing that humans "live on air and breathe it constantly" (Brother Francois, *Notebook*, n. 303, p. [676]). Near the end of his life, he wrote: "God in everything; God everywhere; God alone, and my conscience as I face eternity" (Br. François, *Notebook* n. 302, p. [166]). Like St. Francis of Assisi, Br. François invites us to see God's glory and love in all creatures.

Celebrate the Eucharist with all creation. The Eucharist is a "sign and sacrament of brotherhood" and "communion" (*Constitutions*, 46). This brotherhood now includes all creation in Christ. The bread and wine, symbolizing creation's elements, become the body of Christ. This celebration signifies brotherhood with all creation: "When we gather to celebrate Jesus' gift, we're in communion with all people, especially

the poor, and *with all creation*" (*Water from the Rock*, 86; emphasis supplied). It is an occasion to pray *with* and *for* creation, remembering the devastation of the Earth, the extinction of species, the pollution of waters, the suffering of those affected by floods and droughts, and to commit to their healing.

Recognize brotherhood with other creatures. Brotherhood to non-human creatures is a "fraternity that excludes nothing and no one," a "universal family" that surpasses human fraternities—including Marist brotherhood. Essential creaturehood and brotherhood, not special privileges, are what matter most. Brothers, expected to be "experts of communion" (*Rule*, 39), are to "remind others that communion implies equality as well as reciprocity" (39).

Brotherhood means deepening our affection for other creatures. It involves deepening the sense of belonging to the vast community of life on Earth and the entire universe. It is developing the capacity to empathize, especially with animals, feeling their pain and suffering. By learning to perceive them with a loving gaze, "to look upon them with tenderness and love" (Pope Francis: Homily), we can experience wonder and gratitude. As Pope Francis emphasizes, "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" (*LS*, 91).

Long Path of Renewal

We lack an awareness of our common origin, of our mutual belonging, and of a future to be shared with everyone. This basic awareness would enable the development of new convictions, attitudes and forms of life. -*LS* 202

We can no longer truly define our human identity without including the great sweep of cosmic history and our shared biological inheritance with other organisms in the evolutionary history of life. According to science as well as theology, there is but one community of life on Earth. -Elizabeth A. Johnson:

Come, Have Breakfast, p. 16 Based on the reflection above, how will the Institute address the challenge of

Brothers being “brothers to all creation”? This section will propose measures for the Institute to consider.

Marist Institute’s formation programs and reflections at all levels must incorporate the concept that Marist Brothers are “brothers to all creation” as an essential aspect of the Brotherhood’s definition. This will raise awareness of this new dimension in the Brothers’ understanding of their identity. They are brothers to children, young people, the poor, their fellow brothers, and the people they work with. Equally important is the fact that they are also brothers to all creation.

The Institute needs to reconsider its ministry to encompass all creation, particularly our Sister, Mother Earth, our common home. This naturally flows from their identity as Brothers to all creation. Its ministry, like its identity, can no longer be confined to children and young people. Integral to the Institute’s ministry will be caring for and protecting fellow creatures and the Earth community. Not optional or secondary, but *constitutive* of its ministry. Ecological initiatives, more than merely as a response to the ecological crisis, need be understood as the Institute’s living out its identity as Brothers to all creation.

The Institute might adopt the 13.7-billion-year universe story to enhance its identity and ministry. This comprehensive cosmic story reflects the communion of the Triune God and situates humanity within a vast cosmic framework. The primary objective is to help the Institute understand its broader role to advance the evolution of life. This becomes increasingly urgent in light of the relentless devastation of the planet. This story grounds the Brothers’ identity as brothers to all creation. It broadens and deepens the Christian understanding of God, Jesus Christ, humanity, and creation.

In conclusion, the Institute must undergo a profound cultural, spiritual, and educational transformation. A deep awareness of brotherhood with all creation must become an integral part of and a reality within the Institute’s identity. This will necessitate a “long path

of renewal” (*LS 202*), which has the potential to deeply revitalize the Institute as Brothers become “brothers to all creation.” ❖

FULL BIBLIOGRAPHY PROVIDED IN APPENDIX III, SECTION II



Jose Nacianceno with fellow Marists from the Province of East Asia.



Br. Dan (USA), Jose Nacianceno (Philippines) and Matt Fallon (USA) together at the 23rd Marist Brothers General Chapter.

Section III — Eco Spirituality by Brigid Wolff

Defining eco spirituality can be an exercise in irony. As humans on this amazing planet we have “evolved” to the point that we have placed ourselves so far outside of and apart from creation that, as we return to wholeness, we find ourselves at a loss for words. We are experiencing glory and led to doxology upon the contemplation of a leaf, and the beauty of a blanket of snow, or the cooing of a dove in the yard. What do we do with this experience? It is surely of and from God? How do we define it? What do we call it?

Scripture however has never experienced this loss and in fact has preserved for us God’s intention for us in our relationship not just with God, our Selves, and one another, but also with Creation. The earth, like Abaraham and Sarah, Miriam and Moses, and Jesus and Mary, has always had a voice and a presence in scripture and in salvation history.

An example of scripture having a voice in scripture comes from the drama of the Cain and Abel story from Genesis 4:1-10. It is a multi-layered morality tale. Cain and Abel are brothers and the children of Adam and Eve. In this passage, each offers the fruits of their labor to God. God prefers Abel's offering for reasons not identified in the text. Maybe it is the mother and teacher in me, but I have always imagined that Abel gave the best of his work, and Cain gave the minimum effort so that he could get back to what he felt was more important.

There is a great exchange between God and Cain, which I refer to as a "coaching session." Cain is angry that God prefers Abel's gift. Here, Cain exhibits many characteristics we share as humans: jealousy, entitlement, and an inability to engage in self-reflection. God says the following to Cain, in it I can hear the voice of a loving and frustrated Father: "Then the LORD said to Cain: Why are you angry? Why are you dejected? If you act rightly, you will be accepted; but if not, sin lies in wait at the door: its urge is for you, yet you can rule over it." (NAB Gen.4:6-7)

The image of sin waiting at the door is so candid. Unfortunately, Cain does not follow God's counsel and reaches out to grab the hand of sin as he takes his brother out into a field and kills him. The story continues with this passage. "Then the LORD asked Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" He answered, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" God then said: What have you done? Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground! Now you are banned from the ground that opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand." (NAB Gen.9-11)

I have yet to read this passage without being appalled at Cain's disrespectful response to God. I also hear Jesus and his mother, Mary, saying, "Yes, actually you are your brother and sister's keeper!" It is significant to note that the reporter of this murder, is the earth. The earth experienced pain when a brother's blood was spilled upon it in an act of violence committed by another brother.

Throughout scripture, we see evidence of the earth having a voice, often in praise and celebration, as in so many of the Psalms. But here, the earth cries out in pain. We know that it still cries, not just for

itself, but also for those whose poverty worsens at the hands of their brothers and sisters. This emphasis on the impact of those who experience poverty in light of environmental degradation is one of the most essential elements of Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'*.

An eco spirituality that is grounded in scripture is one that simply names, knows, accepts, and sees, the beauty of creation all around us. So many of our Marist pillars can be a guide as we renew and return to God's intention for us and our relationship with creation.

For example, an adjusted understanding of the pillar of simplicity can help us edit our impulses to consume more than we need. The pillar of Family Spirit can invite us into a sabbath experience of rest and repair for ourselves, our relationship with God and others, and with the earth. Pope Francis offered a new dimension of eco spirituality when he added an 8th dimension to the Works of Mercy which is to notice the beauty of creation. This was announced in 2016 on the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation.

How can we as Marists learn from the morality play of the characters of Cain, Abel, God, and the Earth in Genesis 4? In my context as a religion teacher at Marist High School in Chicago, our students experience great poverty in their relationship with creation. They have had very few experiences in nature and are far removed from a relationship with the food they consume. The junior religion curriculum offers students an opportunity to grow in these areas.

Our students participate in a simulation of life as a parent caring for a family while earning minimum wage. Through this, they learn about various aspects of justice, including a living wage, affordable housing, the necessity of public transportation, child care, food deserts, and the correlation between material poverty and physical health. The levels of cortisol rise in the classroom as students navigate life as the working poor. When we first started doing this project, I was surprised that the area of most significant impact for our students and their parents is around groceries and leftovers.

One element of the project is for students to create a budget for housing, transportation, child care, and utilities. With what remained,

they were to create a grocery list with itemized costs. Many of our students are athletes, so the first red flag goes up when I ask them how their ability to compete would be affected by the diet that their fictional family consumes. Next, we look at the correlation between poverty, diet, food deserts, and various life-threatening diseases like hypertension and diabetes.

One of the last components of the project is for students to share their experiences with their parents, with particular emphasis on the habits of their families regarding grocery costs, food waste, and leftovers. The students are shocked at how much their family spends on groceries, and many will have an epiphany around leftovers, which brings great joy to the parents. Food then becomes the pathway to peace, understanding, and compassion, not just for the earth and the value of the gifts that it bears, but for our brothers and sisters in Christ, whose experience is so different from that of so many of our students.

Another way that our students at Marist Chicago come to know peace is through actions of solidarity with the earth. Three years ago, our Green Team Environmental Club worked with Owen and Seamus Murphy, brothers and Marist students who planted hummingbird and pollinator gardens for their respective Eagle Scout projects. The gardens are self-watering through a cunning solar-powered system of underground wires using water collected in rain barrels. The Murphy brothers graduated, and the tending of the gardens has been left to the Green Team, with the help of the boy's father, Mr. Murphy.

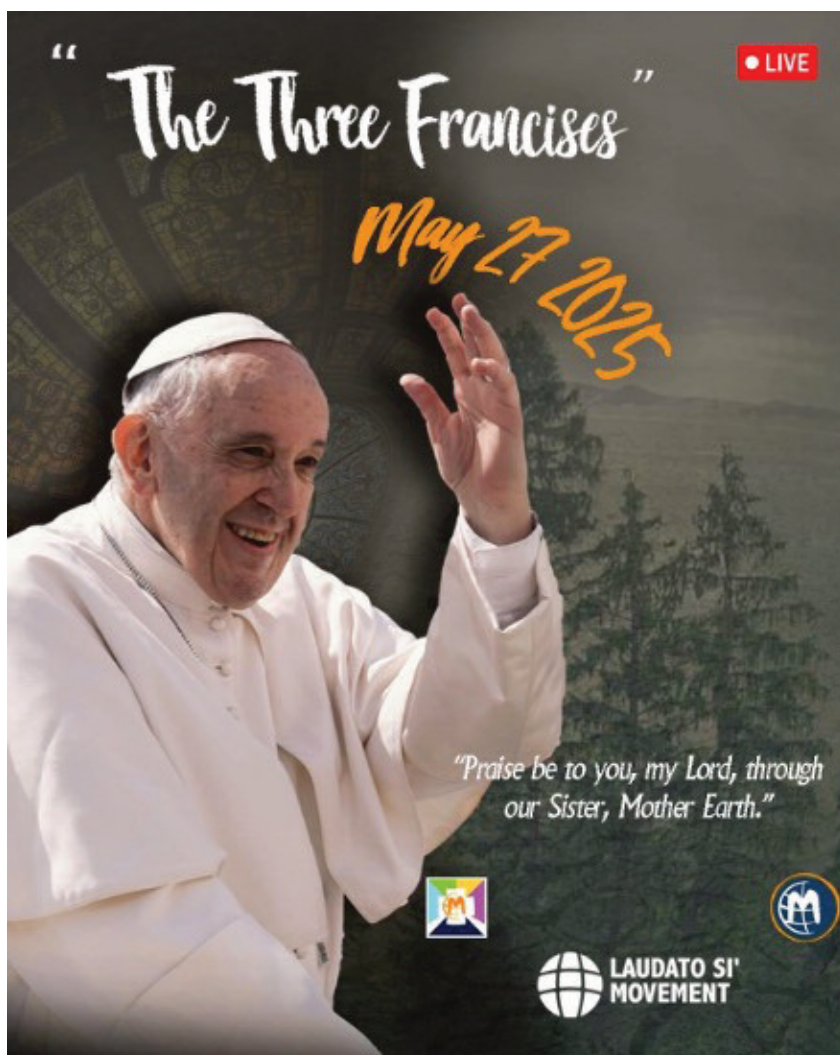
He has taught us to prune, cultivate, and remove invasive plants, all while having discussions about the nature of a weed. Every week that I work with the students in the garden is a doxology of praise, presence, and love. The students work together, share resources, encourage each other, and tease each other. We get our hands dirty, and we sweat a little. We met the hummingbirds as they feasted in the garden, and experienced the joy of watching them take flight to their nest, newly built in a nearby tree. We experience the sweetness of honeysuckle and the satisfaction of work done with love. These moments with the students in the garden are truly a return to Eden. In them, I experience, and I hope the students do too, God's original intention

for us and for creation, one of unity, harmony, and love, where there is no violence, even in sustenance, and we see God, one another, and the earth, as one relationship of love.

This quote from *Laudato Si'* so fully encapsulates this experience of doxology: "The universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely. Hence, there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person's face. The ideal is not only to pass from the exterior to the interior to discover the action of God in the soul, but also to discover God in all things." (*Laudato Si'*, 233)

Hopefully, in the classroom and in the garden, as well as at the dinner table and the grocery store, our students will grow in the gift of seeing God in all things; in the honeysuckle, and in the cortisol bump that comes with being in solidarity with those on the margins, God is there.

In choosing to be present to these realities, I discover that I have arrived at a spirituality of leftovers and a spirituality of savoring. So many questions to ask in this experience: Whose loving hands prepared this food? Whose hands delved into the soil with strength and honor to bring forth this fruit of the earth for us to consume, what rest do we and the earth experience when we slow down and savor, and consume the gifts of the earth with integrity and gratitude? Where is Jesus present with us when we experience the joy of being at table together? How happy is his Mother, Mary, to see her children know harmony and love with one another, God,



Marists from across the world gathered virtually in May 2025 for a special prayer service to commemorate the 10th Anniversary of Laudato Si' and to celebrate the contributions of Pope Francis, St. Francis of Assisi and Br. Francios (our first Superior General) to Ecological Spirituality.



Marist Students from across the USA gathered for morning prayer during Earth Day 2026.

Section IV — Concluding Synthesis of Chapter 6

In the quiet spaces where creation is received rather than used, something within us begins to awaken.

*Not first a call to act,
but a call to see.*

*To recognize that we are not separate from creation,
but part of it.*

Not owners, but participants.

Not distant observers, but deeply connected.

*In a world that often rushes past the sacred, ecological spirituality teaches
us to pause... to notice... to receive.*

A leaf.

A breath.

*A shared meal.
The quiet presence of another.*

*These are not small things.
They are places where God dwells.*

*From Champagnat's simplicity,
to Francis' kinship,
to Mary's quiet attentiveness,
to the lived witness of educators and communities—
we are invited into a new way of being.*

A way marked by:

***wonder over indifference,
relationship over domination,
gratitude over consumption,
communion over isolation.***

*In a wounded world, ecological spirituality becomes a prophetic
witness.*

*It reminds us that creation is not a problem to be solved,
but a mystery to be received.*

*That the Earth is not a possession, but a gift.
Not a resource, but a relationship.*

And ultimately:

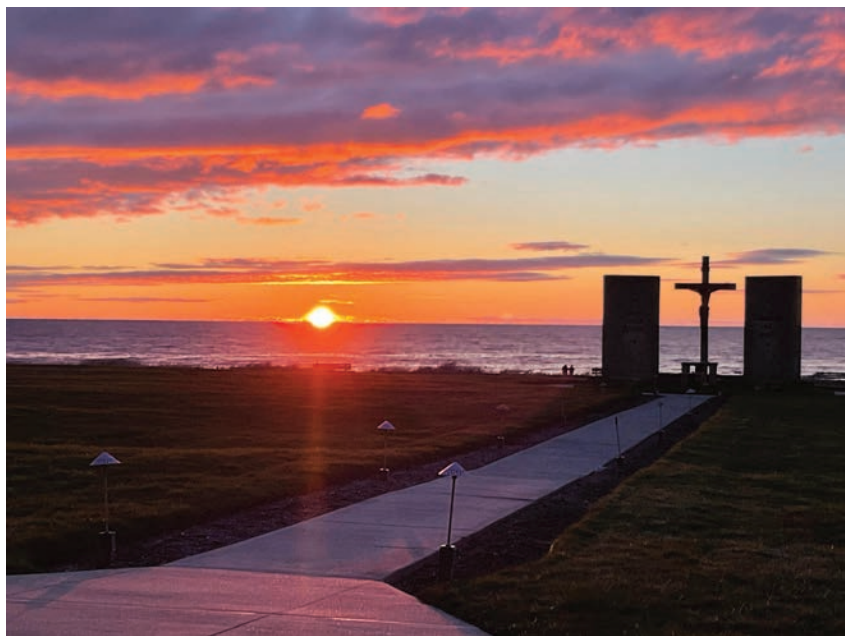
That we are not alone.

*We belong—to
God, to one
another,
and to the whole of creation.*

And in that belonging, we find our way home.



Students from Mount St. Michael Academy plant an apple tree during Earth Day Weekend 2024



God's daily Good Morning to us



The Roselle Catholic prayer Labyrinth was built and is maintained by Marist young people. Many students and teachers continue to use this sacred space as a place to be at one with God and nature.



The labyrinth courtyard at Roselle Catholic in Roselle, New Jersey.

CHAPTER 7

COMMUNITY RESILIENCE AND EMPOWERMENT



Green Team student leaders from all USA Marist Schools gather annually in Esopus for the Province Earth Day weekend. The program includes Keynote talks, several workshops on numerous Ecological topics, prayer opportunities, the planting of native plants and time for school groups to plan and update their school Laudato Si' Action plans.

“What gives me hope is seeing my peers take initiative with courage and conviction. There is a growing awareness that sustainability is not optional, it is essential. When I see students advocating for greener policies, reducing waste, and educating others, I see the Marist Pillars alive in action. Hope comes from knowing that my generation understands that faith calls us to responsibility. Guided by the vision of Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'*, we are learning that ecological conversion begins with small daily choices that ripple outward into lasting change.”

— SAMEERA ZAHEID, STUDENT AT ARCHBISHOP
MOLLOY AND USA GREEN TEAM MEMBER

Section I — Introduction by Sam C. King

No one person is an island. No one of us alone can adequately respond to the Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor. When asked about the number one thing that a person can do about climate change, the leading environmentalist Bill McKibben advises us to “be a little less of an individual.” We need to braid together our ecology efforts—through Community Resilience and Empowerment—to respond adequately and at scale to the challenges at hand.

The biologist Lynn Margulis once said that “Life did not take over the world by combat but by networking.” Indeed, the call to ecological conversion in *Laudato Si'* compels us to network; to connect and collaborate with like-minded organizations such as the *Laudato Si'* Movement, Catholic Climate Covenant, GreenFaith, and Mission Energy. We must learn from the examples of other schools, religious communities, and advocacy organizations to enhance the collective impact of our efforts.

The experience of our Province-wide Green Team is a tangible experience of Community Resilience and Empowerment. Four years ago, we began gathering together students, faculty, staff, Brothers, and members of our Province team to organize and share opportunities for

education and action rooted in integral ecology. Through these collaborations, we have planted six pollinator gardens at our various schools. We have seeded thrifted clothing fashion shows and expanded compostable products in cafeterias. We have supported programs such as Columbus' circular economy partnership with Campus for Green, turning recycled plastic into hats, lanyards, benches, and pens for school use and even Province programs. And for the past three years, we have offered Province Ecology grants to support grassroots, student-led efforts aligned with the Laudato Si' Action Platform.

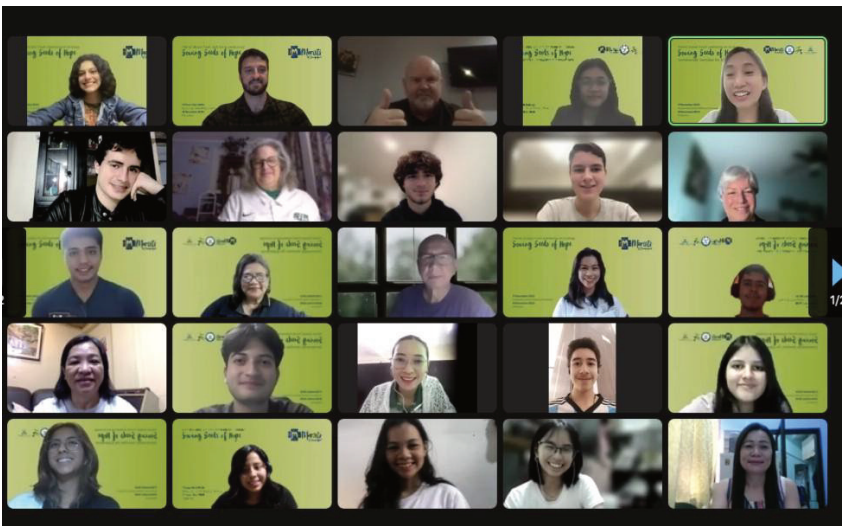
Another example of Community Resilience and Empowerment emerged through our connection with Mission Energy, a partner of the Catholic Climate Covenant, which supported Marist High School in completing a major rooftop solar project in 2025. Featuring 982 solar modules, the system is expected to generate about 695,000 kilowatt-hours of electricity and generate annual energy cost savings of about \$80,000 to \$90,000. Beyond financial savings, the solar project is projected to offset about 490 metric tons of carbon dioxide annually, which is equivalent to removing more than 100 gasoline-powered vehicles from the road each year.

The Catholic Climate Covenant has also helped us to create our Province-wide Carbon Offset Program. Every quarter, we calculate all plane and car travel from our various ministries and pay a price on the carbon dioxide emissions associated with travel—approximately \$15 per metric ton of carbon. This fund is used to support tree planting and renewable energy projects across the Province. While this is not an exhaustive solution, it is a tangible step toward recognizing the ecological footprint of travel and promoting efforts to sequester carbon.

We have also sought to embody this principle during our annual Earth Day Weekend. In 2023, we were joined by Laura Petit, an elected official from the Town of Esopus, who educated us about local composting and recycling programs. More recently, we have joined Religious Organizations Along the River (ROAR) to help advocate for the health of the Hudson River bioregion around Esopus. For the past three years, we have invited Indigenous Mi'kmaq teacher Evan

Pritchard, a former professor at Marist College, to offer morning prayer and teach us about Native history by the Hudson, known to Native Lenape peoples as the “River that Runs Both Ways.” We have also installed a Land Acknowledgement on the grounds of Esopus to honor the Indigenous communities who have lived in deep relationship with neighboring lands and waters for millennia. Recognizing a fraught history of colonial oppression, these are small gestures of solidarity with Indigenous nations, and a humble attempt to honor their enduring ecological spirituality.

Community Resilience and Empowerment will only become more important in the face of the climate crisis. As the planet warms, we will need to strengthen community networks to protect our neighbors, preserve local foodways, safeguard clean water, and respond to natural disasters. The journey ahead may not be easy, but we can weather the storms better in solidarity with one another.



Student leaders from Guatemala, the Philippines, and the U.S. gather for Sowing Seeds of Hope: An International Youth Colloquium on Ecology.

Section II — Hermitage Builders, Yesterday and Today: Marist Community Resilience and Empowerment by Brother Diego Zawadzky – Director of the Secretariat of Solidarity-Cmi. Rome

In 1824 Marcellin Champagnat together with his Brothers undertook the titanic task of building a new house that would respond to the needs of growth of the nascent community of religious educators.

The place to locate this new residence was beautiful and challenging. The task was to transform a small valley crossed by the Gier River where a granite rock quarry was located into a place where the community could establish itself in a sustainable way: a house, an orchard and a small factory taking advantage of the force of the river. The task required decision, deep conviction, individual and collective commitment, tireless work and absolute trust in divine Providence.

This emblematic place for all generations of Marists, which is still standing after 200 years, is the irrefutable testimony of how a human group can settle in harmony with its environment and generate a type of relationships capable of sustaining a sense of life, a bond of fraternity, a mission project at the service of others and a spirituality that brings together all of the above, enhancing it in the light of love and the will of God.

For this reason, the house that we have known since then as **Our Lady of L'Hermitage** represents a paradigm of the principle of **resilience and community empowerment**, to call it in today's terms, from the perspective of the encyclical *Laudato Si'*.

This principle, defined as a process of **collective ecological conversion**, seeks to strengthen the capacity of communities to face the socio-environmental crisis through solidarity action and active participation. Under the premise that "*everything is connected*," this principle holds that social problems must be addressed through community networks that promote the **common good** and the creation of more equitable systems.

And this, of course, was what Marcellin Champagnat and the first Brothers managed to build when they transformed that valley into the mother house of their congregation: not only did they erect stone walls and cultivate the surrounding land to meet the food needs of the group, but they strengthened the bonds of fraternity and belonging, while forging the sense of educational, evangelizing and solidarity service that was at the heart of his missionary work in many parts of the world. In this way, the Gier valley was "humanized" with the best that can be inferred from this term and "sacralized" by the ultimate inspiration that propitiated the Marist project.

Following the tradition of Marcellin and the first Brothers, the Marists have reached many corners of the earth where they undertook projects to transform the environment, always seeking human development and harmony with the surrounding environment.

There are examples of Marist houses established in wastelands that today are veritable orchards. Among other, I could mention places such as the Formation House in Chosica, Peru; the monastery of Las Avellanas, in Spain; the Marist Village in Luján, Argentina; the Marist Brothers Center – Mid-Hudson Valley Camp in Esopus, United States, although there are surely many more.

Apart from these physical spaces mainly intended for formation in the foundational charism, the Marist mission has also been oriented towards paths in which **resilience and community empowerment** are exercised through the firm commitment to accompany vulnerable populations to become "**active agents of environmental care**", giving them a voice and tools to rebuild their lives while protecting the planet.

In such missionary projects, the Marists work together with these populations in their efforts to adapt to adverse conditions such as climate change or poverty, while developing their community capacity to **flourish and reclaim their autonomy** through environmental education, food sovereignty and political advocacy. Thus, empowerment arises from **dialogue and deep listening** to the diverse voices of the community, allowing even the youngest to become

"guardians of our common home", intrinsically linking human rights with climate justice and the protection of biodiversity.

This exercise of community empowerment is articulated in two lines of action:

1. On the one hand, the work led by the Secretariat of Solidarity in the **defense and guarantee of rights** through the mechanisms that civil society has to make its voice heard in the international forums of the United Nations system, mainly in the preparation of reports for the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and other mechanisms of participation before the Human Rights Council, seeking to influence the generation of public policies in each nation that respond to today's ecological challenges.

Some of the reports recently prepared with the leading participation of children and young people have highlighted the situations of environmental degradation that put their future at risk. For example:

- children and young people **in Kiribati** shared their concerns about how climate change is undermining their daily lives, future opportunities and the continuity of their culture, language and traditions;
- **Fijian** children and youth expressed concern about the direct impact of sea-level rise on their lives, causing the forced displacement of some nearshore populations;
- for young people in **Mozambique**, climate resilience is a constant concern, and they call for the adoption and continuous implementation of effective adaptation, mitigation and disaster risk reduction measures;
- children and youth in **Bolivia** call for consultation on decisions affecting indigenous peoples' lands and environmental resources before implementing projects in their territories;
- young people in **the United States**, concerned about environmental degradation, are calling for stricter policies to

deal with global warming and pollution, although their voices have not yet been heard in the absence of their national government's delegation at the most recent UPR session.

2. A second axis is the **management of development projects** with the technical and financial support of the Marist Foundation for International Solidarity FMSI, on all continents and contexts, from a shared vision that places **integral ecology** at the center of the Marist mission, shaping a global ecological movement based on the adoption of the principles of *Laudato Si'*, child-led environmental action, the generation of sustainable livelihoods and food systems, the circular economy, waste reduction, and the demand for climate justice for the most vulnerable.

In these projects, local communities, whether in refugee settlements, rural schools, urban suburbs or conflict-ridden communities, take the lead in coping with the situations that overwhelm them, allowing children, families and educators to become guardians of the Common Home as they rebuild their own lives.

Some examples of this main line of action are:

- At La Valla School, in **Cambodia**, environmental care is a path to trust and active citizenship for about 250 children with disabilities. The project includes the use of solar energy, waste management and the creation of green spaces for both personal development and physical and emotional rehabilitation.
- In **Haiti and Mexico**, a binational program is being developed where school gardens become spaces for healing, learning, and community resilience. Children learn agroecology, water conservation, food sovereignty, biodiversity protection and disaster risk management.
- At the Bobokoli Institute, which serves nearly 5,000 primary and secondary school students in the **Democratic Republic of Congo**, a 20-hectare "ecological laboratory" and a nursery

with 30,000 seedlings have been set up. Students lead environmental clubs and reforestation projects to inspire change in Kinshasa.

- In **Madagascar**, in the face of massive forest loss, 25 schools are networked as a climate resilience platform, promoting sustainable agriculture and environmental education to combat poverty.
- In the Heart Without Borders project in Maicao, in the arid climate of La Guajira, **Colombia**, where children face droughts, high temperatures, and respiratory diseases linked to weather conditions, trees are planted to create shade and reduce extreme heat. Ecology is defined as climate justice for children forcibly displaced out of Venezuela.
- The Heart Made Project in Aleppo, **Syria**, promotes a circular economy initiative where women rebuild their dignity in the face of the effects of war while recycling discarded fabrics to create new garments in a solar-powered workshop, promoting conscious consumption and creativity.

These initiatives are just a small sample of the Marist commitment to the formation of a new generation of men and women who are more aware of their role in the promotion of their rights and their commitment to environmental sustainability, with a deep sense of community and courage that will enable them to face the immense challenges that arise today.

We hope that their response will live up to the legacy left by Marcellin Champagnat and the first Brothers, and that today, as yesterday, we will all together be **"builders of a new Hermitage"** which, in the words of Brother Peter Carroll *"will not be a fixed structure in one place, but a living reality that moves like the river itself, wherever Marists live their faith, create fraternity and give life to others"*.



Brother Diego Zawadzky – Director of the Secretariat of Solidarity-Cmi.

Section III — An Essay by Josh Van Cleef

The Catholic Diocese of Lexington gathers annually in Frankfort, Kentucky to speak with lawmakers during the legislative session about issues related to our faith. We call this event Catholics at the Capitol. Every year, this proves to be a meaningful experience, but 2025 was different.

In March 2025, the faithful of the diocese assembled at the Kentucky State Capitol to speak to legislators about bills that threaten the environment and to implore lawmakers to care for creation. On the day of the event, people from across the diocese arrived at the Capitol building early in the morning for our first legislator meeting. The

event started as it does every year and with usual participants. The bishop, priests, and the faithful gathered in a room, found their seats, and prepared for our discussion with the first legislator. Then something unexpected happened. The door opened, everyone turned from their seats to see what the commotion was, and an entire 3rd grade class from one of our Catholic schools filed into the room. The students were outfitted with handwritten posterboard signs with quotes from *Laudato Si'*.

As stunned as everyone was to see an entire 3rd grade class file into this meeting, that wasn't the most surprising moment of the day. The moment that undoubtedly will remain in everyone's memory, especially the first lawmaker's, came after the remarks from our first legislator. The legislator supported a bill that sided with corporate interests and ended the protection of thousands of miles of streams. At the conclusion of his remarks, he perfunctorily asked the group if we had any questions.

Then, without hesitation, the hand of nearly every 3rd grader shot up. And one-by-one, the children claimed the microphone, questioned the politician, and gave a testimony of how their faith calls them to protect God's creation. It was an unforgettable moment.

The moment was memorable for various reasons: the dumbfounded look on the lawmaker, the boldness and conviction of the 3rd graders, and watching young people take claim on the future of their community. The moment beautifully captured the goal of *Laudato Si'* for *Community Resilience and Empowerment*.

Community Resilience and Empowerment

Community Resilience and Empowerment calls for collective action and advocacy on behalf of Our Common Home. It requires intentional community engagement and participatory action at the local, national, and international levels to care for God's

creation. This goal finds concrete expression through legislative advocacy and grassroots campaigns to protect God's creation, and

community action related to responding to the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth in one's local community.

I have seen first-hand what it looks like when Catholic communities collectively work for the protection of God's creation. I serve as the Director of the Office of Peace and Justice for the Catholic Diocese of Lexington, Kentucky, and it has been my privilege to guide each one of our parishes through the process of making a Laudato Si' Action Plan. Each faith community built a team, hosted listening sessions, and made a Laudato Si' Action Plan that put into action each of the Seven Goals of Laudato Si'. Across the 50 counties of the diocese, the faithful have put Community Resilience and Empowerment into action.

In my experience, action for Community Resilience and Empowerment stems from understanding two fundamental premises that underpin this goal: 1) The problem is bigger than any one of us but impacts all of us. 2) The solution must come from collective action.

The problem is bigger than any one of us, but it impacts all of us.

Pope Francis reminds us in Laudate Deum, the ecological crisis is "a drama that harms all of us" (3) as "the world in which we live is collapsing" (2). Communities across my diocese see the impacts of the ecological crisis in their lived experience. Some parishes experienced the historic flooding in 2022, others experience it with increased water pollution and decreased legal protections, and still others see threats to plant and animal life. Many of the faithful look to the future with concern for the world that our children and grandchildren will inherit.

While the ecological crisis touches each of our lives, we recognize that it is not simply the result of personal choices. Our personal lifestyle decisions, like what we consume and how diligently we recycle, alone did not get us in this mess. Rather, the strength and scope of the crisis result from a myriad of forces larger than each of us. For instance, local, national, and international laws have allowed for the destruction of the Earth at a massive scale and speed. National and corporate

interests often place profit over the poor and the planet. The pervasiveness of the throwaway culture that views marginalized people the natural world as disposable.

The solution must come from collective action.

The ecological crisis impacts the entire global human family, wildlife, and threatens the Earth itself. This problem is not simply a matter of personal responsibility but of collective stewardship.

Pope Francis wrote,

“I ask everyone to accompany this pilgrimage of reconciliation with the world that is our home and to help make it more beautiful, because that commitment has to do with our personal dignity and highest values. At the same time, I cannot deny that it is necessary to be honest and recognize that the most effective solutions will not come from individual efforts alone, but above all from major political decisions on the national and international level”.

— (LAUDATE DEUM, NO.69)

Community Resilience and Empowerment is fundamentally about the movement of the Spirit animating communities to protect God’s creation.

We practice this goal when we:

- Advocate for laws on the local, national, and international level that protect God’s creation
- Participate in grassroots movements, protests, and social movements to call attention to the ecological crisis and call for a new path forward
- Stand in solidarity as a global family to protect God’s creation
- Build community, foster belonging, and amplify the voices of those most marginalized

Community Resilience and Empowerment and Our Marist Way

Marist spirituality and mission invite each of us to communion with God, our neighbors, and creation. Our call to care for creation flows from the experience of the Spirit at work in all things. We read in *Wherever You Go: The Marist Brothers' Rule of Life*:

“Authentic spirituality...awakens an awareness of the deep unity of all living beings and your interconnectedness with all creation. Commit yourself to maintaining global harmony, a source of life for our world. Develop a contemplative attitude toward the universe and protect the integrity of our common home: “and God saw that all created things were good” (Gn 1:31). Do so, not only for the sake of this generation, but for the children and young people of the future. Leave them a habitable planet, a world in better condition than the one that you received; let that be your legacy.

— (RULE OF LIFE, 33)

Protecting God's creation responds to the urgent needs of our time and of future generations. As the XXIII General Chapter stated, caring for our common home is a foundation stone for building a New Hermitage, a new path, and vibrant future.

As Marists, Community Resilience and Empowerment draws upon our Family Spirit, the pillar of our Marist life that shapes the way we build community and care for those around us. Community Resilience and Empowerment, asks us to extend our care and protection of community to include not only students, neighbors, and the marginalized in our midst but also:

- The flora and fauna that sustain life in our community
- The streams, rivers, and bodies of living water that surround us
- The future generations- our children that will call these ecosystems and communities, home

Similarly, Community Resilience and Empowerment draws upon our Family Spirit, inviting us to act in solidarity with the Global Charismatic Family.

- To come to the aid of communities most effected by the environmental crisis
- To advocate for international laws that safeguard our common home
- To reject efforts of rich nations to dominate and exploit the resources of poorer ones

As a lay Marist of Champagnat, I approach my diocesan *Laudato Si'* work with a distinctive approach that believes in the power of community. In community we encounter God, others, and ourselves and we are sent together in mission. I have experienced this power in Marist groups countless times. In my own diocese, I have also experienced the power of faith communities to stand up for God's creation and stand in opposition to powerful political, economic, and cultural forces.

I will close with a quote from the Kentucky environmentalist and poet, Wendell Berry, "What I stand for is what I stand on". May each of us claim our community and together take a stand.



Josh Van Cleef, who leads the Laudato Si' efforts for the Diocese of Lexington, Kentucky lives with his wife, Ellen and their two children on Magnificat farm in rural eastern Kentucky. The Three Violets chapel on their farm was built by fellow USA Marist



USA Marists building the Three Violets chapel.

Section IV — Together with girls and boys, be the Good news of today in the midst of war by Mónica G. Yerena Suárez, Área de Solidaridad Provincial Maristas México Central

According to data from the Economic Commission for Latin America (2021), in 2020 the population under 18 years of age was 200 million. This represents three out of every ten people in Latin America and the Caribbean; however, this population is the one that suffers the greatest inequality gaps and the one that concentrates the highest percentage of poverty (46.2%) in relation to the rest of the age groups in the region.

The social disadvantages and the impoverishment of childhood and adolescence jeopardize not only their present, but also their future. As shown by statistical evidence, a large portion of the people born in an environment with no access to fundamental rights such as food, housing, education or health die under the same conditions.

Limited social mobility of the most vulnerable sectors, access to drinking water, air pollution, obesogenic environments in schools and homes, management of hazardous waste and displacement due to natural disasters are just a few of the problems that affect the right to a healthy environment of children and teenagers.

The organization Action Against Hunger (2023) mentions that in no other region of the world is the disparity between men and women who suffer from food insecurity as high as in Latin America and the Caribbean. This demonstrates how social marginalization has differentiated impacts based on gender and interdependence of rights. The lack of nutrients during gestation and during early childhood affects the immune system, physical growth and the cognitive and socio-emotional development of people. As a result, the right to food influences a student's health and, in turn, their learning potential. Although the socio-environmental emergency affects us all, some more than others, as mentioned above, it has also triggered processes of transformation. Parting from the principle of education as a path to peace, conflicts can always become opportunities.

We can take Cuba as an example. Thanks to state efforts, the tightening of the blockade on the island is accelerating the transition toward renewable energies through different citizen initiatives (Duarte Galleguillos, 2026). There are also the different forms of “creative resistance” that the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation (2024) has documented throughout the American continent, which are developing energy alternatives that prioritize people and the care for nature. At the same time, these forms defend the territory from projects that seek to generate surplus value at the expense of natural goods, through the destruction of ecosystems and the pollution of the planet.

To “uproot the problem” as Greta Thunberg would say, we need to continue acting with a comprehensive perspective, just as Pope Francis proposed: always taking into consideration the social, economic and environmental dimensions. All of this can be a reality by following the premise that being Christian also means taking responsibility for the care of Creation.

Thanks to the mobilization of children and teenagers around the world, ecological conversion today has a concrete tool of enforceability: General Comment No. 26 of the United Nations Committee on children's rights, which speaks about the rights of children and the environment, with special attention to climate change. This comment sets specific obligations that States must fulfill to effectively guarantee the life and full development of children without any discrimination.

General Comment 26 establishes that authorities must comply with the following provisions:

- Take bold measures.
- Assess the impact on children's lives of decisions related to the environment.
- Regulate companies to prevent them from polluting.
- Provide access to climate justice.
- Promote international cooperation to address the problem.
- Consider children's rights in decisions on climate change and mitigate it.
- Include children in the design of plans and public policies for a healthy environment; and
- Not allow any climate related financing to violate their human rights.

The goal is that the above provisions and each of the daily actions we carry out for the care of our common Home allow us, together with girls and boys, to be Good news of today in the midst of war.

References in Appendix iii, Chapter 7, Section IV



Mónica G. Yerena Suárez, continues to be an inspiring leader in the area of Solidarity for the Marist Province of México Central



Section V — From School Nursery to Community Transformation Planting Trees, Empowering People: A Marist Response to Laudato Si' in the Democratic Republic of Congo by Br. Edouard Yatha Nanga Luka, FMS, Introduction: A Marist School at the Service of Society

Institut Bobokoli is a Catholic Marist secondary school located in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo. Founded in **1956**, the institution has grown into a major educational center serving **4,928 students during the 2025–2026 academic year**, supported by **132 teachers and educational staff**. Over the decades, the school has developed not only as an academic institution but also as a social and formative hub influencing families, neighborhoods, and partner schools across the region.

Guided by the Marist tradition of educating the whole person — intellectually, morally, spiritually, and socially — Bobokoli emphasizes responsibility, solidarity, and service to the wider community. In a rapidly expanding urban context marked by environmental degradation, deforestation, and socio-economic vulnerability, the institution progressively recognized that education must extend beyond classroom instruction.

Inspired by Pope Francis' description of the earth as “our common home” (*Laudato Si'*, §1), the school launched a practical ecological initiative aimed at linking environmental awareness, youth formation, and community participation.

Laudato Si' and the Principle of Integral Ecology

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis teaches that environmental destruction cannot be separated from social injustice. He reminds us that the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor must be heard together (§49). Ecological responsibility therefore requires educational transformation, moral awareness, and collective participation.

The encyclical further insists that “everything is connected” (§91) and calls for an “integral ecology” integrating environmental, social, economic, and cultural realities (§139). This vision aligns closely with the Marist educational philosophy, which seeks to form responsible citizens committed to both human dignity and the protection of creation.

Within this perspective, environmental education becomes an essential component of the school’s mission.

The Birth of the Bobokoli Nursery Initiative

The ecological program began with the creation of a school nursery on the Bobokoli campus. Initially conceived as a pedagogical tool linking environmental theory with practical experience, the nursery rapidly demonstrated its broader transformative potential.

Students became actively involved in preparing seeds, watering seedlings, managing soil conditions, and transplanting young trees. Environmental awareness became experiential rather than abstract. Through tree planting, students learned patience, responsibility, ecological interdependence, and long-term thinking.

The initiative also became institutionalized in the school culture. **Each student entering the first year of secondary education is encouraged and guided to plant a tree on the project site,** transforming environmental responsibility into a formative rite of entry into the school community.

Over successive phases, the initiative expanded significantly. To date, more than **300,000 tree seedlings** have been produced, including forest species and fruit trees that support environmental restoration, food sustainability, and local resilience.

Education and Capacity Building

Training has remained central to the initiative. Workshops are organized for students and teachers to develop theoretical knowledge

and practical environmental skills, including nursery management, irrigation, biodiversity awareness, and long-term maintenance.

Teachers integrate environmental themes into academic subjects, ensuring continuity between classroom instruction and field practice. Students become ecological actors rather than passive learners.

The project gradually expanded beyond the school. Parents received seedlings with guidance for planting and care. Other schools participated in awareness campaigns. Local organizations collaborated in planting operations. Environmental responsibility thus evolved into a shared social practice.

This approach reflects Pope Francis' call for ecological education capable of forming "new habits" and lasting cultural change (*Laudato Si'*, §209).

Luila: A Major Experimental Site for Ecological Resilience

A decisive phase in the expansion of the initiative was the establishment of an experimental ecological site in **Luila**, located **68 kilometers from Kinshasa**, in the **territory of Kasangulu in Congo Central Province**.

The Luila site functions as a rural environmental laboratory where agroforestry experimentation, ecological training, and long-term observation are conducted in a structured environment.

To date, more than **12,000 trees have been planted in Luila**, and these trees continue to grow steadily, transforming the site into a visible ecological reference point for surrounding communities.

The initiative at Luila integrates both educational and pastoral dimensions. The **parish priest of the local parish belonging to the Diocese of Kisantu** has been actively associated with the project in order to accompany the local populations and support community engagement. This collaboration strengthens the social and spiritual sustainability of the initiative.

Students visiting Luila observe soil adaptation, species resilience, irrigation methods, and seasonal growth patterns. Teachers use the location as an open-air classroom. **Students from surrounding schools near the experimental field are also regularly sensitized and involved**, extending the educational impact beyond Bobokoli itself.

The Luila experience embodies Pope Francis' teaching that authentic ecological commitment requires responsibility toward future generations (*Laudato Si'*, §159).

Community Participation and Empowerment

One of the strongest outcomes of the Bobokoli initiative has been the development of wide community participation. Ecological resilience grows when communities become actors rather than beneficiaries.

Seedlings distributed to families, schools, and organizations created a network of environmental stewards. Parents planted trees in residential compounds. Students organized planting campaigns. Schools integrated environmental awareness activities into their academic calendars. Local institutions incorporated reforestation into community programs.

Through this participatory structure, environmental protection became part of everyday social life. Pope Francis urges precisely this transition from indifference to shared responsibility (*Laudato Si'*, §14).

Participation generated dignity, ownership, and collective hope.

The Marist Educational Contribution

The effectiveness of the initiative is closely linked to the Marist pedagogical tradition. Marist education emphasizes presence among young people, practical formation, solidarity, and education for life.

Environmental initiatives reinforce these values by requiring cooperation, patience, and shared responsibility. Students learn leadership through concrete tasks. Teachers accompany intellectual

formation alongside ethical development. Communities increasingly perceive the school as a center of service and innovation.

The initiative itself was launched under the leadership of **Brother Edouard Yatha Nanga Luka, Marist Brother**, whose vision emphasized linking environmental education, student formation, and community empowerment in a single integrated mission.

Conclusion: Planting the Future

The ecological initiative at Institut Bobokoli demonstrates that community resilience and empowerment can grow from sustained educational action. What began as a school nursery has evolved into a movement producing more than 300,000 trees seedlings and mobilizing thousands of participants.

In the spirit of *Laudato Si'*, the project confirms that protecting our common home begins locally — through education, shared responsibility, and collective commitment. Each planted tree becomes both an environmental contribution and a symbol of solidarity for future generations.

Through Marist education, planting trees ultimately becomes an act of planting the future.



Br. Brian Poulin with Br. Br. Édouard Yatha Nanga Luka, during his visit to the Marist secondary school at l'Instut Bobokoli, Kinshasa, DRC in 2025.

Section VI — Concluding Synthesis of Chapter 7 by Br. Dan O’Riordan

The collective essays of this 7th Chapter point to a clear emerging truth: We cannot respond to the Cry of the Earth or the Cry of the Poor alone. Community resilience and empowerment are not optional—they are essential.

They call us to:

- move from individualism to communion;
- from isolation to collaboration;
- from concern to collective action.

In the Marist tradition, this takes shape through:

- Family Spirit,

- shared mission,
- accompaniment of young people,
- and a commitment to justice and sustainability.

In order for us as Marists to respond to the message of our recent 23rd General Chapter of building a “new living Hermitage” for our time in history, it will require us to build communities that sustain life, foster belonging, empower the vulnerable, and protect our common home.

This is not simply a strategy. It is a way of being. And in a world facing profound ecological and social challenges, it may be our greatest hope.



Student leaders from Christopher Columbus High School presenting to the USA Provincial Council about their commitment to living Laudato Si' across their school community.



During Earth Day weekend, USA Marist students learn how new solar panels at the Marist Brothers Center in Esopus now provide energy for two of the buildings on this sacred ground. Students who attended the previous Earth Day weekend had dug the holes and trenches for these solar panels.

Going Green AT MARIST



THE MARIST CAFETERIA IS NOW USING COMPOSTABLE SOUP CUPS AND FLATWARE, WHILE ELIMINATING HARMFUL STYROFOAM AND MANY PLASTICS. THANK YOU TO THE MARIST GREEN TEAM FOR THEIR CONTINUED DEDICATION TO HELPING US "GO GREEN!"

Marist High School in Chicago implementing compostable packaging in their cafeteria.

FINAL THOUGHTS

BR. DAN O'RIORDAN

What has been placed before us in these pages is not simply a collection of reflections, but a call.

A call that echoes through every chapter, every story, and every witness:

To see differently.

To live differently.

To love differently.

From the cry of the Earth
to the cry of the poor,
from economic systems
to daily choices,
from education
to spirituality,
from personal conversion to communal action—
we are being called into conversion.

Not a partial conversion.

Not a temporary one.
But a transformation of heart, mind, and way of life.

In the Marist tradition, this path is not new—
it is a return.

A return to the Marist pillars of **simplicity and presence**,
a return to a way of being that is attentive, relational, and rooted
in God.

We are surrounded by prophetic voices who guide and inspire us:

Champagnat, who showed us that great things begin small.
Francis of Assisi, who revealed how to live in communion with all of
creation.

Brother François, who cultivated both a garden and a vision we are
called to continue.

Pope Francis, who challenges us to care for our common home with
courage and conviction.

Mary, who teaches us how to listen, trust, and boldly respond.

And Christ, in whom all creation is held together in love.

Today, that same call is before us.

To build **a home for all**
and to become **a river of life**
in a world longing for healing.

May we go forth as Marists of today—
walking gently upon the earth,
standing in solidarity with the poor,
building communities of resilience and hope,
standing in solidarity with those on the frontlines of environmental
change,
educating for transformation,
and living a spirituality that recognizes God in all things.

For this world is not only our home—
it is the place where God continues to dwell among us.

**And the future of our common home will be shaped
by how we choose to live this call—today.**

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APPENDIX I

USA PROVINCE LAUDATO SI' ACTION PLAN



THE FULL USA PROVINCE LAUDATO SI' ACTION PLAN CAN BE ACCESSED BY USING THE FOLLOWING WEBSITE:

<https://maristbr.org/pdfs/newsletters/Laudato-Si-Action-Plan-2025-USA-Province.pdf>

Introduction:

In his 2015 Encyclical, *Laudato Si'*: On Care for our Common Home, Pope Francis states that "Living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience" (217}. These words remind us that our call to care for creation is an essential part of Christian life and the life of the Church. In his 2023 Apostolic Exhortation, *Laudate Deum*, Pope Francis makes plain that this vocation requires the Church, at every level, to take bold, urgent, and faith-filled action.

The spirit of *Laudato Si'* has deep roots in the Marist charism, which emerged among rural Christians from the French countryside in the early 19th century. As Marists, we seek to embody what St. Marcellin Champagnat called a "simple and down-to-earth spirituality" grounded in the Four Pillars of Presence, Simplicity, Family Spirit, and Love of Work (WFR, n.23}. We look to our own Brother Francois - the first Superior General of the Marist Brothers, and an herbalist and infirmarian - as an exemplar for what it means to live out this ecological spirituality.

Brother Francois spent his early life working on a farm, tending to sheep and lambs, nurturing a deep sensitivity to ecological spirituality. He advised the early Brothers to "watch, listen, and hear" to contemplate the natural world. He likened the heavens to "an immense temple that God has raised up for his glory" (Br. Francois, Notebook n. 303, p. [560]). He was attentive to the movement of leaves, the songs of birds, the fragrance of flowers, the behavior of animals, and the changing of seasons. He marveled at the profound bond between humans and nature, writing that, "Humans live on air and breathe it constantly" (Br. Francois, Notebook n. 303, p. [676]).

Brother Francois experienced God at work in nature. He once observed a farmer who, after planting seeds in the field, could only wait and hope for "the precious produce of the land," and for God to "send the rains of the first and last seasons" (Br. Francois, Personal Letters, T2. 1664, Notebook of Letters n. 7, p. 1076). He wrote that, "The study of medicine has led me to praise God, who has given healing power to different remedies" (Br. Francois, Notebook n. 301, p. [77]). Br. Francois recognized and praised God at work in planting, in the land and its produce, in the rains and the seasons, and in the healing properties of various herbs. Near the end of his life, he wrote: "God in everything; God everywhere; God alone, and my conscience as I face eternity" (Br. Francois, Notebook n. 302, p. [166]). Like St Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of ecology, Br. Francois invites us to see the goodness of God in all creatures.

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis connects ecological spirituality with a call to embrace "a prophetic and contemplative lifestyle, one capable of deep enjoyment free from the obsession with consumption" [LS, 222]. Br. Francois embodied this ethic in his own time, advising early Marist Brothers to, "Eat less and chew more to aid digestion and maintain health; this is a good recipe for healing or preventing illnesses" (Br. Francois, Notebook n. 301, p. [149]).

He also reflected that, "Being a happy person, engaging in gentle exercises, and having modest meals are three reliable medicines" {Br. Francois, Notebook n. 301, p. [86)}. Br. Francois believed that a healthy body and a sound spiritual life are achieved through moderation, temperance, and discipline-virtues essential for resisting consumerism and protecting Mother Earth.



Marist Brothers USA Province Laudato Si' Action Plan 2025

APPENDIX II. USA PROVINCIAL COUNCIL
VISION AND BELIEF STATEMENT

Marist Brothers USA Provincial Council

Beliefs
& Vision



FIRST belief

That our 2024 Chapter gave evidence of our living in a time of transition. We are committed to creating new structures to meet the challenges and demands of new realities.

SECOND belief

That our dialogue during our recent Chapter encouraged us to focus our energies on inclusion. We seek to create "new wineskins for new wine" and foster an awareness of solidarity and our Global Marist Family, especially in our relationship with the District of Canada.

THIRD belief

That we are called to build a living Hermitage for our times. We will work together to create a shared future for all Marists.

A portrait of a Marist Brother with dark hair and a beard, wearing a brown habit, next to a landscape painting of a coastal town with a church and a boat.

FOURTH belief

That like Mary, we place our trust in God and his presence among us. As Marists, we seek to strive to reflect the Marial face of our Church.

A painting of the Virgin Mary seated with the Christ Child on her lap, surrounded by other figures in a religious scene.

FIFTH belief

That ministry leadership and Marist educators, present and future, must be formed as keepers of the charism. Our ministries will be able to articulate what makes them centers of evangelization.

That we are committed to reading the signs of the times, among them: the challenge of racism, the dignity of the LGBTQ+ community and other marginalized people, and emergent needs of young people (mental health, a sense of belonging, experience of Church).

SIXTH belief

SEVENTH belief

That our most treasured resources include: the spirit of hope that is evident within the Province at large, the awareness that we stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us, the faith and witness of our older Brothers, and our journey towards communion as Marists of Champagnat.



EIGHTH belief

That we are inspired by the courage of those joining our brotherhood and energized by new brothers among us who reflect a diversity of culture and experience. Their zeal for our mission and their desire to live a life together centered around the Gospel are a source of great hope.

NINTH belief

That our communities and ministries are committed to the principles of Laudato Si and that a growing awareness of care for our common home is at the heart of the education of young people.



TENTH belief

That we believe that God is faithful and will guide us through this third century of Marist life. Likewise, as keepers of the charism, we will do all that depends on us.



vision

As members of the Provincial Council, we commit ourselves to establishing a culture within the Province of the United States shaped by the passion that first led us on the journey of religious life.

FAITH

Rooted in faith, the culture we create will:

- ✓ Be mission-oriented
- ✓ Promote justice, peace and joy
- ✓ Foster a sense of family spirit created around the Lavalla table
- ✓ Be inclusive, with a concern for one another and a respect for differences
- ✓ Be attuned to God's Spirit as manifest in our day and age

PASSION

Like Marcellin and our early Brothers, we will:

- ✓ Take risks
- ✓ Allow God to transform us into prayerful people
- ✓ Encourage young people to embrace the God who loves them
- ✓ Direct our energies toward the poor and marginalized
- ✓ Claim Mary as Our Good Mother and sister in faith

COMMITMENT

We are willing to expend our best energies and resources to bring our preferred future to life.



Marist Brothers U.S. Province

Market Brothers Communities and Market Affiliated Ministries are in the following areas:

Berlin, 73
 Bloomwood, 87
 Boon, 87
 Brentsville, 73
 Chicago, 3
 El Paso, 73
 Ensign, 87
 Eugene, 58
 Fleming, 87
 Ferry Mills, 87
 Jackson, 17
 Lenoir, 73
 Lawrence, 84
 Miami, 11
 Missouri, 81
 Copper Lake, 1
 Portland, 87
 Poughkeepsie, 3
 Seattle, 81
 Seattle, Canada
 Greensburg, 87
 Whiting, 87



APPENDIX III

PAN-AMAZONIAN ECCLESIAL NETWORK (REPAM) SOURCE: ORGANIZATIONAL PLAN: IDENTITY, STRUCTURE, AND SERVICES.

The Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network (REPAM) is a network that involves many people and institutions dedicated to the care and defense of environmental and human life. Throughout its history, REPAM has experienced various processes of training and coordination in support of the socio-environmental cause in the Amazon.

Defending the human rights of Amazonian peoples and promoting socio-environmental justice and well-being has been its main mission since it was founded in September 2014. REPAM is an ecclesial network serving the life of the territories of the Pan-Amazon region, aimed at cultivating, caring for, and strengthening processes of visibility, coordination, and care for the peoples, ecclesial organizations, and territories that are part of the Amazon. It functions as a coordination platform, to share experiences and services, with the purpose of responding to the needs of the 8 countries and one overseas territory that make up the Pan-Amazon region, namely: Bolivia, Brazil, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, Guyana, Suriname, and French Guiana.

On September 12, 2014, at a meeting held in Brasília, REPAM was officially established by its founding entities: the Episcopal Council for

Latin America and the Caribbean (CELAM), the Latin American Confederation of Religious (CLAR); the Latin American and Caribbean Secretariat of Cáritas (SELACC), and the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil (CNBB), through the Episcopal Commission for the Amazon. The founding meeting included the participation and support of many people who, from their territories, organize and coordinate networked work actions with the support of local Churches and international organizations.

The creation of REPAM coincided with the beginning of Pope Francis' pontificate. Months after the Network was founded, the Pope published the Encyclical *Laudato Si'* on the Care of Our Common Home, in which he highlighted the importance of the Amazon for the balance of life on planet Earth.

In the process of building and strengthening REPAM, *Laudato Si'* was adopted as the foundation, methodological path, and horizon.

A foundation to inspire its practice based on the Magisterium of the Church, with Pope Francis' sensitive perspective on socio-environmental issues. A methodological path because it incorporates practical guidelines from *Laudato Si'* into the daily reality of socio-ecclesial action, in relations with local peoples and the entire biome. And a horizon, because this Encyclical points to concrete directions for pastoral work and presence in political spaces that promote advocacy, grounded in ecclesial identity and witnessing to the Gospel of Creation. REPAM is a network that nurtures, cares for, and strengthens processes of visibility, coordination, and care for the peoples and ecclesial organizations of the Amazon and other territories. It is aware of the dynamics inherent in being a network embodied in the daily lives of the peoples, promoting actions with other spheres of awareness and advocacy.

It is an Ecclesial Network because it takes on the commitment of socio-ecclesial action that strengthens the care and defense of the peoples, territories, and Amazonian ecosystems, promoting life and the hope of living in justice and harmony with all of creation. To this end, it strengthens what the Church carries out in the Amazonian territory concerning the life of the peoples and Integral

Ecology, and mobilizes efforts from various organizations, pastoral groups, movements, congregations, and other ecclesial actors for this purpose.

It is a Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network. The Pan-Amazon is a territory where life pulses with great beauty and many threats. It is a place where different peoples build and carry out their life projects deeply connected to their environment. This territory is also the collective of local Churches, religious congregations, institutional and inter-institutional projects. Therefore, REPAM assumes this place as the territory of its pastoral action and socio-environmental mission.

VISION, MISSION, AND PRINCIPLES

Vision: By 2030, to establish itself as a connected, dynamic, and empowered network that defends the peoples and territories of the Amazon, promoting just and sustainable ways of life.

Mission: To weave a socio-ecclesial action network that strengthens the care and defense of the peoples, territories, and ecosystems of the Amazon, promoting life and the hope of living together justly and in harmony with all creation.

Principles:

Preferential option for the poor and for Mother Earth: Make pastoral choices to promote the dignity and human and nature rights of these subjects and territories, as an ethical requirement to promote the common good.

Peoples' protagonism: Deeply respect the cultures, traditions, customs, beliefs, and traditional organizations of the peoples and communities, welcoming them in all their processes of formation, articulation, communication, and other services of REPAM.

Subsidiarity: Provide support, actions, and services to communities and groups in the Amazon, especially those in situations of exclusion and vulnerability, without supplanting their own initiatives or the obligations of states or governments.

Comprehensive care for the Common Home: Be committed to defending the Common Home at both local and global levels, strengthening experiences that promote new economies, and other relationships between peoples and nature that recognize the forest, waters, land, and the entire biome as rights-bearing entities.

Human, Collective, and Nature Rights: Seek ways to promote and foster political awareness, systematizing and documenting situations of injustice, vulnerability, and rights violations in the territory, participating in local, regional, and international spaces for reporting, advocacy, and influence that contribute to changing these realities.

Synodal Walk: To be a space of convergence for ecclesial and non-ecclesial organizations from the territory and other regions committed to the defense of life and the Amazon biome.

Solidarity and cooperation: To guide knowledge, methodologies, practices, projects, and resources to promote the life of the peoples in the Amazon, through the fraternal and committed cooperation of allied Church and society agencies, which are strategic partners for carrying out REPAM's mission.

~Submitted by Brother João Gutemberg. Brother Joao is a member of the Synod for the Amazon. He was Executive Secretary of the Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network (REPAM) from September 2020 to December 2025, based in the city of Manaus (Brazil).



Br. João Gutemberg Sampaio and the organizing committee

APPENDIX IV

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