California Catholics Steadily Work to Care for Our Common Home

State leaders urged to address environmental issues with approach that cares for all of creation’s ecological, social, cultural and economic dimensions.

We can see God’s gifts in the various aspects of life in California: the biodiversity of plants and animals; the state’s rich history, that includes its indigenous peoples; the beauty in our magnificent state and national parks; the productivity of our farmlands; and the advancements in technology that have positive effects on our lives.

However, California also has encountered tremendous challenges due to the destructive effects of fires, floods, climate change and rapid urbanization.

In their recent pastoral statement, “God Calls Us to Care for Our Common Home,” the California bishops asked all to heed the call to a conversion that respects our common home and cares for all. In the document, they identified specific responsibility for lawmakers, public officials, and other policy makers that “because of their influence over institutions [elected officials] have extra responsibilities for upholding the common good.”

Of course, the most visible expression of that responsibility for a lawmaker is through legislation and the California Catholic Conference continues to advocate on behalf of critical legislation.

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Since 2015, when Pope Francis encyclical *Laudato Si’* was published, the Conference has worked on numerous environmental legislation aimed at implementing the ideas in the document.

For instance, a key piece of legislation supported by the Conference was SR 37, that encouraged the California legislature to study and consider the papal encyclical when considering climate change in relevant legislative action. This resolution was adopted in the summer of 2015.

The Catholic Conference has proved successful in campaigning for laws that have reduced emissions of greenhouse gases and pollutants; promote renewable clean energy; provide safe and affordable drinking water in all communities; educate K-12 environmental literacy; and provide for supplemental environmental projects.

In fact, Catholics throughout the state have often lead the way in practical efforts protecting our common home.

Years before Pope Francis wrote about care for our common home in *Laudato Si’*, the Diocese of Stockton already was practicing its own kind of environmental stewardship.

Created in 2005, the Environmental Justice Project at Catholic Charities, Diocese of Stockton, has been tirelessly working for more than 10 years to help steward God’s creation. Many parishes within the diocese have become more environmentally aware, focusing on recycling and energy efficiency. Last year, Church of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Stockton embraced solar power with the installation of 535 solar panels on its roof.

In the Diocese of Monterey, one-third of the parishes, offices and facilities have gone solar, and the counties of Monterey, San Benito and Santa Cruz draw on 100 percent carbon and nuclear-free energy largely thanks to efforts of local Catholics. The diocesan office runs on 100 percent solar energy, while 18 of the 46 parishes and two of the 12 schools have made the move. More are in process. (More stories can be found at www.cacatholic.org.)

California has been blessed with great beauty. Through all creation, God is revealed. Pope Francis’ encyclical *Laudato Si’* calls us to rediscover in awe and wonder the beauty of creation. At the same time, we must respond to the cry of the earth in its suffering of our mistreatment of the natural world.

“Each Californian, every elected official is called upon to embrace an ecological vocation. Together we must address environmental issues with an integrated approach that combats poverty, restores dignity to the excluded and at the same time protects nature,” said the California Catholic Conference’s Director of Environmental Stewardship Ray Burnell.