**Reflection on Sustainability and the Mission**

Over the last 15 sessions in the Sustainability and the Mission program, the cohort read and discussed *Laudato Si* and its follow-up, *Laudate Deum*, both written by Pope Francis. The first, *Laudato Si*, is a global call to action on the importance of sustainability and the devastating impact of climate change. Despite the challenges, hope is not lost. The second, *Laudate Deum*, raises the alarm that the Earth is approaching a tipping point, with more developed and industrialized countries disproportionately contributing to this damage.

*Laudato Si* calls on all citizens of the planet, regardless of religious affiliation, to take better care of our common home. The overconsumption of resources is a key driver of climate change. Biblical weather phenomena – such as stronger and more frequent hurricanes, extreme heat and cold, melting glaciers and ice caps, flooding, and droughts – affect everyone. These events, combined with higher carbon emissions and the overuse of natural resources, disproportionately impact less developed countries and vulnerable populations who lack the resources to evacuate or adapt to these conditions.

A central theme throughout *Laudato Si* is the care for our common home and one another. During the first semester, we visited various sites on campus to learn about Xavier’s sustainability efforts, which reflect a broader commitment to caring for both the environment and each other. Guest speakers shared insights into the campus’s sustainability practices, and these efforts are helping to mitigate the negative impacts of climate change and reverse some of the damage. I was particularly impressed with the Xavier Dining’s initiatives to limit food waste and prioritize locally sourced food. Supporting local farms and businesses not only boosts the local economy but also reduces emissions by cutting down on shipping distances and packaging waste. Additionally, I found the conversation about geothermal energy at Our Lady of Peace Chapel particularly intriguing. While geothermal energy is not yet being used in new campus buildings like the College of Osteopathic Medicine or the upcoming science building, knowing that it is a viable option for future expansion is promising.

This discussion around *Laudate Deum* was much less hopeful. The urgent alarms sounded by Pope Francis offer a sobering reality check. It’s disheartening to see that the need for change is being largely ignored by more developed countries, especially the United States. This raises the question: do individual efforts really make a difference when governments and large industries seem intent on avoiding meaningful action? The financial bottom line often takes precedence over the urgent health of the planet. This makes it all more crucial to engage in local sustainability efforts, as national and international governments may not come to a consensus without significant economic consequences. *Laudate Deum* made me reflect on what more I can do to help the planet. Through discussions with our cohort, I gained new perspectives and ideas for actions I can take. Beyond recycling, reducing plastic and single-use items, and remembering my reusable grocery bags, I learned that buying higher-quality clothing and avoiding fast fashion can reduce textile waste in landfills. I can also turn off my vehicle while waiting to pick up my son from school. On nicer days, he can walk to school, which will further reduce emissions that are created while idling in the car line.

Through this course, I’ve come to realize that while I cannot control everything, I can control my contributions to sustainability efforts and educate those around me about their importance. It’s natural to feel overwhelmed, as this is a massive challenge, but I’ve learned not to let that discourage me from continuing to do my part.