

Sustainability & The Mission

Final Reflection - Tami Kauffman

As a new staff member at Xavier participating in this program, my understanding of sustainability has evolved in profound ways, intertwined with my faith. I used to view sustainability primarily through the lens of secular environmentalism—something important, yes, but not necessarily a deeply spiritual concern. However, through my experiences on campus and the reflections inspired by Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'*, I've come to realize that care for creation is inherently a Christian idea—rooted deeply in our faith.

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis emphasizes the interconnectedness of all creation, calling for an urgent response to the environmental crises facing our world. He reminds us that the Earth is not just a resource for us to exploit but a gift to be cared for, as it was created by God and declared "good" (Genesis 1:31). This message resonated deeply with me. The lightbulb moment came when I connected sustainability not just with my environmental conscience, but with my spiritual values. God's creation is perfect, and we—His imperfect creations—are entrusted with the responsibility to care for it. As Pope Francis writes, "we are called to be protectors of God's handiwork" (*Laudato Si'*, 217). The more I reflect on this, the more I understand that sustainability is not merely a secular pursuit, but a spiritual calling that aligns directly with our faith.

During our field trips across campus, I witnessed first-hand the sustainability measures that have been implemented at the university, ranging from energy-efficiency to the integration of green spaces. These efforts revealed to me the depth of care and intentionality involved in sustainable practices. They exemplify the Jesuit philosophy of *cura personalis*—care for the whole person and the whole world. They challenged my narrow understanding of sustainability and called me to care for the larger community, including the Earth, as part of our shared humanity.

Through this journey, I've also come to recognize that much of my previous mindset about consumption was shaped by American culture. In a society that values "more," "bigger," "better," and "new," it is easy to fall into the trap of believing that these ideals align with Christian principles. However, the more I reflected on God's message, the more I realized that these values—rooted in consumerism—are not aligned with the Christian teachings of simplicity, contentment, and care for others. As Pope Francis points out, "our industrial system... has not been capable of addressing the environmental and human costs of its activity" (*Laudato Si'*, 51). Sustainability challenges the mindset of constant growth and instead calls us to consider the long-term well-being of the planet and all its inhabitants.

At times, the enormity of the sustainability challenge feels overwhelming, and it can be easy to feel paralyzed by the weight of the issues. But through this class and my experiences on campus, I have learned that sustainability is not a task we need to perfect overnight. It is a journey of incremental change—small, daily steps toward improvement. The path to transformation is one of discernment and action. Each small effort, no matter how insignificant it may seem, is part of a greater mission to bring about change. I've learned to approach sustainability with a mindset of hope, knowing that every effort, no matter how small, is a step toward a more just and sustainable world.