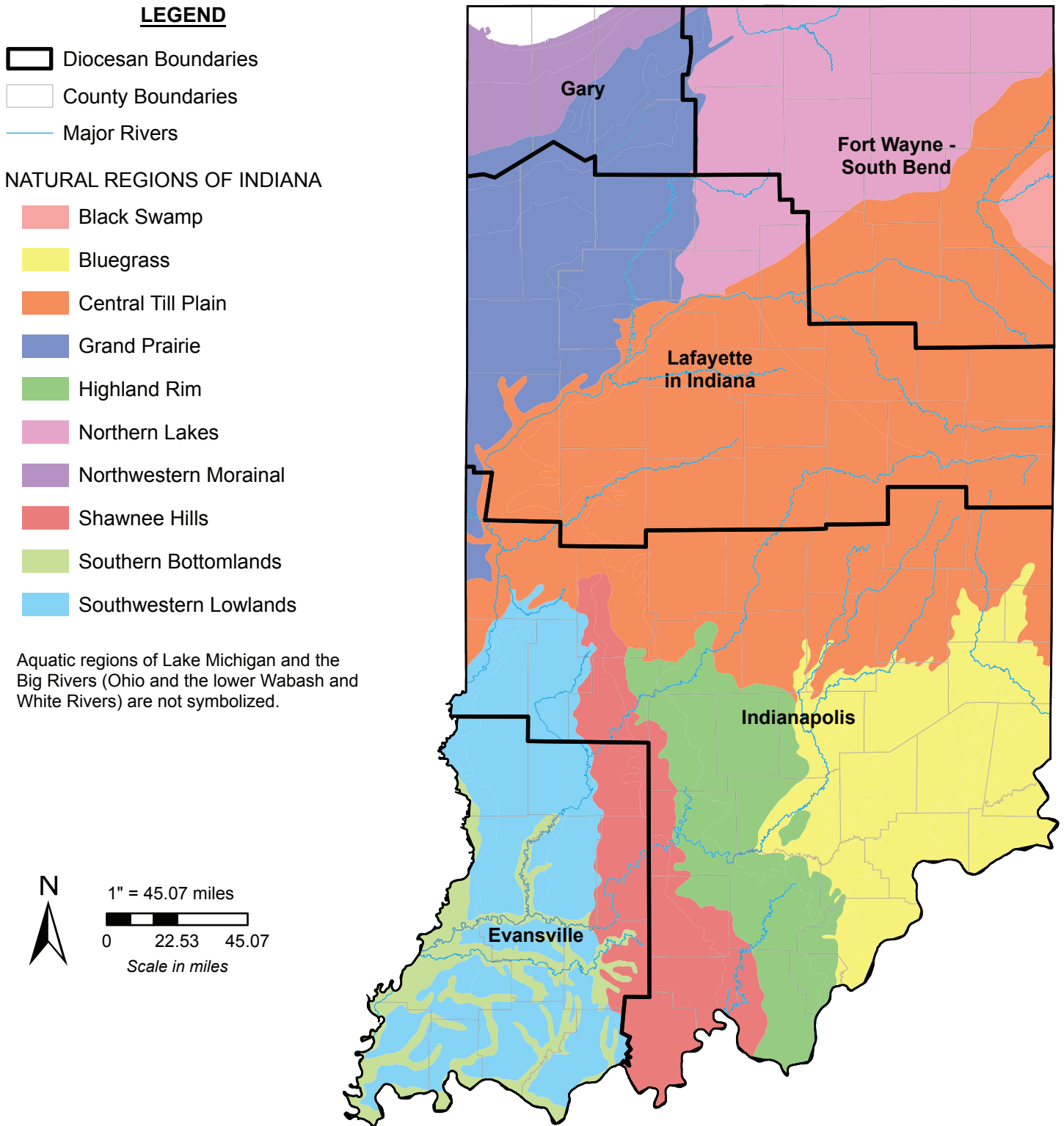


INTEGRAL ECOLOGY

A Sacramental Vision

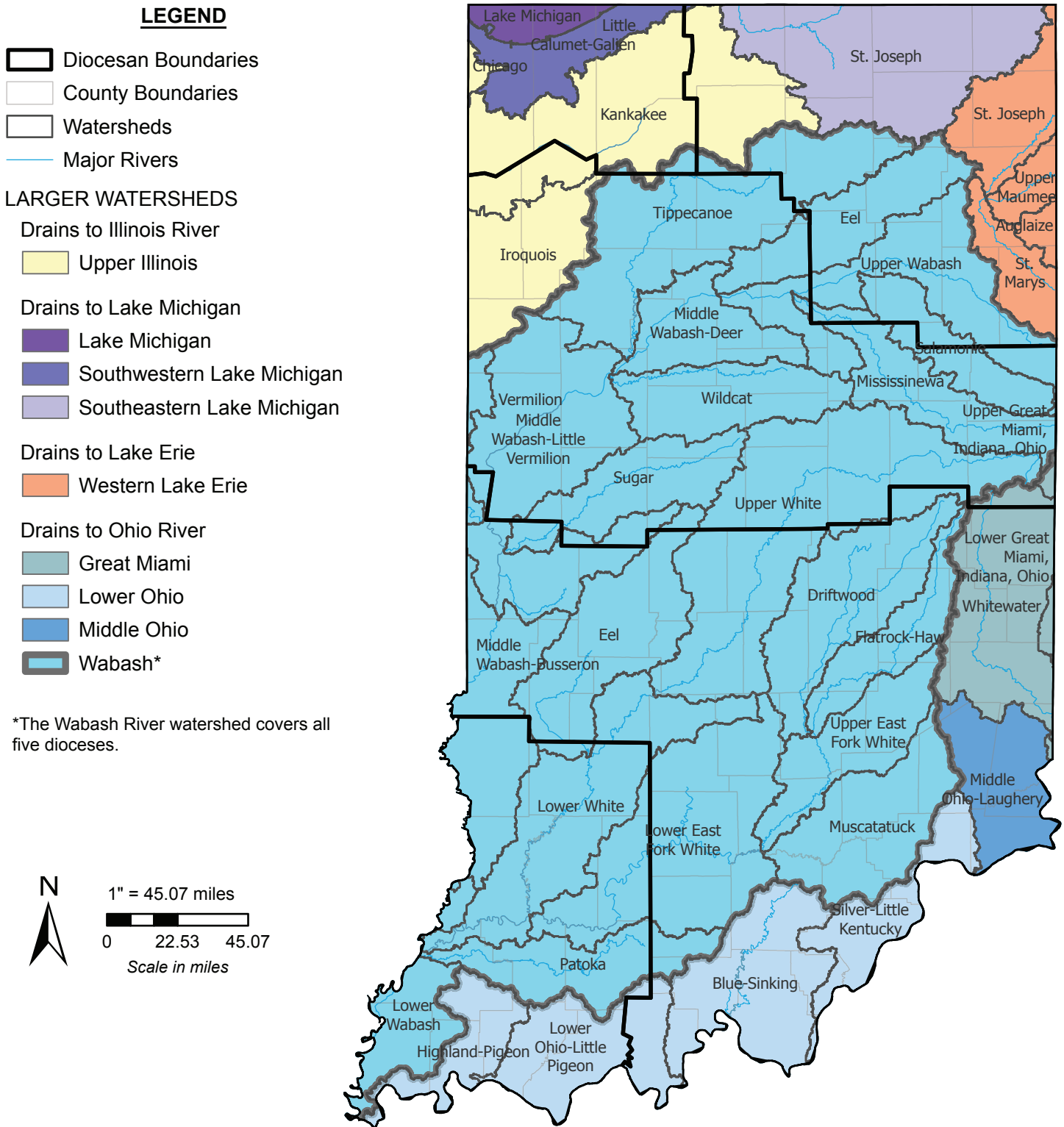


Map 1: Indiana's 12 Natural Regions and 5 Catholic Dioceses



Data sources: Mundell & Associates, Inc., Indiana Geological Survey (IGS), United States Geological Survey (USGS), IGIO, Polis Center, IDNR, IDEM, Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC). 2023. "North American Environmental Atlas - Lakes and Rivers". Natural Resources Canada (NRCAN), Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (INEGI), Comisión Nacional del Agua (CONAGUA), U.S. Geological Survey (USGS). Ed. 3.0, Vector digital data [1:1,000,000]., Indiana Department of Natural Resources, Division of Nature Preserves, Indiana Natural Heritage Data Center, 2002, Natural Regions in Indiana

Map 2: Indiana's Watersheds and 5 Catholic Dioceses



Data sources: Mundell & Associates, Inc., Indiana Geological Survey (IGS), United States Geological Survey (USGS), IGIO, Polis Center, IDNR, IDEM, United States Geological Survey (USGS), in partnership with US EPA, USDA NRCS, along with other state, federal, and local partners; Indiana Geographic Information Office, Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC). 2023. "North American Environmental Atlas - Lakes and Rivers". Natural Resources Canada (NRCan), Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (INEGI), Comisión Nacional del Agua (CONAGUA), U.S. Geological Survey (USGS). Ed. 3.0, Vector digital data [1:1,000,000].



Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul, Archdiocese of Indianapolis



This pastoral letter has been developed by the Indiana Catholic Conference (ICC) in collaboration with Fr. Terrence P. Ehrman, C.S.C. It was approved by the bishops of Indiana in December 2025.

The ICC is the statewide coordinating body for the five Roman Catholic Dioceses in Indiana. It serves the spiritual, moral, and material well-being of the people of Indiana and is the public policy voice of the Catholic Church in the State of Indiana. For more information about the ICC, visit indianacc.org.

For supplemental resources to aid in individual and group reflection with *Integral Ecology: A Sacramental Vision*, visit indianacc.org/ecology.

Cover art: Wenzel Peter (Karlsbad 1745 — Rome 1829), *Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden*

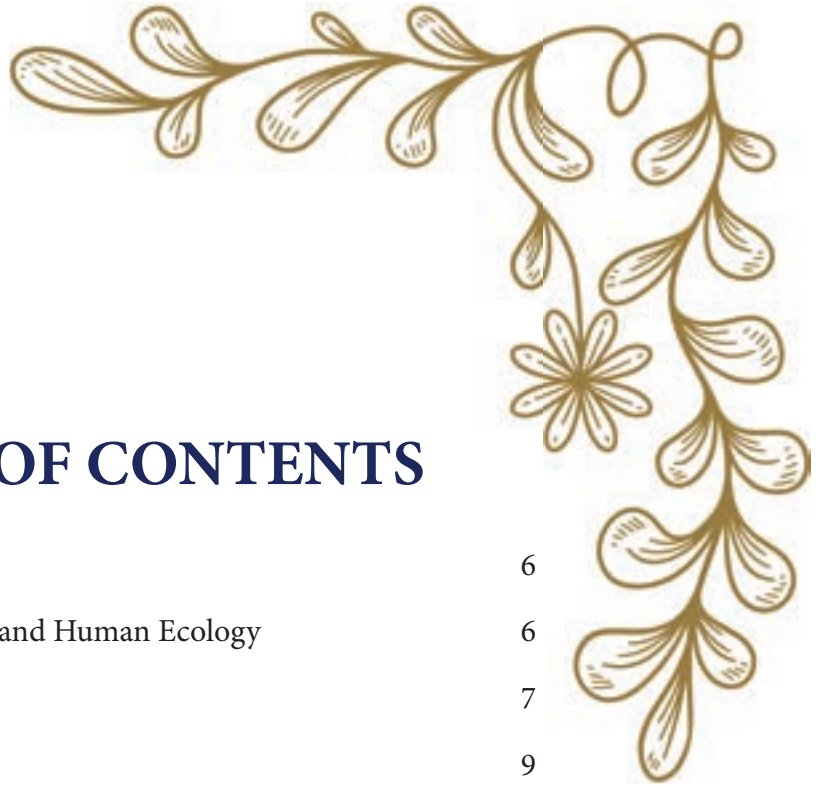
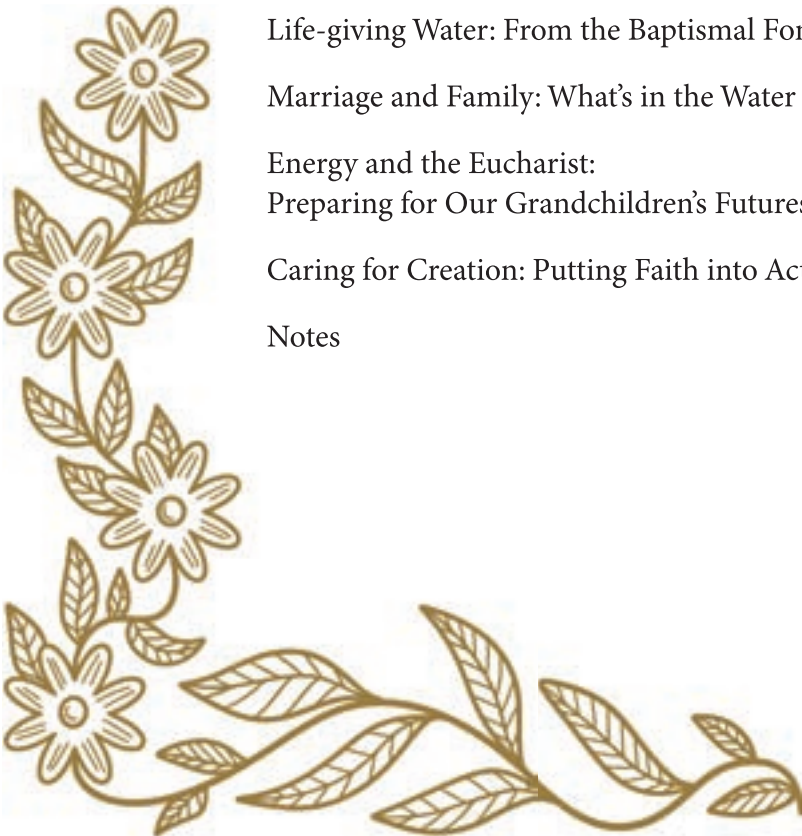


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Introduction

Brothers and Sisters in Christ and all people of good will in our state of Indiana, we write to you with enduring hope following last year's Jubilee Year of Hope to share our joy in the Good News of Jesus Christ and to encourage you in that "hope that does not disappoint" (Romans 5:5). Twenty-six years ago, during the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, we appealed to all Indiana Catholics to be more attentive and responsive to caring for God's creation.¹ Eleven years ago, we focused on the Church's response to poverty in Indiana in our document, "Poverty at the Crossroads."² Two years ago, the Archdiocese of Indianapolis hosted the National Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis as part of the National Eucharistic Revival. The challenges of caring for our earthly home and caring for our brothers and sisters, especially those who are poor, remain as urgent today as in the past. Just over 12% of all Hoosiers and 15% of children under 18 in the state live in poverty.³ However, as Pope Leo XIV reminds us, "[T]he poor are not a sociological category but the very 'flesh' of Christ."⁴ The social, economic, and political reality of human life and poverty is not disconnected from environmental issues concerning polluted air, water, and land, decreasing biodiversity, and habitat destruction. Human ecology and natural ecology are united in what Pope Francis called "integral ecology."

Immersed in these social and ecological challenges, we write this pastoral letter in Christian hope. The Father has poured out upon us the Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ our savior "so that we might . . . become heirs in hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:7). Hope allows us to look to the future and inspires us to act in the present. In the past, we have written separately about ecology, poverty, and the Eucharist. Today, we write from the perspective of "integral ecology" that unites all three realities together. Formed by our encounter with the Risen Jesus Christ in the Eucharist, we hope for the coming of the Kingdom of God that will transform and renew the earth and our brothers and sisters. As the bishops of Indiana, we share with you some reflections about how we are to live eucharistic lives as we care for both our human community and for God's good world.

Integrating Natural Ecology and Human Ecology

We call this land of Indiana our home. We delight in an Indiana sunrise or sunset, a harvest moon, a red-plumaged Northern Cardinal against a snow-blanketed tree, golden yellow leaves of an autumn Shagbark Hickory, quiet lapping of ripples upon a forested lakeshore to an armada of endless, boisterous, white-capped waves landing upon Lake Michigan's sandy beaches, warm-water fly fishing in the Tippecanoe River, or watching cumulus clouds float by overhead on a summer afternoon. For all residents of the Hoosier state, this land of fertile agricultural fields, oak-hickory and beech-maple forests, prairies, wetlands, caves, sand dunes and abundant lakes (including Lake Michigan), streams, and major rivers—the Wabash, the White, the two St. Josephs, the Maumee, the Kankakee, and the Ohio—forms us as ecological citizens. We are nourished by the fruits of the earth provided by the labor of those of us who work on farms and raise livestock. We are at home in a natural ecology that includes organisms and the surrounding environment of the atmosphere, water, rocks, and sunlight. Our human ecology includes our interactions with nature—we breathe, eat, drink, and flush away waste—yet our spiritual nature transcends the material. We are communal and social, moral beings raised in families who are to do good and avoid evil. We are to love God with all of our heart, soul, strength, and mind and love our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:34-40; Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Leviticus 19:18).

We are at home in the natural world, yet we are also aware that we are pilgrims journeying to our true home in heaven. The Greek word for a house or home is *oikos* which in English becomes "eco." Thus, we have ecology—*oikos logos*—the reason, understanding, intelligibility, or logic of the house of the environment and all creatures that live there. We can think about natural ecology as well as human ecology. Integral ecology recognizes that we are both ecological citizens and ecclesiological citizens. We belong to the earth and to the Church.

On our pilgrimage through this natural world, our spiritual home is our parish. We are born in nature but born again to eternal life in Baptism; we eat natu-

ral meals daily but also receive our supernatural daily bread in the Eucharistic meal; we die and our bodies are buried in hallowed ground—ashes to ashes and dust to dust, yet we celebrate a funeral Mass with Christian burial in the hope of bodily resurrection. We are ecological citizens, yet as Catholics, we are also ecclesial citizens of our parishes which belong to one of five dioceses of the state: the Archdiocese of Indianapolis and the four suffragan dioceses—Fort Wayne-South Bend, Lafayette, Gary, and Evansville. At the heart of each diocese are the parishes where we gather every Sunday for the Lord's Day to celebrate the Eucharist.

The Eucharist unites all the faithful into the one Body of Christ, the Church. In our sacramental worship of God, we participate in the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ who gave us the gift of Himself—His Body and Blood—as a covenantal, sacrificial meal and a memorial of His paschal mystery through which He reconciles us to the Father in the Holy Spirit. We are nourished by this daily Bread of Life as food for our pilgrim journey to our heavenly home. The Sacrament of the Eucharist, however, does not bypass the created world but uses the created world to transform and redeem us.

In the Sacrament of the Eucharist, we see and experience the fullness of being both ecclesial and ecological citizens. The Trinity's first gift of love is all of creation, and the second is our redemption in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. Creation and redemption go together. The Risen Christ who redeems us is also the Creator through whom all of creation comes into being. In the Eucharist, the fruit of the earth—wheat and grapes—tended by agricultural workers is transformed by the work of human hands to become bread and wine which we bring forward to the altar where the priest, through the power of the Holy Spirit, consecrates them into the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. Those who participate and share communion in the Eucharist are invited to a deeper communion with and thanksgiving for farmers and fields, vineyards and soil, rain and sunshine, and thus all of creation.

Integral ecology is the interconnection between natural ecology and our human ecology. "The Eucharist is the fulfillment of integral ecology."⁵ In this time of Eucharistic Revival in our Church, we see more clearly the truth of the Eucharist as Christ's sacramen-

tal and Real Presence among us that heals, sanctifies, and unifies us. Jesus gives His flesh for the life of the world (John 6:48-51). Conformed to our Lord in the Eucharist, we are sent forth at the end of each Mass in mission "for the life of the world." As ecological and ecclesial citizens, as Catholics fed by the Eucharist, we are on a "pilgrimage of reconciliation with the world that is our home."⁶

Watershed Theology



One way to visualize and think about integral ecology and our identity and mission as baptized ecological and ecclesiological citizens are the maps presented at the beginning of this document that depict the boundaries of our five Indiana dioceses lying overtop two distinct ecological boundaries—natural regions and watersheds. We do not simply live at a street address but are located within a much broader, natural ecosystem or watershed. Based on flora and fauna, geology, soil, and climate, Indiana can be divided into 12 natural regions as depicted on page 2.⁷ Two regions are completely aquatic: Lake Michigan and the Big Rivers (Ohio and the lower Wabash and White Rivers). The others are the following: Northwestern Moraine, Grand Prairie, Northern Lakes, Central Till Plain, Black Swamp, Southwestern Lowlands, Southern Bottomlands, Shawnee Hills, Highland Rim, and Bluegrass. Distinctive communities of plants and animals characterize these regions. These natural regions also shape us and our sense of self and place. Growing up around the Indiana Dunes versus the forest-covered limestone hills of Brown County versus the rugged landscape of the Switzerland Hills in southeastern corner of the state can form how we see ourselves and the world.

A watershed is a natural part of the landscape whose highest points drain water downhill to make a river. All the precipitation that falls within that area is "shed off" to become a stream or river. Watersheds are nested within one another, so that each tributary to a river is its own watershed but part of the larger river watershed. For example, the Eel River watershed around Logansport is part of the larger Wabash River watershed.

Our five Indiana dioceses each have their own



Wabash River Vincennes, Indiana



Confluence of St. Mary and St Joseph Rivers to form the Maumee River;
Fort Wayne, IN

unique watersheds, but one watershed alone is common, if only in a small part, to all the dioceses—the Wabash River watershed whose waters flow into the Ohio River (see page 3).⁸ The Grand Calumet River watershed in the Gary diocese drains into Lake Michigan. The Fort Wayne-South Bend diocese includes two different St. Joseph Rivers. One drains north through South Bend to Lake Michigan. The other combines with the St. Mary River in Fort Wayne to make the Maumee River which flows northeast to Lake Erie. The Kankakee River watershed drains part of the Fort Wayne-South Bend, Gary, and Lafayette dioceses. The river flows west, merging in Illinois with the Des Plaines River to form the Illinois River which flows into the Upper Mississippi River. All the other watersheds in the state ultimately drain to the Ohio River which also flows lower down into the Mississippi River.

The Wabash River watershed drains two-thirds of Indiana's 92 counties. Originating thirty miles into Ohio, the Wabash River then flows southwest for about 475 miles across the Hoosier state, eventually forming the western border with Illinois, and empties into the Ohio River near Mt. Vernon, Indiana.⁹ The Miami Native Americans called this river "wah-bah-shik-ki," which meant "pure white," after the limestone bedrock visible through the clear waters.¹⁰ Today, over four mil-

lion people live in the watershed of this second largest tributary to the Ohio River, but the water is no longer clear.¹¹ It is turbid due to sediment run-off from the abundant agricultural fields. As the state river, the Wabash River was instrumental in the formation and settling of the state as it and the former Wabash and Erie canal allowed transportation and commerce between Lake Erie and the Gulf of Mexico.

This North-South water route was joined by the East-West federal National Road (which would become U.S. Highway 40 and now Interstate 70) which connected Maryland with Illinois passing through Richmond, Indianapolis, and Terre Haute in Indiana and by the Michigan Road that connected Madison, Indiana on the Ohio River to Michigan City on Lake Michigan via Indianapolis and South Bend.¹² These transportation paths allowed the movement of people and exchange of commerce that developed the state of Indiana and facilitated westward expansion of the nation. The state motto since 1937 describes the location of Indiana as "The Crossroads of America."¹³ These same crossroads of multiple interstates, extensive railroad networks, and shipping ports on Lake Michigan and the Ohio River enable Indiana today to be a leader in the automotive industry.¹⁴

Since Indiana became the 19th state of the Union

in 1816, our relationship with one another and nature and even God has changed significantly. Today, 72% of the 6.9 million Hoosiers live in cities or incorporated areas, and many of us have a limited relationship with the natural world.¹⁵ Technology and the digital age present challenges to how we engage one another person-to-person and face-to-face and how we encounter our ecological home. It is fitting for us to reflect on our Catholic relationship with ecology especially because our state is considered one of the birthplaces of the science of ecology. Henry Chandler Cowles, botany professor from the University of Chicago, studied plant succession at the Indiana Dunes along the shores of Lake Michigan. His seminal works at the turn of the twentieth century helped form the foundation of the new science of ecology.¹⁶ This fragile ecological area today includes a state and national park amidst one of the most heavily industrialized parts of the state.¹⁷ We hope our reflections lead the hearts of all the faithful and those searching for truth to a rediscovery of God as the Creator, through Jesus Christ, who is both the Creator and Redeemer of all things (Colossians 1:15-20), in the Holy Spirit who renews all things and unites us in the Eucharist as Christ's Body.

Theology of Creation

Every Sunday at Mass, we recite the Nicene Creed, which had its origin at the Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325. Thus, 2025 marked the 1700th anniversary of the creed, and in it, we profess belief in the Trinity as the Creator. "I believe in one God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible; I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ . . . through whom all things were made; I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life." Our belief in God the Creator and the world as created should affect how we see, think, and act toward creation and our brothers and sisters. Pope Leo XIV emphasizes that "works of mercy are recommended as a sign of the authenticity of worship."¹⁸

First, with eyes of faith, we look at nature and see a deeper dimension to it, namely creation. We can encounter the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit in and through what they create. This is sacramental vision. A sacrament is a sign that points beyond itself.

Nature is not just stuff, but a sign to us of God's loving care and presence. God continues to create everything right now: galaxies, the sun, the Earth, each of us, and all organisms. Creation is fundamentally a relationship of dependence upon God for existence.¹⁹ St. Basil the Great, from the fourth century, prays for his people, "I want creation to penetrate you with so much admiration that everywhere, wherever you may be, the least plant may bring to you the clear remembrance of the Creator."²⁰

God freely creates out of His love, goodness, wisdom, and mercy. God declares His creation to be "very good" (Genesis 1:31). St. Bonaventure described creation as a song of God.²¹ We can hear the divine melody all around us, affirming the goodness of everything and God's love for us: "For thus says the LORD, The creator of the heavens, who is God, The designer and maker of the earth who established it, Not as an empty waste did he create it, but designing it to be lived in: I am the LORD, and there is no other" (Isaiah 45:18).

Our response in faith to God for the gift of creation is thanksgiving and praise. Scripture expresses this abundantly. "Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all shining stars" (Psalm 148:3); "Let the earth bless the Lord, praise and exalt him above all forever. Mountains



Cathedral of St. Mary, Diocese of Lafayette

This image depicts a succinct Trinitarian catechism of the One God who is Three Persons: The Father (Pater) is (est) God (Deus), the Son (Filius) is God, and the Holy Spirit (Spiritus Sanctus) is God, yet the Father is not (non-est) the Son, the Son is not the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is not the Father.



Cathedral of St. Benedict, Diocese of Evansville

Christians rejoice and praise God for creation, but even more so, we praise and thank God for the Incarnation—the Word of God became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). Jesus Christ is the One through whom all things come to be. He is the Creator Word who became human of the Virgin Mary and was born on Christmas. The same Lord Jesus whom we worship in the Eucharist is the same Lord Jesus through whom creation comes into being. In contemplating the sun, moon, and stars or a tree or a firefly, we are to be mindful of Jesus Christ who is creating all of them at every moment. Everything around us proclaims God’s glory and goodness (cf. Psalm 19).

and hills, bless the Lord; praise and exalt him above all forever. Everything growing on earth, bless the Lord; praise and exalt him above all forever” (Daniel 3:74-76). Pope Leo XIV expresses this praise of God from us and all of creation as he draws upon St. Augustine, “Your creation sings praise to you so that we may love you, and we love you so that praise may be offered to you by your creation.”²²

We also encounter the Holy Spirit through creation. On Pentecost, we pray Psalm 104 as the Responsorial Psalm, “If you take away their breath, they perish and return to their dust. When you send forth your spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth.” The Holy Spirit is the life-giving water that renews and refreshes our spirit along with the rest of creation. St. Hildegard of Bingen described the renewal of our parched and sinful souls as well as of dry land as *viriditas* or the greening power of the Holy Spirit.²³

God makes us in His image which comes with the responsibility to care for the gift of creation in a manner worthy of God. God established humankind’s mission in regard to creation, “God blessed them and God

said to them: Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things that crawl on the earth” (Genesis 1:28). The witness of Jesus Christ and Scripture helps us to understand “dominion.” God settles Adam in the garden of Eden and commands him “to cultivate and care for it” (Genesis 2:15). Dominion has a humble, pastoral sense of providing for land and animals. Ours is not an absolute dominion but a delegated one from God. We are to govern and administer as God’s servants within the ordered world He has wisely created. Jesus Christ is the Incarnate Creator Word who humbles and empties himself (Philippians 2:6-7); who comes to serve and not to be served (Mark 10:45); who always does the Father’s will (John 6:37-38). In baptism, we enter into the life of Christ as priest, prophet, and king. We are to govern ourselves, others, and the world in this Kingship of Christ. The Book of Wisdom exhorts us to govern in God’s wisdom. “God of my ancestors, Lord of mercy, you who have made all things by your word and in your wisdom have established humankind to rule the creatures pro-



Tulip Poplar, *Liriodendron tulipifera*. State Tree of Indiana

duced by you, and to govern the world in holiness and righteousness, and to render judgment in integrity of heart” (Wisdom 9:1-4).

Natural and Human History of Indiana

The splendor of God’s song of creation is dynamic not static, ancient and ever new. After the origin of our universe in the Big Bang 13.8 billion years ago, our solar system with our Sun and planets formed about 4.5 billion years ago.²⁴ God, the divine composer, has been bringing forth over billions of years millions of species, each a note or word in His hymn of creation.

As we look at the landscape and resources of Indiana which many use for daily life, we recognize that their formation has taken vast amounts of time which is all part of God’s song. 350-325 million years ago, Indiana would have been submerged under a tropical ocean and the resulting sinking of dead hard-shelled organisms would eventually form the limestone quarried around Bedford and Bloomington that would be used to build fourteen state capitols and the Empire State Building. By 300 million years ago, Indiana had risen above the sea and harbored productive tropical swampland. The vegetation sequestered sunlight and carbon dioxide and stored it in their plant tissue. Over millions of years, the accumulation of this decaying plant matter would form the coal deposits discovered and mined in the southwestern counties of Vigo, Clay, Sullivan, Greene, Pike, and Warrick.²⁵

Most of the geological landscape we see around



Indiana Dunes National Park

us today resulted from the last Ice Age which ended around 12,000-10,000 years ago and extended south through two-thirds of the state. The glaciers left behind abundant ground water and rich soils which form the foundation of an abundant agricultural harvest. The first humans in Indiana, the Indigenous Peoples, arrived only after the mile-thick glaciers melted and retreated northward.

The Potawatomi settled into northern Indiana around the southern area of Lake Michigan, and the Miami called the land around the Maumee and Wabash rivers home. Smaller populations of the Miami tribes of the Wea and Piankashaw lived in the southern half of the state with the Shawnee and Wyandot. The Kickapoo lived on the western border and the Delaware lived in the east-central part of the state.²⁶ The Miami had a village at Kekionga, present day Fort Wayne, which was a critical location as the highest point of land separating the Great Lakes and Mississippi watersheds. The Miami Chief Little Turtle called this connection between the two major river transportation arteries of the Maumee and Wabash rivers the “Glorious Gate.”²⁷

The first Europeans to enter what is now Indiana were 17th century French fur traders and Catholic missionaries.²⁸ As the Catholic population grew, Pope Gregory XVI, on May 6, 1834, established the diocese of Vincennes which included the entire state of Indiana and the eastern third of Illinois along with a small trading post called Chicago.²⁹ The Catholic Church grew along the Wabash and Erie Canal route as Catholic Irish and German immigrants building the

canal required pastoral care. The diocese of Vincennes would be renamed and moved to Indianapolis in 1898.

When the first Europeans entered Indiana in the 17th and 18th centuries, our state's ten terrestrial natural regions were much more readily identifiable. Virgin forests covered 87% of the state.³⁰ Though the Native Americans had an impact on the natural ecosystems by creating paths, clearing forests, and using fire, the landscapes remained primarily natural areas—forests, prairies, wetlands. Today, less than 1% of the natural areas remain. 60% of the land has been converted to cropland.³¹ By 1920, only 7% of the state was forested. Currently, about 20% of the state is young forest; less than 0.06% of old growth forest remains.³² The non-Native American population of Indiana rapidly increased from 5,600 in 1800, to 147,000 in 1820, to one million in 1850, to 2.5 million in 1900, to an estimated 6.9 million in 2024.³³

Noah's Ark of Indiana Ecosystems:

Extinction threatens Biodiversity

We live in a wondrous natural community with all of God's creatures, but sadly many species once found in Indiana have been displaced and some have gone extinct. So often for most of us, our urban and technological lives distance us from the natural world so that we are ignorant of what is around us, or even worse, indifferent to it. However, God delights in us and in everything He creates. Beginning in the Patristic era, the Church has spoken about the two books: the Book of Scripture and the Book of Nature. Both are God's message to us about Himself. Just as St. Jerome, 5th century patron saint of Scripture scholars, wrote, "Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ," so we might say today, "Ignorance of creation is ignorance of Christ," for Christ is the one through whom all creatures come into being.³⁴

God creates us to care for all of creation, and the



Cathedral of St. Mary, Diocese of Lafayette

story of Noah's Ark expresses this loving responsibility. In Scripture, the first explicit covenant God establishes is with humankind and the earth and all living creatures. God proclaims to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant that I am making between me and you and every living creature with you for all ages to come: I set my bow in the clouds to serve as a sign of the covenant between me and the earth" (Genesis 9:12-13). The early Church Fathers interpreted the Ark as a sign of the Church. The Church is like the Ark in that we are to call all peoples to friendship with God and to care for God's creation. Noah and his family had to feed and care for all those animals on the Ark. Theirs was a mission of mercy. Noah is a type of Adam to whom God brought all the animals of the field and birds of the air "to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name" (Genesis 2:19).

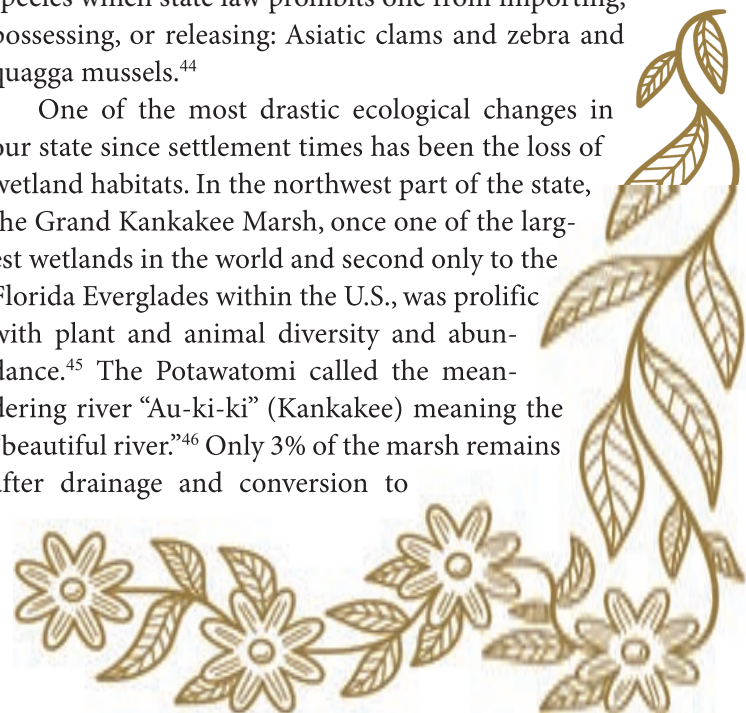
Our current worldwide situation today, however, is that we are causing—directly or indirectly—the extinction of species at a rapid pace; we are deleting numerous notes and chords of God's love song. Over the long eons of geologic time, the earth has undergone five major extinctions from natural causes, the last one 66 million years ago that eliminated the dinosaurs. Evidence indicates that we are now at the beginning of what could be a sixth mass extinction that is facilitated by our actions—habitat loss, spread of invasive species, pollution, overharvesting, and changes in climate.³⁵

Our ecological home of Indiana has experienced extinctions, and the existence of many species is currently threatened or endangered. At the end of the last Ice Age, most of the large mammals went extinct as the climate warmed and they faced hunting pressure from the Paleo-Indians: American mastodons, Jefferson mammoths, saber-toothed cats, giant beavers, and ground sloths.³⁶ Since the settling of Indiana by Europeans and Americans, the Passenger pigeon and Carolina parakeet went extinct as a result of human hunting and habitat alteration. At least one fish species, the harelip sucker, is also extinct.³⁷ Extirpation is when a species has been eliminated from a prior range but continues to exist elsewhere. 54 species of plants (e.g., Swamp-pink, Early Coralroot, Golden St. John's Wort), 11 species of fish (e.g., Alligator Gar, Southern Cavefish, Crystal darter, Shortnose Cisco), 5 species of

birds (e.g., Greater Prairie-chicken, Ivory-billed woodpecker, Common Raven), one reptile species (Mud snake), and about a dozen insect species (e.g., American Burying Beetle, Robust Pentagenian Burrowing Mayfly, Bog Copper Butterfly, Hine's Emerald dragonfly) have been extirpated from our Indiana home.³⁸ Hundreds of other species are considered endangered or threatened. Our state insect is the Say's Firefly, and fireflies in general are being threatened from habitat loss, light pollution, and pesticides and herbicides.³⁹

Indiana has some of the highest biodiversity of freshwater mussels not only in the country but in the world.⁴⁰ Mussels are good indicators of habitat and water quality, and they are one of the most endangered groups of animals in North America. The Wabash River watershed was once home to 75 species of freshwater mussels, but 18 of these species, almost one quarter, have been extirpated from the watershed since settlers arrived. The mainstem of the Wabash River has lost 55% of its freshwater mussel fauna.⁴¹ Over the last two centuries, overharvesting for food or for making buttons, pollution—from row-crop agricultural run-off of nutrients, pesticides, and sediment, along with industrial waste and untreated human sewage—and habitat destruction have contributed to this loss of biodiversity.⁴² In order to protect native freshwater mussel populations, Indiana state law enacted in 1991 prohibits the taking, collecting, or harvesting of live mussels or their shells.⁴³ Another threat to current populations of native mussels are three invasive species which state law prohibits one from importing, possessing, or releasing: Asiatic clams and zebra and quagga mussels.⁴⁴

One of the most drastic ecological changes in our state since settlement times has been the loss of wetland habitats. In the northwest part of the state, the Grand Kankakee Marsh, once one of the largest wetlands in the world and second only to the Florida Everglades within the U.S., was prolific with plant and animal diversity and abundance.⁴⁵ The Potawatomi called the meandering river "Au-ki-ki" (Kankakee) meaning the "beautiful river."⁴⁶ Only 3% of the marsh remains after drainage and conversion to





farmland began in 1852.⁴⁷ On the eastern border of the state near Fort Wayne lies a remnant of the Great Black Swamp, most of which lay in northwestern Ohio covering a total area of 1,500 square miles. Drained for farmland, no single representative area of the swamp remains.⁴⁸ In general, two centuries ago, wetlands once covered 24% of the state, but now only 0.03% of the state is wetlands.⁴⁹ Wetlands provide valuable ecosystem services such as flood control, maintaining water quality, recharging groundwater, and being a source of biodiversity. We have greatly reshaped and altered the natural ecology and landscape of our home mostly for agricultural use.⁵⁰

Agriculture and the Eucharist: Green Revolution or Brown Revolution?



Farming is a vocation from God to feed the human community, and our state is an agricultural leader in that regard. God has blessed the state of Indiana with fertile soils. 94,000 Indiana farmers and farm laborers work by the sweat of their brows to harvest our food and raise livestock.⁵¹ Though the smallest continental state west of the Appalachian Mountains, Indiana is the ninth largest farming state in the country, and agriculture contributes over \$30 billion to the state economy. Indiana ranks #5 in hog production and corn yields (for livestock and ethanol), #4 in soybean and peppermint yield, #3 in turkeys raised, egg production, and spearmint and tomato yield, #2 in pumpkin yield, and #1 in duck production and popcorn and gourd yield.⁵² 98% of the total corn acreage in Indiana is for dent/field corn which is used for animal feed or ethanol production.⁵³

However, as our predecessors wrote twenty-six years ago, “[T]he food supply of the USA is in crisis.”⁵⁴ Since the late 1930s and especially following the end of World War II, agricultural crop and animal yields have increased dramatically due to the development of new hybrid crops, switching from animal labor to machines, using synthetic fertilizers, applying pesticides and herbicides, planting crops in monocultures, raising livestock in concentrated animal feed operations (CAFOs), and the economic efficiencies of large factory

farms. The Green Revolution that generates this amazing productivity, however, has significant relational, social, economic, and ecological repercussions, the latter of which some call the Brown Revolution because of the following effects: fossil fuel dependence, topsoil erosion, soil compaction, loss of soil fertility, water loss/contamination, nutrient runoff that causes algal blooms and dead zones, loss of genetic diversity, pollution and health concerns from pesticide and herbicide use, pests and disease from monoculture.⁵⁵ Socially and economically, industrial agriculture prioritizes profit at the expense of the ecosystem, depopulates rural communities, and subjects farmers and their families to excessive debt and financial instability. In the U.S., from 1940 to 2022, the farming population as a percent of the total population has decreased from 23% to 1%.⁵⁶ Rural communities have suffered as a result.

Instead of an industrial agriculture model that separates human and natural ecologies, we advocate for an ecological agricultural model that fits the agricultural economy into the ecology.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops wrote a document on agriculture in 2003 entitled “For I Was Hungry & You Gave Me Food.”⁵⁷ It identified the following six criteria for agricultural operations that incorporate this integral ecology view:

1. overcoming hunger and poverty
2. providing safe, affordable, and sustainable food supply,
3. ensuring a decent life for farmers and farmworkers,
4. sustaining and strengthening rural communities,
5. protecting God’s creation, and
6. expanding participation. Good farming does not degrade farmers, farmland or animals/livestock, rather good farming restores relationships and treats people, land, and animals in accord with their God-given way of being.

Of particular concern is the welfare of migrant farm workers who, like all migrants are to receive “just and dignified treatment.”⁵⁸

Farming is one of the most dangerous occupations in



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government, uses an impersonal, mechanistic model to grow food and raise animals.⁶⁴ One concern we raise is about concentrated animal feed operations (CAFOs) which call into question how we are treating animals according to their God-given nature.⁶⁵ CAFOs also affect the human community in terms of economics and social life. Instead of being farm owners, many farmers become “contract growers” for large corporations and are saddled with a great amount of debt.⁶⁶ CAFOs also produce a tremendous amount of waste that can low-

the country; it ranks tenth in the number of fatalities per capita.⁵⁹ Almost three-quarters of the hired farm workers in Indiana are immigrants.⁶⁰ Among the most vulnerable people are migrant workers who have numbered around 3,500 to 9,000 per year in Indiana. Most are Hispanic with the majority from Mexico.⁶¹ They often depend on their employers for housing, food, and transportation; sometimes the living conditions are inhumane with overcrowding and with windows and doors lacking on trailers. They are at risk of exploitation, wage theft, human labor trafficking, and health risks from heat stress, tuberculosis from crowded living conditions, and pesticide poisoning.⁶² In the United States, an estimated 300,000 farm workers suffer from pesticide poisonings each year. Pesticide drift can cause acute symptoms—nausea, vomiting, rashes—and chronic exposure can cause cancer and neurological, endocrine, and reproductive problems. Pesticides also have natural ecology effects: animal and bee poisoning, pesticide resistance in pests, and contamination of ground and surface water.⁶³

Industrial agriculture, heavily subsidized by the

er the quality of life for neighbors;⁶⁷ issues of environmental justice arise as many CAFOs are disproportionately located in and have adverse effects upon minority and lower-income communities;⁶⁸ improperly sited or leaking sewage lagoons can lead to water contamination with *E. coli* and nutrient run-off causing algal blooms and fish kills;⁶⁹ manure application can lead to overfertilization and subsequent run-off.⁷⁰

In 1223, St. Francis started the tradition of the Christ-





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mas crèche using real, live animals, to portray the poverty and love of the Incarnate Word, Jesus. The angel announces to the shepherds that the sign of the Savior will be “an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger” (Luke 2:12). This sign points back to the time of Isaiah who writes about the infidelity of the people of Israel, contrasting them with livestock and their trust in their master. “An ox knows its owner, and an ass, its master’s manger; But Israel does not know, my people has not understood” (Isaiah 1:3). The shepherds’ coming to the manger marks the fulfillment of God’s covenant. Jesus is the Son of God, the Savior, who will feed his people with himself, the Eucharist. The ox and ass also witness and welcome the Incarnate Lord. The people of Israel were primarily a pastoral society in their raising of animals, and Scripture reveals their wise and merciful care for livestock. “The just take care of their livestock, but the compassion of the wicked is cruel” (Proverbs 12:10). Jesus, after healing a man on the Sabbath, rebukes the Pharisees for their lack of mercy, by pointing to the mercy shown to animals on the Sabbath. “Then he said to them, ‘Who among you, if your son or ox falls into a cistern, would not immediately pull him out on the sabbath day?’” (Luke 14:5). Animals have an intrinsic goodness because they are created by God. Eating food proclaims our creatureliness and depen-

dence upon God, one another, farmers, and ecosystems. The noble vocation of farming supplies food for all of our tables and for the table and altar at the Eucharist. Eating food, however, is not just about bodily nourishment, rather it is about relationships and communion. Meals unite us as families around a common table where we share food and ourselves with one another. The Greek word “eucharist” means “thanksgiving.” The thanksgiving blessing before our meals at home is connected to our thanksgiving in the Eucharist at our parish. The Eucharist is a redemptive meal with the risen Lord Jesus Christ who restores us to friendship

with the Father in the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ is the Bread of Life, but the Eucharist is not possible, however, without the bread and wine which require sunshine, rain, soil, seeds, wheat, grapes, farmers, vintners, and all those who labor in the agricultural field. By participating in the Eucharist, a sacrificial meal of thanksgiving, we form a Christian culture of thanksgiving for food and drink and for all the memberships to which we belong—Trinity, Church, parish, family, farmers, ranchers, migrant workers, and fellow creatures: soil microbes, pollinators, livestock, crops, orchards. Our modern industrial food system disconnects us





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from these relationships, and we are often unaware of where our food comes from and how it was raised. We become disconnected from one another and the land. The community of Catholic Rural Life which has been serving rural Catholics for over a century promotes a greater mindfulness around food by holding that “eating is a moral act.”⁷¹ St. Elizabeth of Hungary, princess from the 13th century, exemplifies the wisdom of one who is mindful of relationships. Elizabeth loved her neighbor with a joyful and merciful heart. She fed the hungry and cared for the sick.

In the feudal society of her time, it was not uncommon for the lords to take food from the peasants without justly compensating them. Following her spiritual director’s command, whether at home or visiting another castle, Elizabeth abstained from any food or drink unless she knew it had been justly acquired. In solidarity with the poor, she and her attendants suffered not only hunger but also derision from her peers. Today, we are called to be mindful about our food and its origins.



Life-giving Water: From the Baptismal Font to Aquatic Ecosystems

Water gives life and renews and refreshes. We use water for drinking, cooking, cleaning, energy production, irrigation, transportation, industry and manufacturing, fishing, boating, recreation, spiritual refreshment, and baptism. Jesus Christ gives us life-giving water, the Holy Spirit, that wells up within us. Baptismal fonts are often eight-sided to represent the new creation that Baptism initiates. Genesis depicts a seven-day creation from Sunday to Saturday. Jesus Christ rose from the dead on the first day of the week, Sunday. The Resurrection begins the new creation on the second Sunday or 8th day. Creation and redemption go together. Christians live in a new age or dispensation, the New Creation. Our baptismal lives

begin in water and conform us to the life of Jesus Christ, the Creator and Incarnate Word. The Rite of Baptism calls for water that “should be clean and natural.”⁷² Christians born again of water and the Holy Spirit should care for all water—oceans, lakes, streams, rivers, groundwater, atmosphere.

Sadly, our state of Indiana, with its 63,000 miles of streams and rivers and inland lakes and reservoirs, has some of the most polluted water in the country. The state monitors and assesses water quality every two years. From the most recent report of assessed habitat, 73% of the streams/river miles were impaired and not suitable for full body contact, 62% were impaired for fish consumption, and 33% impaired for aquatic life. Of the lakes/reservoirs assessed by acreage, 23% were impaired for full body contact, 48% impaired for fish consumption, 100% impaired for drinking water, and

67% impaired for aquatic life.⁷³

Human activities, from agriculture, industry, manufacturing, and human waste, are the cause of these impairments. One of the most acute areas for water pollution is the Grand Calumet River, which flows through one of the most industrialized areas not only of the state but of the country.⁷⁴ In the late 19th and early 20th century, industrialization and urbanization of the area channelized the river, destroyed rare native habitat and wetlands, reduced biodiversity, and polluted the air and water. Steel mills, foundries, chemical plants, oil refineries, pharmaceutical plants, and meat packing industries dumped their waste into the river. Decades after dumping ceased, many of these pollutants remain in the river and channel sediments.⁷⁵

The single greatest contributor to stream impairment in the state is contamination by *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*), a bacterium in human and animal waste; *E. coli* contaminates almost 75% of all Indiana streams and rivers, making them unsuitable and unhealthy for human contact.⁷⁶ Livestock waste from CAFOs—

whether from leaking sewage lagoons or seepage from land application—is a major source of contamination. Human waste can also enter streams/ivers from faulty septic systems or combined sewer overflows (CSO). Nutrient run-off from agricultural fields also impairs streams/ivers as well as lakes, producing harmful or nuisance algal blooms. Low levels of dissolved oxygen hamper aquatic life.

Toxins such as polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) and mercury contaminate fish to such levels that the state issues fish consumption advisories.⁷⁷ The primary source of mercury is from the combustion of coal in power plants.⁷⁸ Because mercury is a neurotoxin, pregnant women and young children are most at risk to its neurotoxin effects. We are learning more about PFAS (Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances) chemicals used in non-stick cookware, textiles, and fire-fighting foam that also accumulate in fish tissue and pose health hazards to humans, especially given that 45% of drinking water sampled in the United States has detectable PFAS and that PFAS can be transferred from mother to child



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in breast milk.⁷⁹

60% of Indiana's drinking water is from groundwater.⁸⁰ Agricultural practices of fertilizer use, manure applications, and CAFOs present the highest priority threats to groundwater through nitrate and bacterial contamination. Lawn and golf course fertilizer can also contribute to nitrate contamination. 95% of private wells are considered safe, but about 5% of private wells had nitrate levels above the safe drinking standard.⁸¹ Nitrates can cause the fatal "blue baby syndrome" in young infants.

Atrazine is the second most commonly used herbicide in the United States and is used to control weeds competing with crops such as corn and sorghum.⁸² About 75% of all cornfields in the U.S. are treated with at-


razine. However, atrazine is a frequent contaminant found in surface water, groundwater, as well as in drinking water.⁸³ The herbicide also poses significant risks to aquatic plant and animal communities (fish, amphibians, invertebrates) as well as terrestrial mammals, birds, reptiles, and plants.⁸⁴ Atrazine is a chemical that targets and disrupts endocrine or hormonal systems of organisms. Atrazine in drinking water has also been associated with reproductive and developmental health problems with humans.⁸⁵ In 2003, the European Union banned atrazine because of risks of drinking water contamination.⁸⁶ Though the EPA in 2020 recommended the prohibition of the use of atrazine in Hawaii and Alaska, the EPA still allows atrazine use in the rest of the country, including Indiana.⁸⁷

Marriage and Family: What's in the Water Irritating Indiana Fish?



Atrazine is just one of hundreds of synthetic chemicals that affect a broad range of animals (fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds, mammals) across freshwater and marine ecosystems by feminizing males and disrupting sexual development.⁸⁸ These endocrine chemicals are also implicated in the decline of human male reproductive health.⁸⁹ Endocrine effects are present across the country and the world. Here in Indiana, male fish in the St. Joseph River around Elkhart and South Bend and from the West Fork of the White River around Muncie have been found with intersex conditions stimulated most likely by endocrine active chemicals.⁹⁰ The most active and potent endocrine active chemical, however, is the synthetic estrogen in the birth control pill (17 α -ethinylestradiol, abbreviated EE₂).⁹¹ Experiments have shown that the addition of EE₂ at levels found in natural bodies of water caused the fish population to crash because male fish turned intersex making reproduction impossible.⁹²


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esus Christ performed his first sign of his divinity by turning water into wine at the wedding feast at Cana. His mother Mary's instruction to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you" (John 2:5) expresses the call of discipleship as we listen to what Jesus teaches us.

The wisdom of the Catholic Church concerning human sexuality and marriage recognizes the integral ecology of the human couple as male and female embodied beings in relationship with the natural ecology of the ecosystem and watershed.

Many women who are neither Catholic nor Christian are moving away from the Pill because of its chemical effects upon their own bodies and the endocrine effect in the ecosystem, and they are seeking ecologically consistent means of being aware of their fertility and making decisions about possible children within those boundaries.⁹³

Energy and the Eucharist: Preparing for Our Grandchildren's Futures

e have an amazing natural and cultural history as the human family. A great spiritual and moral challenge for us today is the relationship between technology and wisdom. We have developed powerful technologies through science and engineering. From our first controlling of fire thousands of years ago to warm ourselves, cook food, and to better see in the darkness, we have developed power plants to produce electricity to warm and cool ourselves, cook and refrigerate food, and better see in the darkness. How do we wisely use the resources of the Earth to produce energy for our bodily (e.g., food, drink, housing, clothing, health) and spiritual (e.g., education, work, culture, religious freedom) needs of the common good?

The mining and burning of energy dense coal initiated the Industrial Revolution. Fossil fuels—coal, natural gas, petroleum—have provided a stable source of energy for about 175 years and have helped raise the standard of living, freed many out of poverty, and provided energy for transportation, heating, and cooling. Indiana is rich in fossil fuels, and use of them has led to growth in cities and towns, employment, and developing the common good for the life of families.

Indiana is one of the top ten coal-producing states in the U.S., and we are the third largest coal-consuming state in the nation. We rank seventh in coal as a share of net generation of electricity. Most of the coal is used for electricity production, and eight of our state's ten largest power plants are coal-fired. However, the percentage of electricity generation from coal has declined from 89% in 2010 to 52% in 2022, with electricity generation from natural gas making up much of the difference. Natural gas accounted for 33% of electricity generation in 2022, up from just 5% in 2010.⁹⁴

Besides being burned to produce electricity, coal is also an important ingredient in steel production.⁹⁵ Indiana produces more steel than any other state and supplies the automotive and appliance industries in the Midwest and beyond.⁹⁶ Indiana itself ranks third nationally in the automotive industry in production and second in employment.⁹⁷

Fossil fuels took millions of years to form and thus are not renewable on a human time-scale. At current rates of use, energy experts estimate that world supplies of natural gas and oil will be depleted within 40 years and coal in about 100-150 years.⁹⁸ Fossil fuel use has transformed the world and human society over the last century and a half. These fuels are very energy dense and provide reliable energy. Though their use has increased human welfare and standards of living, they also have negative health effects such as air pollution and associated respiratory and heart diseases and mercury contamination. Burning fossil fuels unlocks stored sunlight in plant tissue from 360 million years ago in the form of energy and of gases, such as carbon dioxide, that are altering the composition of the atmosphere and of the oceans. Indiana ranks 8th highest in the U.S. for emissions of carbon dioxide, with electricity generation producing 45% of the state total, industry 25%, transportation 22%, the residential sector 5%, and commercial activity 3%.⁹⁹ Transportation accounts for over 75% of the state's petroleum consumption.¹⁰⁰

As we assess the current situation and look to the future, what does wisdom counsel us about our use of energy and the type of technologies for energy generation? First, before considering or relying only on technological solutions, we should examine our own spiritual identity and our personal and communal ways of life that are the basis for our use of energy. Pope John



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Paul II affirmed our being made in God's image consists in the "priority of ethics over technology, in the primacy of the person over things, and in the superiority of spirit over matter."¹⁰¹ Popes John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis have all addressed in encyclicals the human and ecological dangers resulting from consumerism.¹⁰² After discerning what is a just use of energy, we must then prudently decide upon what technologies to use to provide the energy for our needs.

Currently, Indiana energy use comes primarily from fossil fuels. We acknowledge and thank all of those who have labored in these industries to provide our society with reliable energy. In terms of natural and human ecology, however, we think it prudent to also develop renewable energy sources moving forward in thinking about energy sources for our children, grandchildren, and future generations. We recognize limits with any technology, and every technology produces some kind of pollution.

Renewable energy in Indiana accounts for 14% of


the state's electricity generating capacity. Wind energy produces almost 10% of the state's electricity, and the state ranks 12th in the nation in installed wind capacity with the mid-central counties of Benton, White, Tipton, Madison, and Jay counties having the highest capacity. Indiana is also the sixth largest producer of ethanol (biofuel) and fifth largest producer of biodiesel.¹⁰³

Several universities within the state are working to reduce the impact of energy use on human and natural ecologies. Indiana University aims to be carbon neutral by 2040, and the University of Notre Dame, Ball State University, and Indiana State University are working toward carbon neutrality by 2050.¹⁰⁴ Ball State has the nation's largest geothermal energy system. Notre Dame has developed geothermal, hydroelectric, and solar sources of energy and replaced all use of coal with natural gas.¹⁰⁵

The Earth and its atmosphere and oceans are part of the common good entrusted to us by God. In the Eucharist, we are interconnected and in communion

with all Catholics across the dioceses of our state, our nation, and the world.

Caring for Creation: Putting Faith into Action

fter addressing only some of the many challenges we face in caring for our common home and for our brothers and sisters, especially the poor, we call all the faithful to respond actively with spiritual and corporal works of mercy to bring healing and transformation to our ecological home and our relationships with one another.¹⁰⁶ Many responses can and should be in the technological, economic, and political realms, but we also want to focus on the spiritual dimension, because we think the latter is foundational to all responses as it fundamentally affects our relationships with God, our own selves, our neighbor, and creation.

At the core of the ecological and social crises is a human heart enclosed in upon itself, alienated from God, our neighbor, and creation. The Sacred Heart of Jesus seeks to draw each human heart into communion with Himself and through Him into communion with the Trinity. “Exalted at the right hand of God,” the Lord Jesus “received the promise of the holy Spirit from the Father and poured it forth” at Pentecost (Acts 2:33), which marks the beginning of the Church. Filled with the Holy Spirit, we become living flames of love who joyfully pour ourselves out in Christ to glorify God and sanctify the world. Weekly, we are summoned together by Christ’s Spirit to celebrate the Eucharist. Pope Francis reminds us that “Sunday, like the Jewish Sabbath, is meant to be a day which heals our relationships with God, with ourselves, with others and with the world. . . . And so the day of rest, centered on the Eucharist, sheds its light on the whole week, and motivates us to greater concern for nature and the poor.”¹⁰⁷

We call for a recovery of the Lord’s Day as a sacred time of worship in the Eucharist, of rest, and of healing relationships. Refreshed and elevated by our encounter with the Real Presence of the Risen Lord in the Eucharist, let us go forth to encounter the real presence of one another and also the presence of the Trinity in creation. Our contemporary culture tempts us away from Real Presence to encounter another by a virtual pres-

ence through screens and electronic words. The same Lord Jesus present in the Eucharist can be encountered through sacramental vision in creation. Unplug yourselves from a virtual world and encounter God in His world by going outside for a walk in your neighborhood or at our state’s National Park, twenty-four state parks, or numerous county parks. See with sacramental vision the trace of God in all things and learn to hear God’s song of creation speaking a divine message to us. Develop the biblical and spiritual disposition of praising God for the gift of creation. On Sunday, let us rest from unnecessary labor and commercial activity including online shopping.

Like Adam, share in the joy of naming God’s creatures. Become acquainted with your home watershed with its waters and land uses. Encounter the flora and fauna that live there and learn to call them by name. King Solomon, wisest ruler of Israel, also knew intimately God’s creation. “He spoke of plants, from the cedar on Lebanon to the hyssop growing out of the wall, and he spoke about beasts, birds, reptiles, and fishes” (1 Kings 5:13).

One specific example would be to encounter the wondrous natural phenomenon that is the annual spring and autumn migration of the sandhill cranes. 30,000 Hoosiers watch this autumn migration at the Jasper-Pulaski Fish and Wildlife Area (JPFWA) which is one of the largest wetlands remaining in the state. Sandhill Cranes were once endangered with fewer than 1,000 individuals alive in 1950.¹⁰⁸ After conservation efforts, they number 25,000-30,000 at the JPFWA, the largest population east of the Mississippi, but they are still listed as a species of special concern.¹⁰⁹ The Sandhill Crane has also been for centuries the symbol of the Myaamia (Miami) Native Americans.¹¹⁰ Most of the Myaamia tribe was forcibly removed from Indiana to Oklahoma following the Indian Removal Act of 1830, but four Myaamia bands were exempted, and their descendants still reside in Indiana.¹¹¹

Immersed in the awe and wonder of God’s creation, we encounter a beauty and goodness that soothes our soul and can open us to greater spiritual depth. We find



our soul being filled with God's gifts and a desire for God such that our desires for things and their consumption diminishes. The Holy Spirit unites us to God in prayer, where we can cultivate an attitude of "serene attentiveness" to God, ourselves, neighbor, and creation.¹¹² In contrast to our often hectic, overstimulated, distracted, and consumeristic lives, Pope Francis counsels us, "An integral ecology includes taking time to recover a serene harmony with creation, reflecting on our lifestyle and our ideals, and contemplating the Creator who lives among us and surrounds us . . ."¹¹³ Jesus Christ prayed all night on a hilltop (Mark 6:46) or rose early in the morning to go to a deserted place to pray (Mark 1:35). Jesus tells us to consider the birds of the sky and the wild flowers of the field (Matthew 6:26, 28) to understand God's Providential care for us that removes anxiety about our daily needs.

Besides our individual and familial life, the Liturgy can also transform us to be agents of the Holy Spirit in the world. Pope Francis's institution of the World Day of Prayer for Care for Creation on September 1 has been extended into an ecumenical Season of Creation beginning on September 1 and concluding on October 4, the Memorial of St. Francis of Assisi, patron saint for those who care for ecology.¹¹⁴ We encourage parishes and schools to develop prayer and activities to worship the Holy Trinity and to bring about ecological awareness, conversion, and responsibility. Pope Leo XIV stresses the need to pray for "the conversion of the many people, inside and outside the Church, who do not yet recognize the urgent need to care for our common home."¹¹⁵ The Diocese of Gary held a one-day "Summit on *Laudato Si'*" with speakers who addressed the spiritual, scientific, legislative, policy, and pastoral aspects of integral ecology.¹¹⁶ Liturgically, many dioceses in the country are celebrating a Green Mass during this Season of Creation, the color pointing to the greening power of the Holy Spirit and the color of life. For example, our own Diocese of Gary celebrated a Green Mass at St. Ann of the Dunes parish located within the Dunes National Lakeshore.¹¹⁷ The Church also just promulgated in the summer of 2025 a new Mass setting for the "Care for Creation."¹¹⁸



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In the fifth century, St. Benedict wrote a rule for his monastic community. Their communal life was ordered around prayer and work. St. Benedict was a lay religious; he was never ordained. He offers all of us, whether lay, religious, or clergy, wise advice about the spiritual life. Prayerful attentiveness roots us in our heart, and we operate from a firm foundation, bringing a calmness and thoughtfulness to our thoughts, words, and



deeds. St. Benedict writes about the monk, “He will regard all utensils and goods of the monastery as sacred vessels of the altar, aware that nothing is to be neglected.”¹¹⁹ Attentiveness cultivates gratitude and wonder before the simplest objects. The humility and simplicity of the Benedictine way of life teaches us about integral ecology and our relationship with God and His creation.

We can apply this ancient Benedictine vision to our modern relationship with our world and how we virtuously use the gift of its resources with temperance, fortitude, justice, and prudence. A few of the communal and institutional responses of Catholics in Indiana include the following regarding renewable energy use: St. Mary School in Avilla installed a donor-supplied array of 270 solar panels on their roof which cuts energy consumption by 59% and Cardinal Ritter Jr./Sr. High School installed 28 solar panels on their school roof.¹²⁰ Both schools integrate the science/technology with theology in the classroom. St. Meinrad Archabbey, founded in 1854, has reduced reliance on fossil fuels by installing 3,000 solar panels, switching to LED lighting, and using geothermal heating and cooling.¹²¹ The monastery saves over \$350,000 annually in energy costs and over \$650,000 annually in operational costs.¹²² The Franciscan Sisters in Oldenburg installed solar panels on their farm buildings and, through a grant for rural communities, have facilitated homeowners and businesses to add solar panels to their respective buildings. These Sisters have also revitalized their Michaela Farm.¹²³

Other schools and communities have also begun sustainable farms/gardens. St. Mary’s College at Notre Dame has a five-acre Sustainable Farm that integrates faith, food, and justice as it addresses food insecurity in the surrounding neighborhoods and builds relationships with the community.¹²⁴ St. Mary-of-the-Woods runs the White Violet Center for Eco-Justice. In addition to maintaining a 320-acre forest, the 7-acre organic garden, orchards, and apiary provides food for the community and education through sustainable agricul-

ture internships.¹²⁵ In 2020, St. Theodore Guerin High School in Noblesville started St. Isidore Farm which uses sustainable practices and provides integrative education through an elective Farming and Food Justice course.¹²⁶ The Daughters of Charity in Evansville sponsor Seton Harvest, a community-supported agricultural farm that is certified Naturally Grown. A portion of each week’s harvest goes directly to charities to feed the poor and hungry.¹²⁷

Biodiversity, ecological restoration, and reforestation/planting trees are other areas of action. Given that Indiana is now only 20% forested, planting trees and reforestation are important ecological goals. The Benedictine Sisters of Our Lady of Grace Monastery in Beech Grove maintain 1,300 trees on their 30 acres. To recognize the celebration of its initial Season of Creation in 2019, the Archdiocese of Indianapolis planted over 200 trees at 13 parishes.¹²⁸ The diocese of Evansville planted 75 trees on diocesan grounds in celebration of its 75th anniversary in 2021. Removal of invasive species that limit native biodiversity is also necessary for ecological integrity. In 2023, the Congregation of Holy Cross at the University of Notre Dame removed a field overgrown with a monoculture of invasive Callery Pear trees.¹²⁹ The University itself has also started removing Callery Pear trees from campus. The State of Indiana’s reforestation program included planting one million native trees over a five-year period.¹³⁰ We encourage the planting of trees by individuals, families, and parishes, whether in conjunction with Arbor Day or, for example, to mark the birth/Baptism of a child. Besides the ecological benefits of trees—oxygen, shade and cooling of people, homes, and streets; nesting sites, fruit, food for insects, soil protection, water conservation, windbreaks, absorption of air pollution—and the economic, they provide personal and spiritual benefits: source of beauty, spiritual refreshment, noise and stress reduction, enhancement of healing, marker of relationships as it grows with a family, facilitation of silent contemplation, exploration by climbing, opportunity for wonder at longevity and size.¹³¹

We have provided examples of action in just three areas. For a more comprehensive engagement with care for creation, we encourage parishes, schools, institutions, groups, and individual people to engage the *Laudato Si’ Action Platform* (LSAP) established by the Vatican Di-



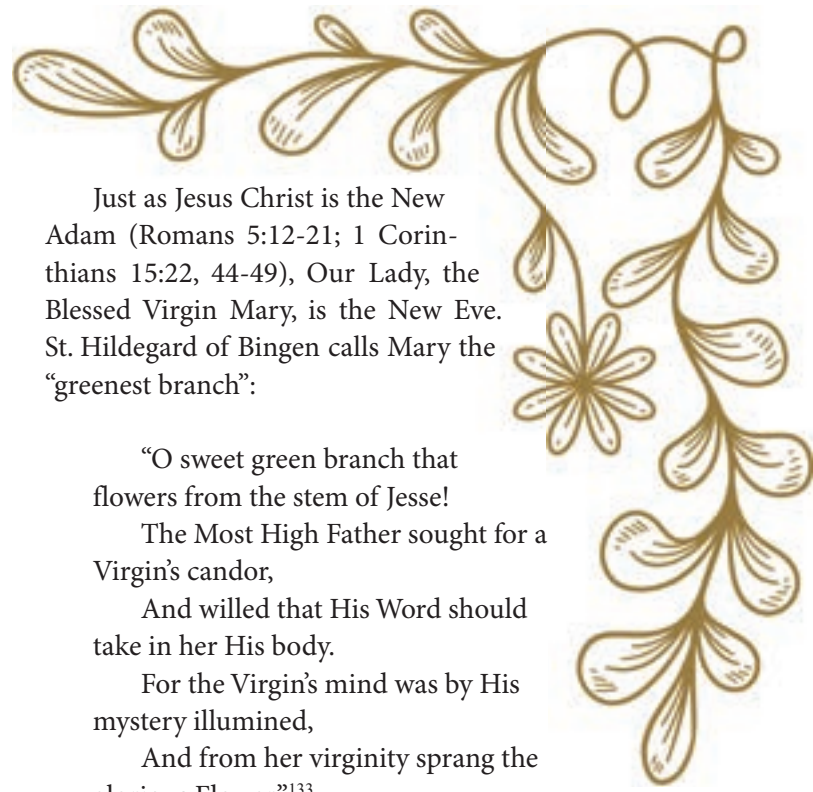
castery for Promoting Integral Human Development. LSAP provides a structure for people to assess their relationship with both natural ecology and human ecology and to make commitments to actions that sustainably care for our common home. Our Archdiocese of Indianapolis was one of the first dioceses in the country to submit a plan to LSAP.¹³²

As we conclude our reflection, we return to the beginning of our human community in relationship to the natural world. Biblically, our human life originated in the Garden of Eden, a Paradise of holy and just relationships among God, ourselves, and creation. Gardening is a way of life that requires humility, attentiveness, gratitude, and faithful obedience to cooperate with the ways of soil and plants. Gardens are a place of death and life that connects us to the Paschal Mystery of Christ in the Eucharist.



Photo: Rebecca Swafford/*Today's Catholic*

Over centuries, the Catholic faithful have created Mary Gardens, gardens with a statue of Our Lady surrounded by flowers associated with her virtues and aspects of her life. We encourage parishes, schools, institutions, and families to cultivate Mary Gardens as a communal exercise of integral ecology to contemplate and praise God in creation and to be attentive to our human identity and mission as adopted sons and daughters of God with Mary as our Mother in grace.



Just as Jesus Christ is the New Adam (Romans 5:12-21; 1 Corinthians 15:22, 44-49), Our Lady, the Blessed Virgin Mary, is the New Eve. St. Hildegard of Bingen calls Mary the “greenest branch”:

“O sweet green branch that
flowers from the stem of Jesse!

The Most High Father sought for a
Virgin’s candor,

And willed that His Word should
take in her His body.

For the Virgin’s mind was by His
mystery illumined,

And from her virginity sprang the
glorious Flower.”¹³³

Come, Holy Spirit, green us with your
love that we may faithfully and joyfully live
out our love of you in communion with the
Father and the Son and so love and mercifully
care for our neighbor and for your creation.

Given on Holy Thursday, April 2, 2026





+ *Charles C. Thompson*

Most Rev. Charles C. Thompson
Archdiocese of Indianapolis



+ *Kevin C. Rhoades*

Most Rev. Kevin C. Rhoades
Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend



+ *Joseph M. Siegel*

Most Rev. Joseph M. Siegel
Diocese of Evansville



+ *Timothy L. Doherty*

Most Rev. Timothy L. Doherty
Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana



+ *Robert J. McClory*

Most Rev. Robert J. McClory
Diocese of Gary



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