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Taking Care of Home



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PROTECTING THE EARTH REFLECTS POPE'S POWERFUL MESSAGE

Pope Francis made a bold statement on the environment in his June encyclical, *Laudato Si*, with a message that not only validated the sustainability movement at USD, but set the stage for a visit to the campus by a renowned Catholic climate-change activist this fall.

Dan Misleh, founder and executive director of the Catholic Climate Covenant, will speak here on Oct. 8 about the encyclical and suggest practical steps people can take to address the issue.

The Catholic Climate Covenant works primarily with major Catholic

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organizations to help them integrate Catholic teaching and climate-change abatement into their work. The covenant has also piloted a program, Creation Care teams, to show smaller teams at parishes what they can do to bring about “ecological conversions” within the community.

“We’re asking people to turn away from behaviors that are destroying our common home, and towards something that is more in keeping with these values that we hold as people with faith,” Misleh explains.

USD has gone through its own ecological conversion, starting in 2006, when the university formed a task force on sustainability. Soon after, it created the Office of Sustainability to manage the impact of the campus on the environment, which led to the first electronics recycling center (ERC) on a college campus, the installation of 5,000 solar panels and significant energy efficiency upgrades.

The office and the task force have also ensured that USD has a strong voice on climate change in the San Diego community at large. The university is also home to the San Diego Climate Collaborative, a network for public agencies aimed at advancing solutions to facilitate climate-change planning.

Michel Boudrias, an associate professor and chair of the Environmental and Ocean Sciences Department, as well as academic director for sustainability, serves as project leader for Climate Education Partners, a group that educates high-profile decision makers and the general public on climate science. He says it’s important for USD, as a Catholic university, to be at the forefront of the climate change issue, especially in light of the pope’s encyclical.

“There was clearly this environmental message — that climate change is real and the planet is in trouble, that we need to take care of it because this is our home. There was also the social justice message that we need to take care of the planet for everyone.”

Those two ideas, Boudrias says, really get to the heart of USD “as a university whose mission is to prepare our students to be ethical citizens of the world.”

One such student is Claire Flynn ’17. As a double major in environmental studies and sociology, she interned over the summer with the Office of Sustainability, where she worked on several videos to explain to incoming students at orientation how and why they should conserve water and energy.

“Any little thing counts,” says Flynn. “It’s easy to think, ‘My little actions aren’t going to make a difference.’ But they do.”

Law students are making a difference too, by conducting energy and climate-related research and analysis through USD’s Energy Policy Initiatives Center. “We’ve been engaged in some pretty meaningful work on

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the local and state level,” says director Scott Anders, including a greenhouse gas inventory of the San Diego region and a review of the legal aspects of California’s cap-and-trade program.

More faculty members are getting involved by incorporating sustainability into the curriculum, according to USD Director of Sustainability Michael Catanzaro. Marketing students in the School of Business Administration are managing a Google AdWords campaign for the ERC, while MBA students are studying the center’s supply chain and efficiency.

Engaging faculty is just what Jeffrey Mark Burns, director of the Center for Catholic Thought and Culture, is trying to achieve. He not only invited Dan Misleh to speak at the campus, but he’s also working to launch a longer-term panel series in the spring called “On Our Common Home,” named after the subtitle of the pope’s encyclical, to put the spotlight on faculty and their work on climate change.

“We want to have something that has legs so the encyclical just doesn’t die, to keep it on people’s minds,” Burns says. “This is something for the long haul.” — *by Bonnie Nicholls*

See video [here](#).

Pictured: Associate Professor Michel Boudrias photographed by Nick Abadilla.

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