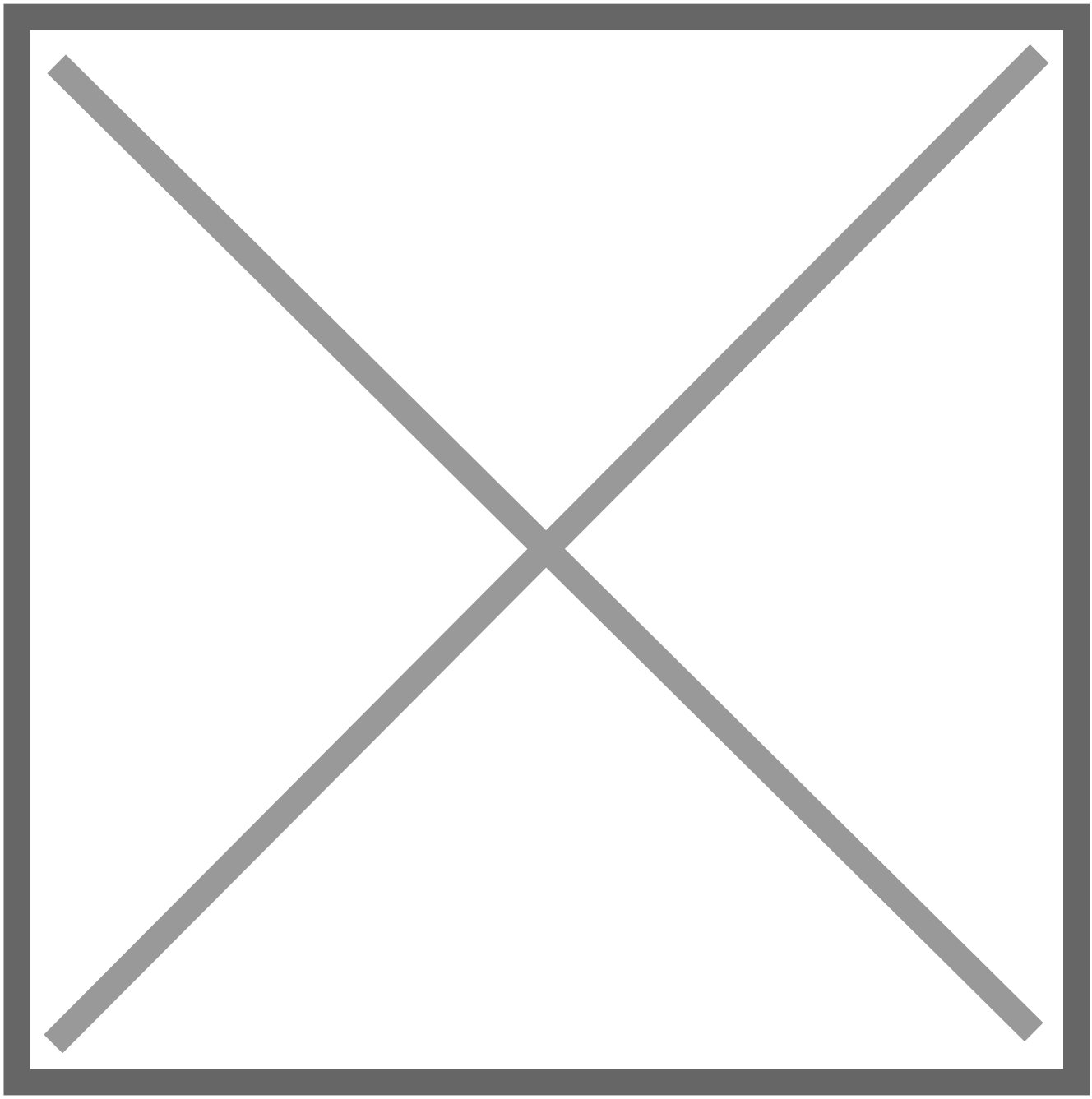
Opinion
Editorial



The University of Dayton removed half the lights in Roesch Library and upgraded the others to high-efficient double-life lamps and electronic ballasts, cutting energy use by half with a barely noticeable reduction in light output. (University of Dayton)

by NCR Editorial Staff

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

January 26, 2024
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Laudato Si' was released nearly a decade ago — but when it comes to Catholic education and formation, church teachings on ecology and our common home are still being treated like an elective, not a required course.

Rarely have we seen examples of the Catholic tenets highlighted in *Laudato Si'* woven into the fabric of how the church and its people operate in the world the way for which Francis' integral ecology calls. Safeguarding the planet is not an extracurricular activity, but that's how it is too often viewed.

And yet, along with various pollutants, change may well be in the air. At a conference on Catholic higher education at the University of San Diego in mid-January, San Diego Cardinal Robert McElroy urged Catholic universities to use *Laudato Si'* as a central pillar to their missions. This is the type of integration required to truly live out church teaching on integral ecology, solidarity and justice. It can't just be a lens through which we sometimes view our world. Rather, it must constitute the foundation and framework of a Catholic worldview.

If Catholic universities can do this well, they might serve as models for other church institutions, and dioceses and bishops conferences themselves.

> Safeguarding the planet is not an extracurricular activity, but that's how it is too often viewed.
>
> Tweet this

McElroy isn't the only one who sees education as a promising path to pursue such shifts. In a presentation at the same conference, Villanova University professor of theology and religious studies Massimo Faggioli said, "Francis invites Catholic

colleges and universities to be part of a cultural and social process of transformation."

And in his recent apostolic exhortation on the climate crisis, Laudate Deum, Francis makes clear that it is precisely this type of social transformation that's needed to bring about the changes necessary to protect creation today, saying "there are no lasting changes without cultural changes."

During the United Nations climate change conference, COP28, in Dubai last year, the Holy See's delegation placed particular emphasis on the importance of education, too. At one point the delegation even proposed that the final text should contain language requiring nations to fund education on climate change. (In the end, no references to education were included in the final text.)

Indeed, many seem to agree that it is through education that we will learn to see God's world as something we exist within and depend upon, rather than oversee and distribute. Catholic universities are uniquely poised to show how this shift is possible.

Advertisement

McElroy in his talk elaborates on five reasons why *Laudato Si*' constitutes a central pillar for advancing the mission and identity of a Catholic university, specifically. His points, slightly adapted here, speak to why *Laudato Si*' and its integral ecology work so well as a Catholic worldview in general.

- *Laudato Si*' points to the single most universally inviting pathway to encounter with God.
- *Laudato Si*' speaks powerfully to the concept of truth.
- *Laudato Si*' beautifully testifies to the principle of solidarity.
- *Laudato Si*' speaks piercingly to the moral question of technology and its limits.
- *Laudato Si*' speaks incisively and powerfully to the ethic of intergenerational solidarity.

As Catholic schools in the United States celebrate Catholic Schools Week Jan. 28-Feb. 3, we would do well to remember their rich history of upholding Catholic values, not just in their classrooms and lecture halls, but through the way they operate within and interact with the world.

Laudato Si' must take a central, not secondary, role in how Catholics live their faith if its teachings are to truly take effect and enact cultural transformation. And Catholic universities are a good place to start.

A version of this story appeared in the **Feb 2-15, 2024** print issue under the headline: Catholic universities should make Laudato Si’ ’ central, not extracurricular.