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Auxiliary Bishop Robert Casey, vicar general of the Archdiocese of Chicago, speaks during the Chicagoland Christians United for the Care of Creation Declaration Installation at Holy Name Cathedral May 18 in Chicago. (Monica Fox)



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Something new adorns the walls of Chicago's Holy Name Cathedral. On the eve of Pentecost for Western Christian churches and during the Easter season for Eastern Christian churches, an ecumenical gathering marked the installation of the "Chicagoland Christians United for the Care of Creation Declaration" within the sacred space.

Signed by 13 Christian leaders on the shore of Lake Michigan Aug. 17, 2023, during the Parliament of the World's Religions conference in Chicago, the official installation ceremony at the Catholic cathedral downtown May 18 was hosted by Ecumenism Metro Chicago together with the Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago's Office for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs and Office of Human Dignity and Solidarity. Religious leaders representing various Christian faith traditions were in attendance at the ceremony.

Citing Scripture from throughout the Bible, including Genesis, the Psalms and the Gospel of Matthew, the creation declaration states:

> To love God, we must honor all that God has created. To love our neighbor requires us as Christians to preserve and protect all that sustains life. The Earth, its air, land, and water, and everything derived from such, are precious gifts that sustain us all. All of these elements must be cared for, protected, and preserved, here and now, for the common good and for future generations.

It goes on to clearly state that not to care for the Earth "is sin" and to attribute the current "suffering" of the planet to "human-induced climate change and our wanton exploitation of God's precious gift of creation."



An ecumenical gathering marked the installation of the "Chicagoland Christians United for the Care of Creation Declaration" within Chicago's Holy Name Cathedral on May 18. (Courtesy of Archdiocese of Chicago)

The declaration ends with a confession that "we have sinned against God and neighbor by our misuse of God's good creation" and a moral call for "decisive restorative action" to address this "threat to our common home."

The decision to permanently house the original copy of the "Chicagoland Christians United for the Care of Creation Declaration" within the city's Catholic cathedral and archives was made by the ecumenical group because the Catholic Church is known for reliable archiving, and also because the cathedral presents an accessible public space to display the beautiful document and encourage dialogue about it, said Oblate of St. Benedict Michael Terrien, who serves as the coordinator/facilitator of the Archdiocese of Chicago's Laudato Si' Action Platform Commission and chair of Ecumenism Metro Chicago's Chicagoland Christians United for the Care of Creation Committee.



Rev. Fr. Andreas Garabedian of the Armenian Orthodox Church, Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America, speaks during the Chicagoland Christians United for the Care of Creation Declaration Installation at Holy Name Cathedral May 18 in Chicago. (Cindy Cramer)

But now that the declaration has been signed by leaders and installed in a place of prominence, what's next for the faith communities who support it?

"Even though we're the archivists," said Terrien, "we want it to be living. So we have ideas about how it can be a catalyst and an instrument, propelling more action in the region."

Remembering the morning the declaration was signed last August during his reflection at the installation, Auxiliary Bishop Robert Casey, vicar general for the Archdiocese of Chicago, recalled, "The sunlight that had arrived so providentially that morning brought with it a strong reminder; in order to put into practice the declaration that we were signing, we would need some amazing grace to inspire us to move from declaration to deeds."

> 'Declarations are nice. The good works that are inspired because of them are even better.'

—Auxiliary Bishop Robert Casey, vicar general of the Archdiocese of Chicago

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He referenced a Scripture passage that challenges Christians to be "doers of the word and not hearers only," (James 1:22), and continued, "The Declaration for the Care of Creation is a lovely document. It will be a nice adornment on a wall here at Holy Name Cathedral. But if we are simply the signers, or the readers, or the hearers of these words, without becoming the 'doers,' how can we expect creation to be cared for? Our words must become deeds. Our faith must inspire good works. … Declarations are nice. The good works that are inspired because of them are even better."

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Just as a baptismal certificate means nothing if the baptized does not put their faith into practice, "the Declaration of the Care for Creation means nothing if we do not put into practice what we proclaimed on Aug. 17th, 2023," Casey said. "United in one Spirit, may we be compelled each day to become more than a people of parchment. May we become a people of action, putting into practice our praise of the God of all creation."

Terrien told EarthBeat, "This [declaration] is the springboard to how our churches will be working together in the Chicago area to celebrate God's act of creation and care for our common home."