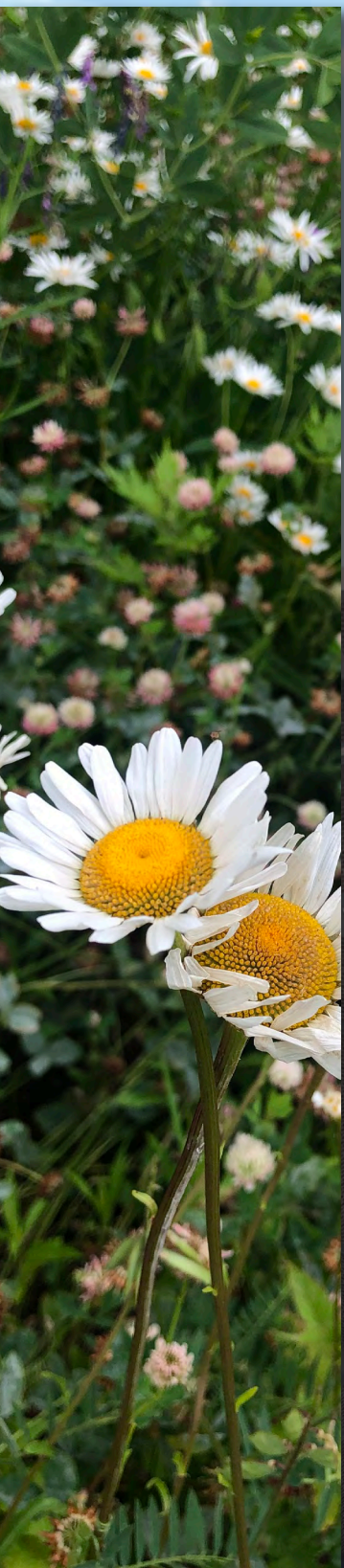


2024 Mercyhurst University Sustainability Strategic Plan



MERCYHURST
UNIVERSITY

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Molly Tarvin (Chair)
Sustainability Coordinator

The Laudato Si' Committee is proud to usher in a new and holistic era of sustainability at Mercyhurst with the release of this 2024 Sustainability Strategic Plan. A campus steeped in green throughout its history, Mercyhurst University's environmental commitment spans decades, thanks to the work of renowned figures such as Sister Maura Smith and Brittany Prischak, in conjunction with a focus of Earth as one of Sisters of Mercy's Critical Concerns. We now chart a new course by structuring this four-year plan around the seven goals set forth by Pope Francis in his 2015 encyclical, *Laudato Si'*.



Ever the pioneer, Pope Francis calls for the Catholic Church to turn its attention to the vast issue of climate change. *Laudato Si'* transcends environmentalism and focuses on a sustainable model balancing the three pillars of sustainability—the environment, society, and the economy. The seven Laudato Si' goals are Response to the Cry of the Earth, Response to the Cry of the Poor, Ecological Economics, Adoption of Sustainable Lifestyles, Ecological Education, Ecological Spirituality, and Community Resilience and Empowerment.

In 2021, Mercyhurst University President Kathleen Getz signed the Laudato Si' Commitment, dedicating Mercyhurst to upholding each of Pope Francis's outlined goals. Following this commitment, and as mentioned in section 3.2 of the 2022-2027 University Strategic Plan, the Laudato Si' Committee has identified a comprehensive range of actionable goals to continue and deepen the university's commitment to sustainability. Within each of these Laudato Si' Goals, some grouped in likeness, are initiatives, in some cases sub-initiatives, and finally action items categorized by their timelines. Each action item will be tracked by the committee in a private document, which assigns an administrative lead, yearly updates, and target completion date.

The task of completing these action items will reach beyond the Laudato Si' Committee, requiring the assistance of our campus community, local partners, the student body, and more. Addressing the three pillars is a holistic achievement, and it will take all of us to see this Strategic Plan through to completion. I thank you for your cooperation, voice, and support as we take on this monumental task. The Mercyhurst community is encouraged to get involved by attending Q+A panels and sustainability events, participating in campus surveys, and submitting questions and comments through our [Laudato Si' comment form](#), which will remain open through the completion of this plan. Campus community members who are passionate about sustainability are invited to join the Laudato Si' Committee at the start of each academic year.

Many thanks to the 2023-24 Laudato Si' Committee, whose names are credited on the first page, for their work in completing this plan, and to President Getz for her continued support and remarkable vision.

To the planet, and all who work to keep it green,

Molly Tarvin
Chair, Laudato Si' Committee
Sustainability Coordinator

Mercyhurst University's Definition of Sustainability:

Mercyhurst University strives to care for the Earth and all of its creatures with due passion and respect. Sustainability is engrained within our campus both physically and spiritually, an integral part of the Mercyhurst experience for employees and students alike.



Sustainability at Mercyhurst

By choosing Pope Francis' seven Laudato Si' goals as our guiding principles, Mercyhurst will expand our commitment to sustainability while staying true to our Mercy roots. With a rich history of environmental engagement, Mercyhurst is well positioned to operationalize these goals both on campus and within our community.

Response to the Cry of the Earth and the Adoption of Sustainable Lifestyles follow the traditional approach to environmentalism, calling for actions related to reducing our carbon footprint, protecting the richness of nature,

and serving as good stewards of the Earth. Mercyhurst seeks to build upon our efforts to secure a healthy future for our communities and natural ecosystems. In this section, we have committed to ambitious initiatives related to energy use, transportation, waste, and landscape management.

Mercyhurst has outlined a thorough approach to Ecological Education using our strengths as a liberal arts institution. Launching in Fall 2024, the new Sustainability Studies major will bring new opportunities for integrating Laudato Si' into our curriculum, though we aim to reach

all students, regardless of their majors. As sustainability is a discussion necessary for all Mercyhurst community members, we have outlined an approach to integrate key conversations in the classroom, in research, and in campus experiences.

Ecological Spirituality relies on our Mercy roots, inspired by the ecological priorities of the Sisters of Mercy. With support from campus ministry and academic departments, we will create programming, physical installations, and connections with diverse religious groups and local Indigenous peoples. Mercyhurst seeks to incubate a love for the environment through all spiritual traditions.

Fulfilling the goal of Ecological Economics is as important as it is challenging. Achieving an ethical economic model which prioritizes circularity is necessary to counter this growing climate crisis. Mercyhurst will seize opportunities to evaluate its own procurement and investments, while committing to expanding conversations on ecological

economic systems. With many students aspiring to become leaders in business and various fields, ecological economics is crucial for shaping the next generation of sustainable leaders.

Lastly, Response to the Cry of the Poor and Community Resilience and Empowerment speak to Mercyhurst's foundation as a beacon of compassionate, creative service for the community and its diverse population. We have outlined action items including benefiting Erie's environmental justice efforts, combating food insecurity in our poorest neighborhoods, and offering a wealth of sustainable resources for Erie students, scholars, and visitors.

By addressing each of these seven goals, Mercyhurst will establish itself as a leader in holistic, mission-centered sustainability. As the climate crisis transcends all borders and barriers, our ongoing work must remain flexible, prepared to extend beyond the limits of our current dreams and plans.



Existing Projects

Tiny Forest



The Tiny Forest is the first of its kind in western PA. Featuring over 600 trees planted in close succession, the roots form connections underground and spur growth 3x faster than traditional plantings. With an impressive 90% success rate after one year, the Tiny Forest provides a wealth of research opportunities and benefits in flood water management and urban habitats.



Geothermal Heat Exchange Systems

Installed first in our Mary D'Angelo Performing Arts Center, geothermal heat exchange systems have since been included in our Hammermill Library and Audrey Hirt Academic Center. Using deep wells to pump water into the ground, the thermal properties of the soil either heat the water or cool it, depending on the differences in temperatures between the air and ground. This method of heat exchange helps to heavily reduce emissions produced from traditional HVAC units.



Student Sustainability Fund

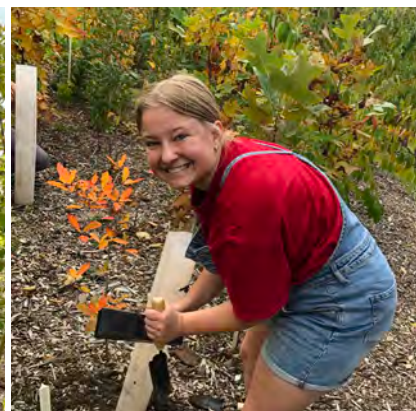
Established in 2007 by a substantial effort from the student body, the Student Sustainability Fund is a small tax on each student's bill per semester. Starting as \$5 and increasing to \$10 shortly after, the Fund is reserved for sustainability projects proposed by the campus community. So far it has provided for a myriad of diverse projects, including the upgrading of gas-powered lawn equipment to electric, reusable water bottles for our incoming freshmen classes, and funding for the National Water Dance, an artistic celebration of water and its benefits.



Greenhouse



Built on the roof of Zurn Hall, the greenhouse is a monumental addition to our environmental efforts. Constructed after diligent work by the Sustainability Club and funded by the Student Sustainability Fund, the greenhouse serves as conservatory for plants and succulents and will assist in jumpstarting the outdoor gardening season.



Executive Summary

The 2024 Sustainability Strategic Plan seeks to expand Mercyhurst's commitment to a holistic approach to climate action. Using Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si'* as a guiding document, this plan divides our next four years of action into each of his seven outlined goals. Drawing from a rich history in environmentalism, including the legacy of lifelong sustainability advocate Sr. Maura Smith, Mercyhurst seeks to address the climate crisis in a distinctly Mercy way. As the Sisters of Mercy designate Earth a Critical Concern, we must continue revolutionizing our campus to better benefit the planet, the community, and the economic systems we participate in.

This plan builds upon the substantial progress Mercyhurst has already made. With an established Green Team beginning in 2000, and Sr. Maura's influence spanning long before that, Mercyhurst has continually prioritized sustainability in decision-making. Past projects include the installation of geothermal heat exchange systems, the Tiny Forest, the Tower Garden Lending Program, the Green Roof, and the creation of the Student Sustainability Fund.

Written by the 2023-24 University *Laudato Si'* Committee, per the commitment in section 3.2 of the 2022-2027 University Strategic Plan, this plan includes a diverse array of actions adhering to the seven goals of Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'*. Each goal or group of goals are addressed in three broad initiatives, in some case sub-initiatives, followed by action items listed by timeline. A summary of the goals and their initiatives are listed below.

RESPONSE TO THE CRY OF THE EARTH/ADOPTION OF SUSTAINABLE LIFESTYLES:

- Reduce emissions and increase energy efficiency.
- Minimize waste streams and offer sustainable alternatives to single-use plastic.
- Increase the implementation of sustainable practices regarding our natural environment.

ECOLOGICAL EDUCATION:

- Create opportunities for *Laudato Si'* related scholarship.
- Increase presence of sustainability in the curriculum.
- Improve sustainability programming and communication.

ECOLOGICAL SPIRITUALITY:

- Increase the presence of ecological spirituality on campus.
- Strengthen ties with local sustainably minded religious organizations.
- Develop relationships with local Indigenous groups to better understand local traditional environmental practices.

ECOLOGICAL ECONOMICS:

- Expand campuswide conversations on ecological economic systems.
- Investigate and initiate the transition to ethical investments.
- Increase the use of sustainably procured products on campus.

RESPONSE TO THE CRY OF THE POOR/COMMUNITY RESILIENCE AND EMPOWERMENT:

- Continue to utilize our resources to benefit the City of Erie's underprivileged populations and Environmental Justice Neighborhoods.
- Help counter food insecurity within our neighboring communities.
- Establish Mercyhurst's campus as a sustainability hub for Erie residents and scholars.



MERCYHURST

A Sustainable Living-learning Community

Historical Timeline



● **1970** - First Earth Day celebration, organized by renowned environmental leader Sister Maura Smith



● **2000** - Green Team first established by Sister Maura Smith and Dr. Chris Magoc



● **2006** - Sustainability Studies Major first introduced



● **2009** - Green Roof installed, led by student Zack Pekor

1970-1999

2000-2009



● **1996** - First geothermal system installed in the Mary D'Angelo Performing Arts Center



● **2007** - Green Energy Fund (now known as Sustainability Fund) established

● **2004** - Cathy Pedler established as part-time Sustainability Coordinator

● **2009** - Organic farm established in Girard by Dr. Mike Campbell and garden manager Tim Boucher



Sustainable Lifestyles



Ecological Education



Ecological Spirituality



Ecological Economics



Community Resilience



Sustainable Lifestyles

Reduce emissions and increase energy efficiency on campus.

Continue progress towards our goal of 50% energy reduction by 2030.

Years 1-2	Years 3-4
Identify action items and timeline for reducing energy as committed to in the Erie 2030 commitment .	Research and apply for grant opportunities to update PAC lights to LEDs.
Conduct an updated and comprehensive greenhouse gas inventory.	Explore and plan for intentional low impact student living arrangements.
Explore funding options for the installation of one rooftop solar array.	Conduct energy audits in at least four energy intensive buildings, to be determined by compiled yearly utility data.

Encourage sustainable transportation alternatives for students and employees.

Years 1-2	Years 3-4
Install a minimum of two EV charging locations on campus.	Survey viability and create carpooling incentives for employees and students.
Purchase a fleet of bikes for student rental, and install bike racks and repair stations to support.	Explore policies and possibilities of purchasing/leasing electric or hybrid vehicles for the University fleet.
Implement policies to deter vehicle idling on campus.	

Minimize our waste streams and offer sustainable alternatives to single use plastic.

Reduce the presence of single use plastics on campus.

Years 1-2	Years 3-4
Upgrade plastic catering materials to compostable or recyclable content.	Install bottle filling stations over all existing water fountains in McAuley, Baldwin, and Preston Hall.
Ensure acceptance of reusable coffee cups at the Bookstore coffee bar.	

Divert compostable and recyclable waste from landfill.

Years 1-2	Years 3-4
Increase use of Earth Tub composters for student/employee food waste by providing clear instructions for use.	Identify local farmers to pilot the donation of pre-consumer food scraps for feed or compost.
Increase the presence of recycling bins during campus events (sporting events, Hurst Day).	Research viability and practicality of innovative technologies for food waste reduction in dining halls (dehydrator, pulper, etc.).
Provide on-campus glass recycling.	Investigate the feasibility of on-campus plastic recycling alternatives through community research and interviews.

Increase the implementation of sustainable practices regarding our natural environment.

Groundskeeping practices

Years 1-2	Years 3-4
Consciously reduce the use of rock salt on campus through strategies of reduction, avoidance, and infrastructure upgrades.	Strategically replace unusable grounds equipment with electric alternatives.
Heavily reduce the use of pesticides/herbicides/fertilizers in routine outdoor care by eliminating bare soil and exploring natural alternatives.	Close the loop of disposal/procurement of landscaping materials (i.e. mulch) by transforming and utilizing our routine landscaping waste.
Install and utilize rain barrels, beginning with facilities building and expanding to green areas of campus.	

Natural Landscape Planning and Care

Years 1-2	Years 3-4
Increase the native trees, shrubs, and flowers planted by an additional 25%.	Conduct a tree identification campaign.
Create a landscaping committee including facilities, faculty, and students to increase communication regarding plant choice and care.	Create a tree care and replacement plan to ensure all newly planted trees are native or noninvasive.
	Achieve designation as a Tree Campus Higher Education .



Ecological Education

Increase opportunities for Laudato Si' scholarship.

Years 1-2	Years 3-4
Hire a full-time Sustainability Studies faculty member to chair the program.	Revitalize our outdoor classroom with new, recycled content benches.
Incentivize increased use of Student Sustainability Fund for student research projects.	Regularly send representatives to sustainability research summits, such as Second Nature or AASHE .
Develop a yearly Green Accomplishment Award for students and employees to be presented before the Sister Maura Smith Earth Day Lecture.	

Increase presence of sustainability in the curriculum.

Years 1-2	Years 3-4
Collaborate with faculty senate to create an inclusive committee for strategic placement of sustainability throughout all academic programs.	Include a sustainability-designated course on campus-wide graduation requirements.
Compile a Laudato Si' syllabus guide to provide resources, lesson inspiration, and articles for discipline-specific courses.	Explore the viability of setting a goal of 75% of departments offering a sustainability-themed/ inclusive course.
Increase the presence of sustainability within IMU courses by featuring a lesson on our campus's Laudato Si' commitment and actions.	Create a series of university-wide sustainable learning outcomes.

Improve sustainability programming and communication.

Years 1-2	Years 3-4
Include campus sustainability opportunities in new employee orientation.	Create an interactive virtual campus map to highlight sustainability installations, housed on the main website.
Mention sustainability initiatives in new student orientation and open houses.	Coordinate a fall semester sustainability celebration.
Collaborate with Admissions to include green projects on Ambassador Tours.	Create a sustainable living website for the Hub, highlighting green living suggestions and resources.
Create and install signage to highlight stops on the Green Tour.	
Establish an email list of student volunteers to assist with environmental projects on campus.	



Ecological Spirituality

Increase the presence of ecological spirituality on campus.

Years 1-2	Years 3-4
Establish ongoing programming to expose the campus to the teachings of Laudato Si' and Laudate Deum.	Form a Laudato Si' prayer circle.
Celebrate the Feast Day of Saint Francis on October 4th with a sustainable dinner party.	Create programming to deepen understanding of religious environmentalism, both past and present (e.g., St. Hildegard of Bingen, Catholic Climate Covenant).
Install a labyrinth on campus grounds.	

Strengthen ties with local sustainably-minded religious organizations.

Years 1-2	Years 3-4
Continue to integrate Benedictine Sisters into environmental religious coursework and programming.	
Collaborate with the Mercy Motherhouse to revitalize the Sister Maura Smith Peace Garden, including mulching, selecting new flowers, and documenting routine upkeep.	

Develop relationships with local Indigenous groups to better understand local traditional environmental practices.

Years 1-2	Years 3-4
Inspire a senior thesis project focused on identifying local Indigenous groups to form connections with.	Create programming or coursework focused on widening the appreciation, understanding, and utilization of Indigenous knowledge.
Explore appropriateness and authenticity of a Land Acknowledgement.	



Ecological Economics

Expand campus-wide conversations on ecological economic systems.

Years 1-2	Years 3-4
Welcome a biannual ecological economics speaker, or a local business owner who utilizes the practices in their operations.	Introduce a team-taught ecological economics course.
Collaborate with the Hammermill Library to build a collection of ecological economics books and online articles for community access, including topics such as degrowth, absolute decoupling, and natural capital.	Encourage student research with a biannual ecological economics essay prize.

Investigate and initiate the transition to ethical investments.

Years 1-2	Years 3-4
Collaborate with student researchers to create a list of viable companies for ethical investments, considering economic and social externalities	Create an Investor Responsibility Committee to assist the Board of Trustees in deliberate ethical investments.
	Within said Committee, make recommendations to the Board based on an ethical evaluation of our current investment portfolio.

Increase the presence of sustainably procured products on campus.

Years 1-2	Years 3-4
Initiate a switch to 30% recycled content printer paper campus wide.	Increase the variety of ethically sourced merchandise in the Bookstore to at least five unique items.
Integrate sustainable cleaning solutions with a Green Cleaning plan, including drain-safe chemicals and 50% recycled content paper towels.	Develop campus-wide ethical purchasing guidelines which include sourcing from minority-owned, locally sourced, and/or New American employing businesses.



Community Resilience

Continue to utilize our resources to benefit the City of Erie’s underprivileged populations and Environmental Justice Neighborhoods.

Years 1-2	Years 3-4
Create a living document compiling environmental justice research opportunities within the City of Erie, for use in labs and individual research.	Initiate a class or senior project focused on investigating and countering City ordinances which limit the possibilities of urban growing and agriculture.
Continue coordinating volunteers to assist local growers in urban areas, with a goal of four environmental service projects by the campus community per year.	Compile opportunities for student internships within local environmental organizations such as Groundwork Erie and the Sustainability Action Team.

Help counter food insecurity within our neighboring communities.

Years 1-2	Years 3-4
Assist the City of Erie and LEAF in creating a fruit/nut based tiny forest within the City limits.	Expand the garden to allow for donation of fresh produce to food banks, pay-what-you-can farmers markets, or soup kitchens.
Explore policies and regulations for initiating a food recovery system to donate prepared foods from our dining halls to the Mercy Market and local soup kitchens.	
Collaborate with Erie Farm to Schools and Parkhurst Dining to teach cooking classes to school children utilizing produce grown in school gardens.	

Establish Mercyhurst’s campus as a sustainability hub for Erie residents and scholars.

Years 1-2	Years 3-4
Organize a sustainability-themed conference for local scholars and community leaders.	Host a sustainability showcase, highlighting sustainable projects and progress within Erie’s nonprofits, schools, and universities.
Host a sustainability summer camp for local middle and high school students.	Establish a Laudato Si’ scholarship for Erie high school seniors to assist with tuition into Sustainability Studies.



With an established history of meaningful environmental commitments, Mercyhurst University is well situated to respond to the challenges presented by the climate crisis. This is no time to rest, given the uncertain future facing the planet we call home. The next four years will define Mercyhurst as a leader in holistic sustainability. This plan serves as a roadmap to ensure we use those years meaningfully.

Now is the time for action: action by institutions, governments, communities, and individuals. The action will be as diverse as it is meaningful; it will not look the

same from one person to another. We will disperse innovative climate solutions through our student body, employee networks, and scholarly works. Our solutions must be as inevitable as the crisis we face.

Our campus is in Erie, Pennsylvania, but our impact can stretch far beyond. The depth of this impact depends on you, and how you face this call to climate action. Your support, your ideas, and your passion will help this Strategic Plan succeed and position Mercyhurst University on the right side of environmental history.