

Nuancing the Implementation of Laudato Si Activities in Aklan

Rev. Fr. Jayvee U. Delos Santos¹, Therese Jean A. Sarabia², Bryan Ray S. Solano³, Jimmy T. Masagca⁴, Amelia Gonzales⁵, Anne Cicely R. Samar⁶, Amelia T. Navejas⁷, Preciosa Corazon B. Pabroa⁸, Haydee M. Solomon⁹, Raymond J. Sucgang¹⁰

¹Sto Nino Seminary, Numancia, Aklan

^{2,6,7}Aklan State University-Makato Campus, Makato, Aklan

³Nabaoy Elementary School Pricipal's Office, Nabaoy, Malay Aklan

⁴Catanduanes State University, Virac, Catanduanes

⁵Bicol University College of Engineering, Legazpi, Albay

^{8,9,10}Philippine Nuclear Research Institute, Diliman, Quezon City

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ABSTRACT

On March 11, 2025, the Diocese of Kalibo in collaboration with several local institutions successfully held an environmental awareness and tree planting event in several locations: Pudiot (Tangalan, Aklan), Napti in Batan (Aklan), and Mambuquiao in Batan (Aklan), Philippines. The event, inspired by Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'*, brought together over 55 participants from various sectors, including communities, academic institutions, and environmental organizations. The main objective was to raise awareness about sustainability, climate change, and the importance of planting trees for ecological restoration. The program included informative sessions, reflections on Pope Francis' call for ecological transformation, and direct action through tree planting activities in several locations: Pudiot (Tangalan), Napti in Batan (Aklan), and Mambuquiao in Batan (Aklan). This article analyzes the significance of the event, assesses the role of collaboration in achieving environmental goals, and explores the broader implications of the initiative in fostering ecological responsibility. The findings highlight the importance of integrating faith, science, and community engagement to address the challenges of climate change and promote sustainable environmental practices.

Keywords: Laudato Si, ecological restoration, Diocese of Kalibo, Pudiot (Tangalan)

INTRODUCTION

Ecological issues such as deforestation, climate change, and biodiversity loss have become pressing global challenges. In response, several sectors have mobilized efforts to promote environmental sustainability. Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si'*, which calls for ecological conversion and responsibility for the planet, has been a significant source of inspiration for faith-based environmental initiatives.

The Diocese of Kalibo, located in the Aklan province of the Philippines, responded to this call with a *Laudato Si'*-Inspired Environmental Awareness and Tree Planting Event held on March 11, 2025, in partnership with several organizations including the Philippine Nuclear Research Institute Onelab team, Aklan State University-Makato Campus, Bicol University, Catanduanes State University, DENR-PENRO Aklan, and Sto. Niño Seminary (See Figure 1).



Figure 1. Photo documentation of the tree planting event

The event, held primarily at the Diocesan property in Pudiot, Tangalan, Aklan, also included tree planting activities in Napti (Batan, Aklan) and Mambuquiao (Batan, Aklan), private locations dedicated to promoting the values of *Laudato Si'*. The initiative aims to address ecological degradation in the region through environmental education and direct action. The event was driven by the need to restore the balance of nature, combat climate change and provide a platform for communities to become active environmental stewards.

This paper explores the outcomes and significance of the event, with a focus on the role of collaboration between faith organizations, educational institutions, and governmental bodies in promoting ecological stewardship and sustainable practices.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The intersection between faith and environmental action has received significant attention in recent years, especially with the publication of Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'*. This document calls for an ecological conversion that encompasses ethical reflection and practical action to address environmental degradation. As climate change and ecological degradation worsen, the Philippines, a country highly vulnerable to climate impacts, has become a major player in adopting a sustainable development framework based on religious teachings and scientific methodology.

In the context of the Diocese of Kalibo, Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'* has inspired various initiatives aimed at promoting environmental awareness and sustainability. These initiatives integrate religious values with scientific principles, creating a holistic approach to addressing climate change and promoting environmental restoration. The environmental efforts of the Diocese of Kalibo, such as tree planting and educational campaigns, embody the ethical framework of *Laudato Si'* while incorporating scientific strategies for sustainable development.

In the broader context of sustainable development, the concept of the Blue Economy, which promotes the sustainable use of marine resources, is gaining momentum in coastal areas such as Boracay. Scholars have explored how integrating the principles of *Laudato Si'* with the Blue Economy can provide a sustainable path forward for communities that depend on marine and coastal ecosystems.

The growing interest in the relationship between faith and science is further demonstrated by efforts to integrate religious values with scientific research methodologies. This approach is designed to offer a more comprehensive understanding of environmental problems and solutions by combining ethical teachings with evidence-based practices.

Review of Related Studies

In recent years, several studies have explored the intersection of faith-based initiatives and environmental science, with particular attention to how religious teachings can inform and enhance sustainability efforts. Delos Santos et al. (2024) discuss how integrating the principles of *Laudato Si'* with sustainable development practices can lead to more effective conservation strategies, especially in coastal areas such as Boracay. They propose a framework for Boracay's Blue Economy that combines ecological conservation with tourism development, emphasizing that faith-based values can guide decision-making in balancing economic growth and environmental sustainability.

Similarly, Delos Santos and colleagues (2024) examine the role of faith in scientific research methodology, highlighting the importance of integrating the ethical teachings of *Laudato Si'* into environmental education. Her research emphasizes that scientific inquiry, when combined with faith-based ethical reflection, can lead to more holistic and morally responsible environmental practices. This alignment is essential to addressing the ecological challenges facing the Philippines, such as deforestation, biodiversity loss, and coastal ecosystem degradation.

Another related study by Delos Santos et al. (2025) focuses on the implementation of *Laudato Si'* in Aklan, providing a strategic framework for sustainable development based on religious values. The article explains how local religious communities, together with government agencies and academic institutions, can work together to create an effective model of ecological stewardship. The study suggests that *Laudato Si'* serves as a powerful tool to mobilize communities to take action on climate change, through grassroots education and large-scale environmental projects.

In addition to these studies, other academics have also highlighted the synergy between faith and environmental science. For example, Naylor (2019) explores how religious organizations in the Philippines are increasingly engaged in climate change mitigation efforts, advocating for policy change and grassroots action. Naylor's work has shown that religious groups are uniquely positioned to influence public attitudes towards sustainability, especially when their efforts are supported by scientific data. Similarly, Mendez and Torres (2020) examine the role of educational institutions in promoting environmental awareness, stating that integrating *Laudato Si'* into the curriculum has the potential to equip future generations with the ethical and scientific knowledge needed to address climate change.

In the context of marine conservation, a study by Aquino et al. (2021) focuses on the role of faith in supporting the establishment of marine protected areas (MPAs) in the Philippines. The authors argue that religious teachings on the sanctity of nature align with the principles of MPA conservation, reinforcing the notion that protecting marine biodiversity is a moral and ecological imperative. This is in line with Delos Santos' research on integrating faith and scientific methods to promote long-term sustainability.

In short, the integration of faith and science in environmental efforts is increasingly recognized as a valuable approach to addressing the pressing ecological challenges of our time. Studies such as those conducted by Delos Santos et al. (2024, 2025) demonstrate the effectiveness of combining *Laudato Si'* with practical science-based environmental strategies. This work highlights the potential of faith-based organizations to play a significant role in promoting ecological sustainability, especially when working in partnership with scientific institutions and governments.

METHODS

An environmental awareness and tree planting event inspired by *Laudato Si'* was organized as a collaborative effort between the Diocese of Kalibo and various stakeholders, including educational institutions, government

bodies, and the local community. To assess the impact of the event on ecological awareness and action, a qualitative approach was used, involving participant observation, interviews, and document analysis.

Participant Observation: The researcher attended the event, observing activities, interactions, and outcomes in real time, providing a comprehensive understanding of the event structure and stakeholder engagement.

Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, including event organizers, local government representatives, participants, and environmental experts. These interviews captured personal reflections on the importance of the event and its role in advancing ecological awareness in the community.

Document Analysis: Program materials, including event handouts, presentation slides, and follow-up communications, were analyzed to gain insights into the information shared with participants and the educational strategies used.

RESULTS

The Laudato Si-inspired environmental awareness and tree planting event achieved several important results that demonstrate the effectiveness of collaborative ecological initiatives. These results are based on observations, participant feedback, and interview data.

Participant Engagement: The event attracted more than 55 participants from diverse backgrounds, including students from local universities, researchers, community members, and religious leaders. This diversity highlights the broad appeal and relevance of environmental issues across multiple sectors of society.

Increased Awareness: Interviews revealed a significant increase in participants' knowledge of sustainability, climate change, and the ecological importance of planting trees. Participants expressed a better understanding of how planting trees can mitigate climate change and restore ecosystems. In Figure 2, the participants received an orientation and reflection session prior to the commencement of the tree planting.



Figure 2: Participants engaging in orientation and reflection prior to the start of the tree planting activity

Commitment to Action: The impact of the event was evident in participants' willingness to take direct action. After the educational session, participants actively participated in tree planting in locations such as Pudiot (Tangalan), Napti (Batan), and Mambuquiao (Batan). This hands-on engagement reinforced the lessons learned

and provided participants with a tangible way to contribute to environmental renewal.

Collaboration and Synergy: Interviews highlighted the importance of collaboration across sectors to achieve the event's objectives. The combination of religious teachings, scientific knowledge, and community engagement created a holistic approach to environmental stewardship. Institutions such as the Philippine Nuclear Research Institute, Aklan State University, and DENR-PENRO Aklan ensured the event was both educational and action-oriented.

DISCUSSION

The tree planting and environmental awareness event inspired by Laudato Si' exemplified how religious and secular organizations can work together to address environmental issues. Building on Pope Francis' call for ecological conversion, the event inspired participants to reflect on their personal responsibility for the environment and take action to mitigate climate change.

The role of faith in ecological stewardship: The leadership of the Kalibo Diocese has demonstrated the powerful role that religious institutions can play in promoting ecological awareness. Laudato Si' emphasizes care for creation as a moral and spiritual obligation. Framing the event in the context of faith encourages participants to see environmental action as part of their spiritual calling, deepening their commitment to sustainability.

Educational impact: Collaboration between academic institutions and government agencies ensured that participants gained a comprehensive understanding of environmental issues. The event integrated scientific and ethical perspectives, motivating participants to engage in sustainable practices. This is in line with the growing recognition that environmental education must be interdisciplinary, blending technical knowledge with ethical reflection.

Community Empowerment: A tangible outcome is the empowerment of the local community. Participants leave with a sense of responsibility and a deeper connection to the local ecosystem. Through tree planting and active participation, they contribute to environmental restoration and encourage others to take similar actions.

Long-term impact and sustainability: The Kalibo Diocese's commitment to ecological stewardship extends beyond a single event. Future initiatives include ongoing tree planting, educational outreach, and partnerships to ensure the long-term sustainability of the project.

CONCLUSION

An environmental awareness and tree planting event inspired by Laudato Si' in Tangalan, Aklan demonstrated the power of collaboration in addressing pressing ecological challenges. By combining religious teachings, scientific knowledge, and community engagement, the event successfully raised awareness and inspired action towards environmental stewardship. As Pope Francis emphasized in Laudato Si', caring for the Earth is essential to living a virtuous life. The event serves as a model for other communities seeking to promote ecological transformation and promote sustainable environmental practices for future generations.

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