



STEWARDS OF OUR EARTH *All of God's Creation*

Social Justice Committee, Holy Cross Parish, Mt. Airy, March 10, 2024

EcoPhilly Annual Conference Pulses with Energy, Enthusiasm, and Community

Three members of Holy Cross Parish participated in this conference. **Here is a recap.**

Eighty people walked through the doors at the St. Thomas of Villanova Church meeting room to attend EcoPhilly's third annual conference on February 24th. There were 29 parishes and religious organizations, 5 educational institutions (including 3 high schools), and 2 environmental organizations represented.

Nicholas Collura, a co-founder of [EcoPhilly](#) alongside John Humphreys, set the tone for the day with reference to the parable of the vine and the branches. We are all intertwined in the care of God's creation, and in collaborating with one another, our branches grow stronger and spread further.

Participants heard about **Martha's Choice Marketplace & Community Farm** which since 2020 has distributed over 6 million lbs. of food to nearly 7,500 families, 29,000 individuals, and 12,300 children. Members of Villanova's Theology and Religious Studies Department shared information on the [CLEAR project](#) – Children, Liturgy, Ecology, and Renewal. The grant offers a \$15,000 stipend to each of two representatives from twelve congregations, as well as \$5,000 seed money for specific initiatives. **Old St. Joseph's composting initiative**, started in the rectory kitchen, has pulled 230 lbs. of CO2 from the atmosphere and avoided 515 lbs. of CO2 landfill emissions annually.

Ideas like seeds grow and blossom and bear fruit, and the table conversations that followed were filled with talk of challenges, possibilities, and hopeful actions. A group of students from St. Joe's Prep felt motivated to get involved after the spread of air pollution sparked by the Canadian forest fires last year. Ideas were shared about parish energy audits, renewable sources of energy, recycling, and pollinator gardens. **It was noted that a cultural shift is needed, one that results in a new mindset about living simpler.** The challenge requires collaboration with institutions, young people, and government.

The Laudato Si' group at Our Mother of Consolation has been advocating to pass **PA House Bill 652** which would require any new or expanding facility to provide an environmental impact report. State Representative Chris Rabb, a co-sponsor of the bill, and the conference keynote speaker, provided excellent advocacy advice on this and other efforts, including engaging people where they are. Systems of oppression bind and often divide us. Acknowledging the struggle binds us together.

The program finished with **100 Reasons for Hope** – stories collected by Old St. Joe's. One story highlighted sixteen young people (ages 5-22) who in the summer of 2023 sued Montana state officials for promoting fossil fuel development that denied their right to a "clean and healthful environment" as guaranteed in the state's constitution. The children won their case – the first youth climate case to go to trial in US history!

Materials and resources were richly displayed around the room, helping this work feel new, fresh, and relevant. "I don't remember the last church function I left feeling so inspired." Another remarked, **"What gives me hope is the diversity of people in the room and the growth of organizations such as EcoPhilly and others dedicated to fighting to protect our environment."**

And so we ended stronger than we started with new connections forged, a blossoming vineyard of ideas, and inspired with hope. **We hope more of you will join us at next year's conference.**