

Branches on the Vine

NEWS FROM THE ARCHDIOCESE OF HARTFORD

JUNE 13 - 19, 2026

Laudato Si' Teachings Take Root at *East Catholic Shoreline Academy*

- Story by *Shelley Wolf*

In late May, parents and students wandered the halls and gymnasium, perusing colorful student art and exhibits at East Catholic Shoreline Academy in Branford.

In a timely spring activity, they learned how to sprout seedlings for a vegetable garden. And anyone who enjoyed a snack during the evening event was instructed by a group of youngsters in how to recycle or compost their packaging and leftovers.

It was all part of the school's "STREAM Night and Art Show," which showcased, among other initiatives, an ongoing *Laudato Si'* program.

Since 2022, East Catholic Shoreline Academy, or ESCA, has been incorporating Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'* teachings into its curriculum in all grades. Students are learning that taking care of God's creation is a moral and spiritual imperative.

"Every year we add something new," says Cheryl Panzo, principal of East Shoreline Catholic Academy, which serves students in pre-kindergarten through eighth grade. "It's really important for us. We definitely want to keep it going. Saving the Earth is kind of a big deal."

Laudato Si' is often celebrated on April 22, Earth Day, or on May 24, the anniversary of the day that Pope Francis' landmark encyclical, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*, was released in 2015. The document urges

everyone to find integrated solutions to address poverty, restore dignity to the excluded, and protect nature, problems that are frequently intertwined.

In 2022, ESCA began its *Laudato Si'* program by planting a schoolwide community garden. "We try to get the whole school involved. The focus is on gardening and sustainability," Panzo explains.

Students planted tomatoes, eggplant, peppers, lettuce, parsley and chives. "Our big goal, should we get there, is to have enough to give to the Branford Community Dining Room," Panzo says, "and to do a farm-to-table fundraiser."

This year, for the first time, a portion of the garden has been taken over by first graders, who planted a "Three-Sisters Garden" of corn, beans and squash.

"The beans use the corn stalks for support, and the squash acts as a fertilizer and keeps the moisture in to help the corn and beans grow," Panzo explains. "This is something Native Americans have been doing in Connecticut long before us."

"There's so much they can learn from this," says Mary Dobson, the first grade teacher, such as how to track the sea-

sons and the weather. "We're also being stewards of God's creation by planting in the soil and seeing how plants grow. And we talk about how when you share your gifts and work together, it's amazing how much you can do."

In 2024, with a grant from the Connecticut Catholic Foundation, the school added a Green Team of fourth and fifth graders to take on special *Laudato Si'* projects.

The Green Team runs an ambitious composting project, using a video and signage to teach other students how to correctly sort lunch items. "Students are learning what can be composted or not, what's recyclable or not, and what's trash," Panzo explains.

In the cafeteria, Green Team members collect unopened food packages to donate to Food Share. Then they guide their fellow students in setting aside food scraps for a composting company, depositing used containers for recycling, and tossing the rest as trash.

Best of all, Blue Earth Compost, a composting company, picks up the scraps and returns them as soil and fertilizer for the community garden.

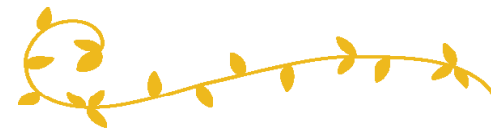


The Green Team, supervised by Nicole Truhart, instructs students in how to sort their disposable items into the proper recycling, landfill and compost containers.

PHOTO BY SHELLEY WOLF



Upcoming Events



JUNE 14 @ 9:30AM - 11AM
DRIVE THRU FOOD COLLECTION
St. Peter Claver Church, West Hartford

Donations will go to the West Hartford Food Pantry, The Catholic Worker, and Hands On Hartford. Suggested items: produce, canned meat, peanut butter, dried beans, rice, pasta/sauce, canned tuna, canned fruit/vegetables.



JUNE 16, 23 @ 9AM - 3PM
**ARTISTS WITH THE SPIRIT,
DAYS ON THE LAKE**
Sacred Heart on the Lake Retreat
Center, Higganum

We offer a quiet, spiritual, and naturally inspiring atmosphere to paint, write, sketch, or craft. Because the retreat center is situated right on the water, it provides the perfect backdrop for the day. Please bring your lunch and art supplies. Coffee, tea and other hot and cold drinks will be provided. Sr. Lany Jo will be available for any help or guidance wanted. A Free Will Offering is asked for this day. Registration is absolutely necessary at sacredheartonthelake.org or call at 203-606-9102.



JUNE 19 @ 6:30PM
CANDLELIGHT MASS EVENT
Our Lady of Knock Parish,
St. Patrick Church, Farmington

Come join the fun and enjoy a beautiful peaceful Candlelight Mass celebrated by Fr. Roberto McCarthy and then afterwards come socialize with other young adults (21+) from surrounding parishes for a fun evening of a cookout and cornhole!



JUNE 26 @ 7PM \$15
**WORLD CUP WATCH PARTY
YOUNG CATHOLIC PROFESSIONALS**
Thomas Hooker Brewery, Bloomfield

Join other young professionals for a fun night of soccer, great food, and community as Uruguay takes on Spain starting at 7pm. Your ticket includes pizza, wings, and pretzels, and the evening will feature a halftime raffle and match prediction game with prizes. \$5 members \$15 non-members.
Scan QR code to RSVP.



JULY 9 - 11 @ 5PM - 9PM
SUMMER FOOD FESTIVAL
Our Lady Queen of the Apostles
Parish, St. Mary Church, Derby

Our Summer Food Festival brings our parish and our community together for a joyful celebration held right in our church parking lot. Featuring delicious food tents, special evenings with live music, family-friendly games for children, and the excitement of announcing our annual raffle winners, the festival is a highlight of the summer season! Visit us on Facebook @StMarysChurchDerbyCt or on our website www.OLQADerby.org.

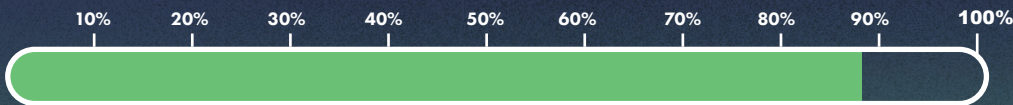


JULY 9 - 11
**ST. ANTHONY CHURCH
CARNIVAL**
St. Anthony Church, Prospect

The St. Anthony Church Carnival brings three exciting nights of food, games, and community spirit from July 9–11. Admission and parking are completely free, with food service featuring daily classics alongside unique nightly Polish, Italian, and Mexican cuisines.
Thursday, July 9th: 6PM - 10PM
Friday, July 10th: 6PM - 10PM
Saturday, July 11th: 3PM - 10PM

2026 ARCHBISHOP'S ANNUAL APPEAL

Scan the QR code to learn how you can make a lasting impact!



Total Goal: \$10M 88.37% as of 6/2/26

\$8,837,270.08 in pledges from 24,383 generous donors

*This figure does not include bequests given to
the Archbishop's Annual Appeal



**WE ARE
ONE**

www.archdioceseofhartford.org/appeal