

Fairfield University

& Laudato si'

2023-2024



Fairfield University & *Laudato si'*

Fairfield University, as a modern, Jesuit Catholic University, has embraced the goals and direction set forth by Pope Francis in the 2015 encyclical letter, *Laudato si': Care for Our Common Home*, which calls for a broad reconsideration of our obligation as persons and as an institution to care for all of God's creation, mindful of the harm that modernization, consumerism, and economic inequity have done to the Earth's environment, and to the persons and creatures who have a right to share our common home.

The title – *Laudato si'* – comes from Saint Francis of Assisi's 13th-century "Canticle of the Creatures," in which a stanza begins: "*Laudato si', mi Signore*," or, "Praise be to you, my Lord."

"In the words of this beautiful canticle, St. Francis reminds us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us," Pope Francis wrote in his

encyclical. "This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her." *Laudato si'* notes that "the post-industrial period may well be remembered as one of the most irresponsible in history" and makes it clear that the misuse of Earth is an extension of a disregard for the sanctity of life in general, and that all efforts to address the issue must also be efforts to address the needs of the global poor, stating that "we have to realize that a true ecological approach *always* becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear *both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.*"

Having said that, the Pope offers that there "is reason to hope that humanity at the dawn of the 21st century will be remembered for having generously shouldered its grave responsibilities." Concern for the natural world, the encyclical makes clear, is an integral part of the Church's teaching on social justice.

The *Laudato si'* Action Platform

In May 2021, the Vatican's Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development launched a seven-year *Laudato Si'* Action Platform – an initiative to centralize action plans for environmental sustainability in different sectors of the Church, from religious orders to Catholic schools, universities, and hospitals.

"We need a new ecological approach that can transform our way of dwelling in the world, our styles of life, our relationship with the resources of the Earth and, in general, our way of looking at humanity and of living life," Pope Francis said.

Action plans are guided by the *Laudato Si'* Action Platform's seven goals: response to the cry of the earth, response to the cry of the poor, ecological economics, adoption of simple lifestyles, ecological education, ecological spirituality, and community involvement.

"On a journey that will last for seven years, we will let ourselves be guided by the seven aims of *Laudato Si'*, which will show us the direction while we pursue the vision of integral ecology," Pope Francis said. "There is hope. We can all collaborate, each one with his own culture and experience, each one with her own initiatives and capacities, so that our mother Earth may be restored to her original beauty and creation may once again shine according to God's plan."

Fairfield's ongoing commitment to sustainability practices and programs are in harmony with the seven goals outlined by the *Laudato Si'* Action Platform. Below are some of the many initiatives, efforts, academic classes, and alumni projects that paint a picture of where Fairfield University is at present, as we engage in this commitment.

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Fairfield has long been committed to stewardship of our environment," said University President Mark R. Nemec, PhD. "Our location at the gateway to the majesty of New England reminds us of the urgency to care for our common home as we meet the challenges of the 21st century and beyond."

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“In our journey to shape the future of our institution, we find our compass pointing unerringly toward sustainability in every campus building project. Embracing sustainable practices isn't merely a choice; it's a commitment to the longevity of our environment, our community, and our ideals. Through each structure we raise, we are constructing the narrative of our institution's legacy, and it's a narrative deeply intertwined with responsible stewardship.”

— DAVID FRASSINELLI, M'92

Vice President of Facilities, Campus and Auxiliary Services, and chairman,
Campus Sustainability Committee

Response to the Cry of the Earth

The Response to the Cry of the Earth is a call to protect our common home for the well-being of all, as we equitably address the climate crisis, biodiversity loss, and ecological sustainability. Recommended actions include the adoption of renewable energies and energy sufficiency measures, achieving carbon neutrality, protecting biodiversity, promoting sustainable agriculture, and guaranteeing access to clean water for all.



IT ALL STARTS WITH THE CAMPUS SUSTAINABILITY PLAN

The Campus Sustainability Plan defines nine areas – campus operations, energy, building design and construction, waste management, land and water management, student engagement, academics, finance, and administration – where Fairfield strives for a symbiotic relationship with the environment in which campus resides. Some tangible sustainable actions taken include heat recovery systems, LED lighting, retro-commissioning, electric charging stations, building to LEED silver standard, waste management, water conservation, fertilizer/pesticide reductions, two-stroke motor reductions, and mitigation of invasive species. Most recently, the newest residence hall (opening in fall 2023), named after Sister Thea Bowman, garnered LEED Silver Award recognition for its environmentally sustainable construction. For more about our Campus Sustainability efforts, visit fairfield.edu/about/campus-sustainability.



FAIRFIELD CAMPUS SUSTAINABILITY GRANTS ENCOURAGE STUDENTS

Campus Sustainability Grants are awarded to students in support of on-campus sustainability efforts. Typically, three grants are awarded each year. Recent winners have included undergraduate students enrolled in the College of Arts and Sciences, the Charles F. Dolan School of Business, and School of Engineering and Computing, for projects focused on water collection systems, recycling innovations, energy efficiency, transportation, food, and other important issues.



ANALYSIS OF MICROPLASTICS IN BIOLOGICAL SAMPLES

Partnering with Mystic Aquarium in Mystic, Conn. and the Central Park Zoo in New York City, students developed analysis protocols (i.e., technical lab activities) for the detection of microplastics in biological samples, initially focusing on penguin feces. The potential negative effects of having very small plastic particles in every ecosystem on Earth directly impacts the health and lives of all animals and humans.

HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE AT LOCAL ZOO GIVES STUDENTS OPPORTUNITY TO IMPROVE ANIMAL'S LIVES

As part of Fairfield University's RIZE (Research, Internships, and Zoo Education) service-learning program in partnership with Connecticut's Beardsley Zoo, vertebrate zoology students tracked the underground activities of the zoo's black-tailed prairie dog population. They found that the colonies had split, which explained recent episodes of aggression exhibited by the animals, and helped zoo officials modify their animal husbandry to enhance the prairie dogs' welfare and behavior.

FACULTY MEMBER STUDIES IMPACT OF OCEAN MIXING ON GLOBAL CLIMATE

Associate Professor of Physics Robert Nazarian, PhD, and Fairfield students partnered with Scripps Oceanographic Institute in San Diego, Calif., one of the largest oceanographic institutions in the country, to conduct research on ocean mixing – the active turbulence of ocean waters due to wind, heat, evaporation, and salinity – which is critical to the global climate system.

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“Our Humanitarian Action Program promotes initiatives at the intersection between climate change and displacement, our Community Engaged Research is exploring how local community gardens can best promote sustainable, urban agriculture, and our Community Engaged Learning faculty are working with local school children to implement hands-on activities related to sustainable energy.

These efforts all help to develop the next generation of global citizens who will be good stewards of the Earth through their advocacy and active engagement in creating a more sustainable future.”

— JULIE MUGHAL

Associate Director, Humanitarian Action, and co-director, Peace Corps Prep Program

Response to the Cry of the Poor

The Response to the Cry of the Poor is a call to promote eco-justice, and to be aware that we are called to defend human life from conception to death, and all forms of life on Earth. Recommended actions include projects to promote solidarity (with special attention given to vulnerable groups such as indigenous communities, refugees, migrants, and children at risk), analysis and improvement of social systems, and social service programs.



STUDENT ENGINEERS BUILDING FOR A BETTER FUTURE

The School of Engineering and Computing’s chapter of Engineers Without Borders (EWB) offers students in any area of study the chance to help build a better world. EWB chapters work on both international and domestic projects in the areas of water supply, sanitation, civil works, structures, energy, agriculture, and information systems.

WAIDE CENTER FOR APPLIED ETHICS HOSTS CLIMATE TEACH-IN

A 2023 multidisciplinary faculty panel discussion was hosted in connection with the annual Worldwide Teach-In on Climate and Justice, organized by Bard College. Teach-in events are held globally to generate thoughtful input from educators, students, faith leaders, and community members who are deeply concerned about climate change, climate justice, and the future.



TANZANIAN STUDENTS LEAN INTO STEM PROGRAMS AT FAIRFIELD

The Center for Social Impact received a \$90,000 grant from the Switzerland-based Benina Foundation to strengthen its partnership with Loyola High School in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The grant enabled four teachers and 10 students, many of whom are immigrant and refugee youth, from the Jesuit high school to visit Fairfield in the summer of 2023 and take STEM classes in chemistry and cybersecurity.



7TH BIENNIAL JUHAN CONFERENCE BRINGS JESUIT SCHOOLS TOGETHER

The Jesuit Universities Humanitarian Action Network (JUHAN) was launched in 2006 by Fairfield, Fordham, and Georgetown Universities as a way to raise awareness on Jesuit campuses about the meaning of humanitarian response and its implications for the Jesuit ideology of “men and women for others.” At the JUHAN 7th Biennial Conference hosted by Fairfield in 2021, faculty members Janie Leatherman, PhD, professor of politics and international studies, and director of the Humanitarian Action program; Robert Nazarian, PhD, associate professor physics; and Nicole Marino, digital scholarship librarian, presented on topics related to humanitarian action and climate change.



FAIRFIELD STUDENTS RALLY TO SUPPORT AFGHAN REFUGEES

In 2021, Fairfield students from the Humanitarian Action Club partnered with regional refugee resettlement agencies to welcome, support, and raise awareness of the plight of Afghan refugees in Connecticut. Groups of student volunteers collaborated with the Interfaith Refugee Resettlement Committee – a coalition of Muslim communities, churches, and synagogues – to set up two Bridgeport apartments for 11 members of a large extended family of Afghan refugees, empowering them to thrive in this new and very different environment.

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“It is critically important that Fairfield University both help produce new young leaders and also lead by example in aggressively developing sustainability programs across all sectors of the University. Participation in the Laudato Si initiative is consistent with these goals for both the Environmental Studies program and for the University as a whole.”

— L. KRAIG STEFFEN, PhD

Director, Environmental Studies Program, and professor of chemistry and biochemistry



Ecological Economics

Ecological Economics acknowledges that the economy is a sub-system of human society, which itself is embedded within the biosphere – our common home. Recommended actions include sustainable production and consumption, ethical investments, divestment from fossil fuels and any activity harmful to the planet and its people, supporting circular economies, prioritizing care labor, and protecting the dignity of workers.



STAG SOLAR STRIVES TO BRING SUSTAINABLE VEHICLES TO CAMPUS

Management of Technology students worked on a 2022 capstone project that explored fleet vehicle sustainability, management, and energy independence at Fairfield. The students researched the possibility of bringing electric vehicles to campus and developed a 10-year financial road map that included state incentives, timing projects, securing funding, and the purchase of electric vehicles. These ecological efforts were linked to positive economic health for the University.



DR. DAVID DOWNIE'S GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS BOOK RANKED #1 ON AMAZON

David Downie, PhD, associate professor of politics and environmental studies in the College of Arts and Sciences, is co-author of *Global Environmental Politics* with Pamela S. Chasek. The eighth edition of their book, published by Routledge in December of 2020, covers “critical” new developments in global environmental politics and policymaking. The book incorporates insights from scholarly literature, materials produced during global environmental negotiations, input from international organizations working on environmental issues, and the authors’ experiences attending or closely following particular global environmental policy negotiations since 1990.

CHILEAN ENVIRONMENTAL LAWYER PRESENTS AT LECTURE “A SOURCE OF FINANCIAL RISK AND NEW OPPORTUNITIES”

In 2023, international environmental lawyer Arturo Brandt discussed new and historic approaches to adapting and mitigating the effects of climate change, with a special focus on the emerging field of climate finance. Presented by the international studies program, with the support of the Humanities Institute and more than six campus partners, Brandt’s lecture focused on current interdisciplinary climate change challenges faced by different communities around the world and encouraged students to think critically about both the risks and opportunities that their generation faces.



FACULTY STUDY CLIMATE CHANGE AND DIRECT CORRELATION TO LOCAL ECONOMICS

William Fernando Vásquez Mazariegos, PhD, specializes in the sustainable development of Latin America. His research takes him across the globe, most recently for a Sea Level Rise (SLR) project to meet the people of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; San Andres Island, Colombia; and the Galapagos Islands, off the coast of Ecuador. Once his climate change data is gathered from coastal areas threatened by flooding, beach erosion, and changes in ecosystems, Dr. Vásquez ties those factors into economic feasibility proposals and presents them to local elected officials, paving the way to a plan for the future of these coastal communities.



STUDENTS DEVELOP SOFTWARE TO TRACK ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ON INVESTMENTS

A student duo developed GreenIRR, a proprietary algorithm using industry-specific metrics derived from eight leading global climate frameworks, offering private equity managers access to real-time environmental data on their portfolio companies, to ensure climate impact is tracked and goals are met. The students created and presented this software during a 2022 Shark Tank-style event held at Fairfield, known as StartUp Showcase.



FAIRFIELD UNIVERSITY STUDENTS PARTNER WITH GREEN VILLAGE INITIATIVE

Green Village Initiative (GVI) is a non-profit in Bridgeport, Conn., whose mission is to grow food, knowledge, leadership, and community, through urban gardening and farming, to create a more just food system in Bridgeport. Fairfield University's Center for Social Impact partners with GVI to realize and promote the benefits Bridgeport experiences from its investment in urban agriculture.



HARNESSING BLOCKCHAIN TECHNOLOGY FOR CHANGE

As part of the finance program's Foundations of Global Engagement, a 2023 graduate presented his findings on how blockchain technology is the future of humanitarian aid, and how it modernizes the approach to refugee assistance and underscores a need to allocate more funding toward investment in modern technology to ensure lasting, effective change. The student explained that some organizations – such as the World Food Programme (WFP), a branch of the United Nations – are already employing blockchain, to better serve communities in need.





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“Sustainability is part of what makes Fairfield the modern, Jesuit University that it has grown to be. A reverence for the environment and care for the natural world has always been a part of who we are and who we will continue to be into the future.”

— DAVID FRASSINELLI, M’92

Vice President of Facilities, Campus and Auxiliary Services, and chairman,
Campus Sustainability Committee

Adoption of Sustainable Lifestyles

The Adoption of Sustainable Lifestyles is grounded in the idea of sufficiency, and promoting sobriety in the use of resources and energy. Recommended actions include reducing waste and recycling, adopting sustainable dietary habits (opting for a more plant-based diet and reducing meat consumption), greater use of public transport, active mobility (walking, cycling), and avoiding single use items (e.g., plastic water bottles, etc.).



FAIRFIELD ALUMNI DIVE INTO ENVIRONMENTAL PURSUITS

Students take the Jesuit value of environmental sustainability they learn at Fairfield and carry it through life – spiritually, personally, and professionally. Alumni start-ups include: a fair-trade coffee company with compostable packaging, a shoe company that uses upcycled grape and apple skins instead of leather, a company promoting the creation and use of sustainable apiaries for honeybee and honey production, organically run wineries, and an outdoor adventure company that partners with national non-profits to increase Black and Latinx representation in conservation, outdoor recreation, and environmental education spaces.

LEAF AND FUSA MAKE THEIR SUSTAINABLE VOICES HEARD

Students in campus groups such as Leaders for Environmental Action at Fairfield (LEAF) and Fairfield University Student Association (FUSA), are empowered to ask for sustainable lifestyle changes they’d like to see made on campus. Students have successfully advocated for the reduction of single-use plastics by increasing the number of bottle-filling stations on campus, eliminating trays in dining venues, and promoting reusable containers for Dunkin’ and Starbucks Café.



SUSTAINABLE EFFORTS MADE IN DINING HALLS

Through Green Thread, an environmental sustainability platform, Fairfield brings innovative and efficient solutions to reducing environmental impact within campus operations. Sustainable initiatives include purchasing produce locally, increased trash recycling, reusables, fryer oil recycling, hydration stations, green cleaning products, herb and produce hydroponic units, composting, and energy and water conservation efforts.



STUDENTS GIVE BACK THROUGH WEEKLY BEACH CLEAN-UP

As stewards of the environment, the Leaders for Environmental Action at Fairfield (LEAF) Club and the Public Health Club hold weekly beach clean-ups throughout the year. Between 30 and 50 students typically volunteer their time to clean up and beautify the Long Island Sound beaches within the Greater Fairfield community, home to many Fairfield University senior students.

CAMPUS SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE RECOGNIZED FOR AWARD-WINNING EFFORTS

Fairfield’s Campus Sustainability Committee (CSC), comprised of administrators, faculty, staff, and students, is charged with helping set the University’s goals and evaluating its progress with regards to sustainability. Born out of the Climate Commitment, the CSC meets to discuss University projects and policies related to sustainability.



Ecological Education

Ecological Education is about rethinking and redesigning curricular and institutional reform in the spirit of integral ecology in order to foster ecological awareness and transformative action. Recommended actions include ensuring equitable access to education for all and promoting human rights, fostering *Laudato si'* themes within the community, encouraging ecological leadership (students, teachers), and ecological restoration activities.



DANCE PERFORMANCE CONNECTS AUDIENCE WITH THE NATURAL WORLD

Internationally acclaimed choreographer-dancers Emily Coates and Emmanuèle Phuon collaborated with members of the University community to bring *We*, a one-of-a-kind dance event, to Fairfield's Regina A. Quick Center for the Arts in 2023. The outdoor performance shined a comparative spotlight on humankind's relationship with the natural world, integrating choreography with the sciences — notably physics and astronomy.



LEAVES ON THE LAWN STALLED TO HIGHLIGHT CONSERVATION EFFORTS

Artist Alan Sonfist created four larger-than-life aluminum sculptures of leaves to represent several of New England's most beloved native trees: the American Beech, the American Chestnut, the Burr Oak, and the Sugar Maple. These 2011 sculptures, which are now on the lawn of Bellarmine Hall, are tangible reminders of the ecological dangers of climate change and the importance of being good stewards of this planet.

CAMPUS MINISTRY TRIPS TAKE STUDENTS TO KENTUCKY AND BEYOND

The Office of Campus Ministry strives to be a home for students of all faith traditions who are interested in exploring and enriching their spiritual lives and commitment to justice. The Spring Break Domestic Immersion Trip program offers immersion opportunities around the United States for students, faculty, and staff to explore what it means to live a faith that does justice, and to deepen their relationships with God through service.



CENTER FOR CATHOLIC STUDIES LECTURE DISCUSSES HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

The 2023 Bellarmine Lecture by Rev. Matthew Carnes, S.J., "Forging Hope, Reforging Democracy: A Contribution of Jesuit Universities to the Future," discussed the intellectual and institutional possibilities for forging a new intergenerational and intercultural dialogue, and offered ways that Jesuit schools can foster a sense of hope and contribute to more effective and inclusive democratic governance. Carnes' research examined the dynamics of labor, social welfare policy, economic inclusion, and democratic participation for a world where young people are the ones who will have to bear the greatest burden.

ECOLOGICAL STUDIES OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

Fairfield students have access to volunteer opportunities in the ecological sciences at community programs run by nearby Maritime Aquarium – such as FrogWatch U.S.A. and the Freshwater Mussels of Connecticut Project – inspiring local conservation efforts through education.



“Fairfield has long been committed to this work of stewardship in relation to our environment — this work has acquired even greater focus and urgency in recent years, and as we sharpen our discernment regarding the path of environmental justice.”

— MARK R. NEMEC, PhD

President of Fairfield University, and a professor of politics

Ecological Spirituality

Ecological Spirituality springs from a profound ecological conversion and helps us to “discover God in all things” both in the beauty of creation and in the sighs of the sick and the groans of the afflicted, aware that the life of the spirit is not dissociated from worldly realities. Recommended actions include promoting creation-based liturgical celebrations, developing ecological catechesis, retreats, and formation programs, etc.



ALLOWING US TO AGE WITH GRACE

A semester-long course entitled “Aging With Grace,” offered by the Murphy Center for Ignatian Spirituality, welcomes retirees of all faiths who seek to deepen their relationship with God and enrich their daily lives. Rooted firmly in Ignatian tradition, the online classes use prayer, assigned readings, and personal reflection to foster an exploration of the spiritual dynamics of growing older.

ENCOUNTERING THE LIVING GOD

A 10-week program of prayer and reflection, under the personal guidance of a trained spiritual director from Fairfield’s Murphy Center for Ignatian Spirituality. This program is open to Fairfield students, faculty, staff, and members of the larger community. Its method and content are inspired by the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola: a compilation of meditations, prayers, and contemplative practices that are a means to deepen one’s relationship with God.

PALLIATIVE CARE PROGRAM TAKES EMPATHY AND FAITH TO NEW HEIGHTS

The Kanarek Center for Palliative Care (KCPC) has educated hundreds of nursing students and practicing nurses on the importance of providing compassionate, holistic, and high-quality care for patients with life-threatening conditions. The mission of the Kanarek Center is to advance nursing leadership and foster interprofessional collaborations that enhance the lives of patients and families in palliative and end-of-life care, through education, administration, practice, research, and policy.



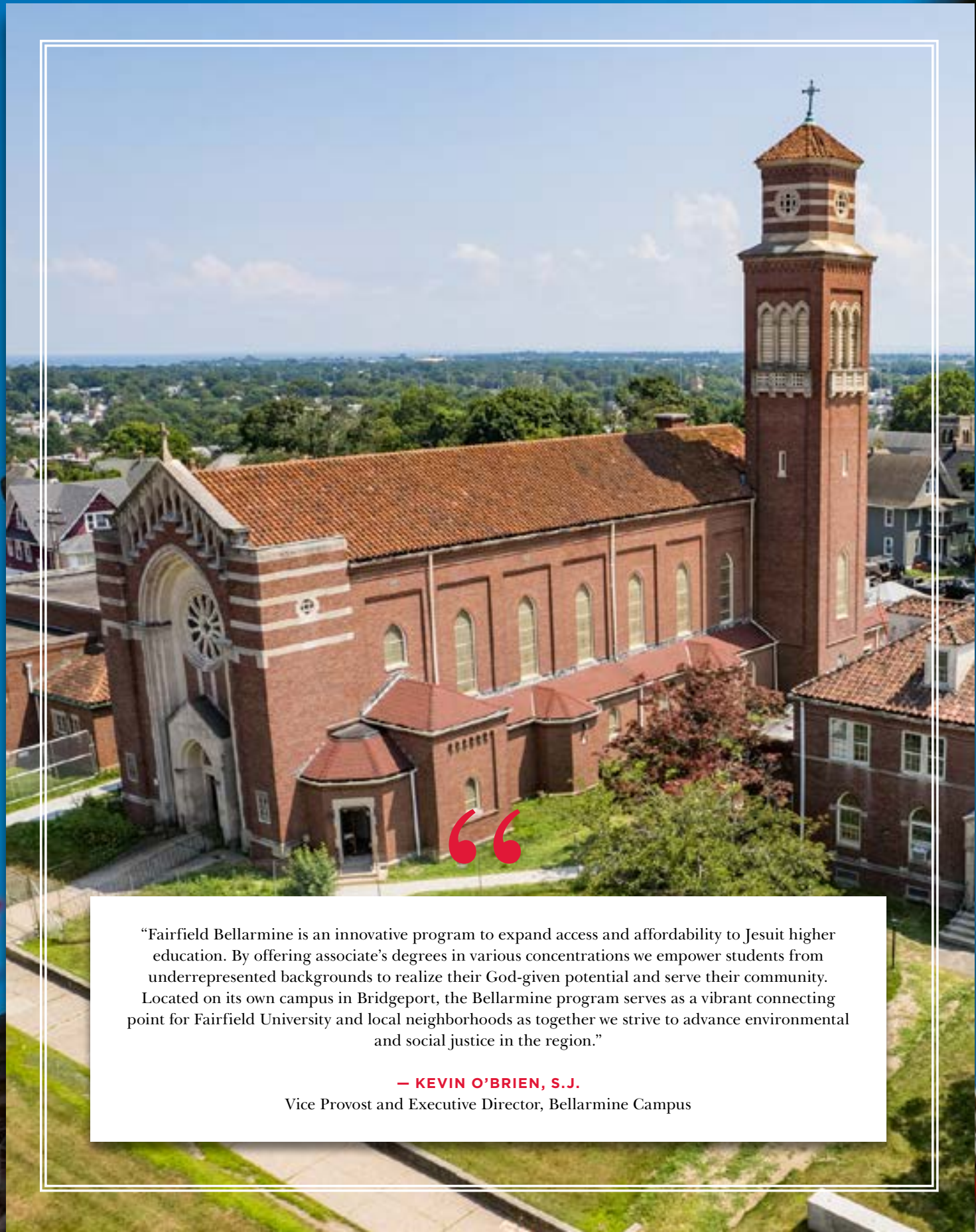
FIRST JESUIT CAMPUS TO CREATE A WALKING EXAMEN

A one-of-a-kind spiritual element, the Walking Examen is a mile-long prayer and meditation trail on Fairfield’s campus. It features five “steps,” each marked by a large boulder and plaque, representing the five movements of the Examen prayer: Thanksgiving, Illumination, Examination, Contrition, and Hope. Open year-round to Fairfield community members of all faiths, the Walking Examen provides respite and faithful contemplation to anyone who wishes to participate.



STATUE OF KEVIN OF GLENDALOUGH GUIDES STUDENTS

A statue of St. Kevin, created in 2019 by Brian Hanlon (American, b. 1961) out of bronze, resides between the Egan Chapel of St. Ignatius Loyola and the DiMenna-Nyselius Library on Fairfield’s North Benson campus. St. Kevin, known for the story of a blackbird making a nest in his open praying hands during Lent, is a symbol to students and passersby of perseverance, sacrifice, and faith in something much larger than ourselves.



“Fairfield Bellarmine is an innovative program to expand access and affordability to Jesuit higher education. By offering associate’s degrees in various concentrations we empower students from underrepresented backgrounds to realize their God-given potential and serve their community. Located on its own campus in Bridgeport, the Bellarmine program serves as a vibrant connecting point for Fairfield University and local neighborhoods as together we strive to advance environmental and social justice in the region.”

— **KEVIN O’BRIEN, S.J.**
Vice Provost and Executive Director, Bellarmine Campus

Community Resilience and Empowerment

Community resilience and empowerment envisage a synodal journey of community engagement and participatory action at various levels. Recommended actions include promoting advocacy and developing people’s campaigns, and encouraging rootedness and a sense of belonging in local communities and neighborhood ecosystems.



FAIRFIELD BELLARMINE TRANSFORMS DISADVANTAGED NEIGHBORHOOD

A new academic initiative, Fairfield Bellarmine opened in 2023 on the site of a freshly renovated former Catholic parish, offering two-year associate’s degrees to an underserved population in the Greater Bridgeport area. In the Jesuit tradition of making education available to all, Fairfield Bellarmine offers strong professional preparation and enhanced academic support to low-income and first-generation students.

COMPANY SCHOLARS PROGRAM ENHANCES COMMITMENT TO SERVING DIVERSE POPULATION

The Company Scholars is a unique cohort-based scholarship program that offers up to 20 four-year, full-tuition grants to low-income students attending Jesuit and Cristo Rey high schools. Students selected to participate in the program become part of an elite group, or company, of diverse individuals who are engaged in academic excellence and equipped with a supportive network and a platform to make a difference in their community.

STUDENTS HELP RESIDENTS WITH TAX ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

Fairfield started the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program in 2009 as a way to provide free tax assistance to low- to moderate-income individuals and families who are unable to prepare their own tax returns. This service helps to educate the public, while providing valuable assistance to people in the local community and making a positive impact on families for generations to come.



2023 COMMENCEMENT SPEAKER LEAVES LASTING IMPRESSION

As part of the 73rd Commencement graduate student ceremony in 2023, Fairfield hosted Geoffrey Canada, president of Harlem Children’s Zone, a world-renowned education and poverty-fighting organization in New York City. Canada’s personal mission to help young people from under-resourced communities succeed through education was an ideal example of how Fairfield graduates can use their faith to help those in need.





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