

Pope Francis greets 16-year-old Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg, with Tomás Insua by her side, during his general audience in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican April 17, 2019. (CNS/Reuters/Yara Nardi)



by Tomás Insua

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This year, "*Laudato Si'*, on Care for Our Common Home" turns five years old. The systems that support life continue to collapse all around us, and the fifth birthday of *Laudato Si'* has occasioned a moment of reflection for many.

Where have we come in the last five years? Where is our faith calling us now?

Five years ago, the world was stunned by its first reading of *Laudato Si'*. Here was a document of unimaginable beauty. Here was a sense of life, a palpable hope for the healing of creation.

I first read *Laudato Si'* with friends and colleagues from all around the world, and as we read we sent messages back and forth, sharing a sense of marvel. It's hard to remember a document that created such wonder. I once counted all the exclamation points in the encyclical and found eighteen. Eighteen!

This document has a boundless enthusiasm for life that has brought many people back to the unfailing gift of joy that our faith offers us. As *Laudato Si'* says, "Rather than a problem to be solved, the world is a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise." (12)



Colorful wildflowers frame the peak of Byron Glacier near Girwood, Alaska, July 3, 2019. Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical "Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home" was widely lauded for its scope on the moral and ethical response to protecting Earth's environment for future generations. (CNS/The Compass/Sam Lucero)

But *Laudato Si'* is not only beautiful. It is also difficult. *Laudato Si'* is unflinching in its recognition that creation was entrusted to our care and that we have let selfishness and short-sightedness lead to its ruin.

Laudato Si' does not give us a false sense of comfort, but rather asks us to honestly look at the crisis we have created. This is the only way we'll find the courage to solve it.

As Pope Francis says, "Doomsday predictions can no longer be met with irony or disdain. . . . the present imbalance can only be reduced by our decisive action, here and now." (LS 161)

So, what is the "decisive action" that we've taken since *Laudato Si'* was released?

One outcome of *Laudato Si'* was the creation of Global Catholic Climate Movement, an organization that I co-founded with a global group of allies. In the five years since our founding, we've helped over 150 Catholic institutions divest from fossil fuels (becoming the single largest source of participation in the divestment movement), trained and certified nearly 1,500 *Laudato Si'* Animators to lead action in their communities, supported our 900 member organizations in hosting thousands of local events, and so much more.

But Global Catholic Climate Movement is only one member of a vibrant community. Countless diocesan commissions, parish committees, religious communities, and other groups have taken bold steps forward in the past five years.

As one example, Catholic Climate Covenant has developed a Catholic Energies program, which provides financing and expertise for Catholic institutions to get renewable energy or increase their energy efficiency. The program has begun the construction of Washington D.C.'s largest solar array, built for the Archdiocese of Washington.

Our brothers and sisters of all faith traditions are also hearing the call. Among the most helpful interfaith initiatives is Living the Change, a tool for people of faith to understand which lifestyle practices best protect creation. This platform and its associated commitment form make clear that sustainable lifestyles are an essential way to practice the core values that unite many faiths.

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Within and beyond our Catholic tradition, we're stepping forward in practical ways to protect the gift of God's creation. We are united; we do not stand alone, but are working shoulder-to-shoulder to bring *Laudato Si'* to life.

And *Laudato Si'* itself does not stand alone. *Laudato Si'* is a reminder that caring for creation has been part of our faith since Genesis. Popes and bishops from all corners of the Earth have long taught its themes.

Laudato Si' is a milestone in a journey that began long ago and that will continue for ages to come. As Francis himself says, "These questions will not be dealt with once and for all, but reframed and enriched again and again." (LS 16)

It is up to us to "reframe and enrich" creation care in our own communities. As we look ahead to the next five years, the demand to take urgent action will only grow. At this moment, fires consume Australia, where over one billion animals have died. Some time in the coming years, climate chaos makes it extremely likely that a storm will devastate communities in the Philippines, that a drought will bring hunger and migration to sub-Saharan Africa, and that malaria will creep to ever-warmer land.

We must accelerate our progress to meet the challenges of the years ahead. As Francis has told us, "Truly, much can be done!" (LS 180) Around the world, we are heeding his call.

[Tomás Insua is Executive Director of the Global Catholic Climate Movement.]