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Homes near Hackberry, Louisiana, are awash in the aftermath of Hurricane Laura Aug. 27, 20

Homes near Hackberry, Louisiana, are awash in the aftermath of Hurricane Laura Aug. 27, 2020. (CNS photo/Adrees Latif, Reuters)



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Editor's Note: *EarthBeat Weekly is your weekly newsletter about faith and climate change. Below is the Aug. 28 edition. To receive EarthBeat Weekly in your inbox, sign up here.*

Between drought and wildfire in the western United States and hurricanes like Laura becoming more frequent, it's hard to ignore the warning signs that scientists have been watching for years. But that's what happened at this week's Republican National Convention.

Next week, the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation on Sept. 1 kicks off the 34-day Season of Creation. The theme for the season is Jubilee for the Earth, a

reference to the biblical season of rest and renewal. But judging by the speeches at the Republican convention, rest and renewal for the Earth are not on the political agenda. There was passing mention of increasing fossil fuel production and reducing climate-related regulations, but silence about the climate crisis and its impacts.

That contrasted with the previous week, when Democrats highlighted the crisis — and its consequences for people's lives — on the third night of their convention. Various speakers pointed out that the climate crisis is an economic justice issue and that measures taken to mitigate it could help create jobs in the wake of the devastating coronavirus pandemic.

The stakes are high. Since President Donald Trump took office in 2016, his administration and Congress have taken steps to roll back 100 environmental regulations, according to a report in the New York Times. The rollback has been completed for 68 and is still in process for 32. That runs counter to Catholic social teaching as set out in Pope Francis' encyclical "*Laudato Si*': on Care for Our Common Home," as we explained in an editorial in April

The largest number — 27 total, of which 8 are still in process — deal with air pollution, which has a direct impact on both climate change and people's health. The administration has weakened standards for emissions from motor vehicles and coal-fired power plants, both of which are linked to global warming and respiratory problems.

If you'd like to dig deeper into those decisions, Harvard University's Environment and Energy Law Program has a regulatory rollback tracker that includes the history of the regulation, the agency responsible and its current status. Many rollbacks that have been finalized are being challenged in the courts, which is also noted in the tracker.

For regulations specifically related to climate, check out Colombia Law School's climate deregulation tracker, which focuses on steps taken by the Trump administration or Congress to reduce or eliminate measures for climate change adaptation or mitigation

Election Day this year is crucial, not just because of the decisions to be made at the polls, but because it is the last day of official U.S. participation in the Paris Agreement, the international treaty negotiated in an effort to limit global warming. One of Trump's campaign pledges in 2016 was to withdraw the United States from

the agreement, and his decision will take effect on Nov. 4, the day after the general election.

Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden has said that if he wins the election, he will reverse the withdrawal and return the United States to the international negotiating table. He might also shut down the controversial Dakota Access Pipeline.

By ignoring the climate crisis, however, the Republicans may be swimming against a rising sea level. Polls show that Americans in both parties worry about climate change. Although concern is higher among Democrats than Republicans, voters from both parties support some strategies for reducing the impact of climate change. This year's hurricanes and other severe storms, as well as the western wildfires, are still likely to be on people's minds in November. And there are links between climate change and the pandemic, although they have gotten less attention than extreme weather.

People of faith have become more vocal about climate change as an environmental justice issue that disproportionately affects people of color in the United States and people living on what Pope Francis calls the "periphery" in other countries.

In the past few years, faith leaders have criticized new limits on federal environmental reviews of infrastructure and energy projects, objected to the administration's weakening of regulations on emissions from coal-fired power plants and warned that a 2017 executive order rolling back various environmental regulations amounted to the country's abdication of its moral responsibility as a major emitter of greenhouse gases.

Meanwhile, Catholic hospitals are taking a hard look at their own greenhouse gas emissions, faith groups are divesting from fossil fuels and the U.S. bishops have expressed support for a proposed tax on carbon emissions from fossil fuels that would be paid out in dividends to U.S. citizens.

Momentum is building, although the near-term future is in doubt until the results of the presidential election are tallied in November. One thing is certain, though: the outcome of the balloting will not change the reality of a warming planet or the growing impact on those who are most vulnerable to climate change.

Here's what's new on EarthBeat this week:

- In our latest Burning Question, Brian Roewe digs into the history of the Season of Creation and offers a wide array of resources for individuals, families and faith groups to use throughout the month.
- Cardinal Michael Czerny told Cindy Wooden of Catholic News Service that the hurricanes, fires, drought and other climate-driven crises that force people to migrate in search of safety are a reminder that "the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor are one cry." This year's fierce hurricane season, the heat and wildfires in the West and the derecho windstorm that struck Iowa are all signs of the climate upheaval that scientists have been predicting, reports Jeff Berardelli for CBS News, a Covering Climate Now partner.
- Tropical Storm Laura, which left at least 12 people dead crashed ashore in Louisiana as a category 4 hurricane, as CNS reports.
- The coronavirus pandemic has forced some California dioceses to hold Masses outdoors to avoid contagion, but now many of those celebrations have been suspended because of smoke from wildfires, Bishop Oscar Cantú of the Diocese of San José told Rhina Guidos of CNS.
- Bolivia's bishops called for voters to keep environmental and rural development policies in mind when they elect a new president in October, writes Lucien Chauvin for CNS.
- And Sally Ho of Green Queen talked to China's lone teenage climate striker about what she hopes to achieve with her protests.

Here's some of what's new in other climate news this week:

- Farm workers in California, many of them migrants and undocumented, are at double risk of respiratory disease, from wildfires and Covid-19, says Vivian Ho at The Guardian, but they can't afford not to work. Also at The Guardian, Graham Readfern reports that a study in Australia found that the children of women who were pregnant while exposed to smoke from a 2014 coal mine fire were more likely to suffer from respiratory illnesses.
- One glimmer of good news amid the disastrous fire news: an ancient stand of redwoods in California apparently survived the scorching, reports Martha Mendoza for the Associated Press.
- And Mark Thiessen at AP reports that environmental groups have filed suit to stop the Trump administration from opening up the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to drilling for oil and gas.

- The death tolls and damage from climate-related disasters have climbed steadily since 1980, with more than 14,000 lives lost and economic costs of $1.77 trillion in the United States, most of that from hurricanes and storms, reports Bob Berwyn at InsideClimate News. And while most real estate websites are mum on the topic, NPR's Rebecca Hersher found that Realtor.com is including flood risk in its listings.
- With so many crises in the news this week, it's reassuring to know that a little creativity and some paint can help reduce some problems. In Norway, researchers found that painting one blade black can reduce bird deaths from collisions with wind turbines, report Heather Richards and David Ferris for E&E News. And in Botswana, writes Cara Giaimo in The Anthropocene, farmers have found they keep predators from killing livestock by painting fake eyes on the cows' rumps.

Upcoming events:

Various virtual events are scheduled this year as Christians and members of other faiths worldwide celebrate the Season of Creation, beginning with the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation on Sept. 1 and ending with the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi on Oct. 4. For registration information, click the links in the entries below.

- The global Congregation of Notre Dame Sisters will celebrate the 400th anniversary of the birth of their founder, Saint Marguerite Bourgoys, with a four-part virtual retreat. "In the Garden of our Common Home" begins at 7 p.m. Eastern time on Sept. 1 and continues once a month through December.
- Thousands of people of faith around the globe will join in a virtual prayer service on Sept. 1, the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, to mark the opening of the Season of Creation. The service will begin at 10 a.m. in New York, 4 p.m. in Rome, 10 p.m. in Manila and 12:00 a.m. on Sept 2 in Sydney.
- How can we bring healing to a post-pandemic world? A series of Season of Creation webinars will explore possible paths, beginning with a just transition for Asia Pacific and Oceania on Sept. 2 at 3 a.m. in New York, 9 a.m. in Rome, 12:30 p.m. in Mumbai, 3 p.m. in Manila, 5 p.m. in Sydney and 7 p.m. in Fiji.

Closing beat:

It's no coincidence that the Season of Creation falls during September. The ninth month of the year is a time of transition — for slowing down and reflecting as the harvest season approaches in the northern hemisphere, and for greeting new life as the southern hemisphere ushers in spring.

This year's theme, Jubilee for the Earth, draws on the biblical concept of jubilee as a time of rest and restoration. Brian Roewe's explainer on the Season of Creation only kicks off the coverage at EarthBeat. Beginning Monday we'll launch a new series called Lens on Creation from award-winning photographer Paul Jeffrey. Three times a week Jeffrey will lead reflections looking at the world through a lens of faith and his camera. Along with introducing readers to the people and predicaments behind the photos, he also will offer suggestions for further study, reflection and action. And in keeping with the global theme, we'll be offering the reflections in both English and Spanish.

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