News
EarthBeat
Environmental activists protest outside the White House in Washington, D.C., June 30, deman

Environmental activists protest outside the White House in Washington, D.C., June 30, demanding that President Joe Biden stop fossil fuel projects and put climate justice at the heart of his infrastructure plans. (CNS photo/Evelyn Hockstein, Reuters)



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Editor's Note: *EarthBeat Weekly is your weekly newsletter about faith and climate change. Below is the Aug. 20 edition. To receive EarthBeat Weekly in your inbox, sign up here.*

When the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change issued its landmark scientific report Aug. 9, there was a major inconvenient truth missing from the summary for policymakers.

Emily Atkin, who writes the climate newsletter "Heated," pointed out that the 42-page summary makes no mention of fossil fuels — oil, natural gas and coal — although it does attribute the sharp rise in temperatures since the Industrial Revolution to human activities.

In contrast, the full scientific report itself, nearly 4,000 pages in all, clearly draws the connection between the use of fossil fuels and the warming of the planet:

> The main human influence on the climate is via combustion of fossil fuels and land use-change-related CO2 emissions, the principal causes of increased CO2 concentrations since the pre-industrial period. Historical observations indicate that current atmospheric concentrations are unprecedented within at least the last 800,000 years.

Although the scientific report also notes that climate change is affecting every part of the planet — for the first time on record, rain fell at the normally frozen top of Greenland's ice cap on Aug. 14 — environmental justice advocates emphasize that the communities that will suffer the greatest impacts are those that tend to be marginalized from political and economic power.

One of the places where people are calling attention to the connection between fossil fuel use and climate change is at the headwaters of the Mississippi River. That's where Indigenous water defenders and their allies, mainly led by women, have been protesting construction of Canadian-based Enbridge's Line 3 pipeline.

Line 3 crosses lands and bodies of water that are sacred to the Anishinaabe people, and when Claire Schaeffer-Duffy traveled to Minnesota in June for a first-hand look at the issue, she found protest closely intertwined with prayer. She describes that experience in a commentary for EarthBeat.

Healthcare workers also rallied in support of the Line 3 protesters this week, calling the tar sands pipeline a threat to health because of the possibility of water pollution caused by spills of oil or drilling fluids, as well as the larger dangers to health posed by climate change.

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In the Southeast United States, the injustices often take a different form. There, low-income communities and communities of color are already affected by increased flooding caused by more intense storms and storm surges, as well as higher "king tides." Scientists say climate change is making those events more intense and more frequent, a trend that will continue as average global temperatures rise.

As they work with communities affected by flooding, climate justice advocates in the Southeast are finding that Pope Francis' encyclical "*Laudato Si*', on Care for Our Common Home," with its emphasis on the interconnectedness of all of creation, is a guidepost for community responses, reports NCR environment correspondent Brian Roewe.

Given the deluge of news stories and commentaries that followed the IPCC report, Franciscan Fr. Daniel P. Horan says he didn't really want to write yet another column about climate change, but ongoing denialism "means I have to keep drawing attention to this terrifying reality. We have to keep speaking about this, writing about this, and protesting the inaction and apathy of our governmental leaders and community members." He adds that we will have to answer, individually and collectively, for our "persistent and willful ecological sin."

Underlying all these issues is another truth, which Francis has stressed in *Laudato Si*' and in *Querida Amazonia*, the apostolic exhortation he issued after the 2019 Synod for the Pan-Amazonian Region: The consumerism that lies at the heart of environmental devastation, and the inequitable impacts that are already evident around the world, make climate change the most critical environmental justice issue of our time.

This is what we've heard from readers:

Several times in recent weeks we've mentioned the fires raging in the western United States, prompting reader Mary Ellison to ask, "Is anyone there aware that there is a country north of the U.S., called Canada? Repeatedly, I read references to events in various parts of the world, including the U.S., and no mention is made of the same events occurring in Canada."

We'll take this to heart in our future coverage.

And this week's Small Earth Story, in which Margaret Nava describes how she gave up her dryer and learned to appreciate rough towels, reminded EarthBeat reader Susan Vogt of a post she wrote last year for her "Living Lightly" blog, about her own shift to "online" laundry drying. Vogt also contributed a Small Earth Story last year, writing about reducing her use of plastics.

Here's what else is new on EarthBeat:

- In the face of the dual crises of COVID-19 and climate change, "the Catholic Eucharist is a profound act of hope," writes NCR contributor Rebecca Collins Jordan.
- As wildfires rage in Greece, the secretary-general of the country's Catholic bishops' conference has called for stronger policies that take ecology and preparedness into account, reports Jonathan Luxmoore for Catholic News Service.
- Also for CNS, Patricia Zapor writes that the Archdiocese of Washington, D.C., has launched an action plan in the spirit of *Laudato Si'*, suggesting steps that Catholics and church institutions can take to respond to Francis' call to care for creation and combat climate change.

And in other climate news:

- Solar panels have become one of the cheapest sources of energy, but the manufacturing of the panels isn't always green. Gero Rueter at Deutsche Welle examines some ideas for making them more sustainable. Meanwhile, at Vox, Katherine Harmon Courage looks at ways to decrease the environmental impact of huge solar arrays.
- David J. Mitchell of The Advocate writes that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will conduct a more thorough environmental impact study of a controversial plastics factory slated for St. James Parish, Louisiana, focusing particularly on environmental justice concerns. You can read more about the local community's struggle against the Formosa plant on EarthBeat.
- Tens of thousands of doses of pharmaceuticals — from pain relievers to antibiotics — are making their way into the Chesapeake Bay near Baltimore

every year, probably from leaky sewer pipes, reports Dharna Noor for Gizmodo.

Upcoming events:

Next week will bring opportunities for both reflection and action. The University of the South resumes its monthly webinar series Aug. 26 with a conversation about aligning faith and practice with the call to care for all of creation.

And on Aug. 27, Interfaith Power & Light and Creation Justice Ministries are organizing a day of action to call on congressional leaders to invest in climate change prevention and resilience.

You can find more information about these and other upcoming events on the EarthBeat Events page. And if your parish, diocese or faith group is planning an event, you can add it here.

Closing beat:

The Season of Creation, which will begin Sept. 1 and run through Oct. 4, the feast of St. Francis of Assisi, is also a time for reflection and action. EarthBeat will offer a series of reflections and practical steps, once again in collaboration with the Ignatian Solidarity Network.

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