News
EarthBeat
People in New York City block a street in Manhattan pretending to be dead during a Sept. 17

People in New York City block a street in Manhattan pretending to be dead during a Sept. 17 climate change protest. (CNS photo/Caitlin Ochs, Reuters)



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Editor's Note: *EarthBeat Weekly is your weekly newsletter about faith and climate change. Below is the Sept. 24 edition. To receive EarthBeat Weekly in your inbox, sign up here.*

We're just five weeks away from the start of the U.N. climate conference, known as COP26, that observers call the last best chance to stave off the worst consequences of climate change. But although scientists say there is still time to keep global warming to within 1.5 degrees Celsius of pre-industrial levels, the world's nations remain far from that goal.

A new U.N. report on countries' commitments shows that greenhouse gas emissions are on track to rise by 16.3% over 2010 levels by 2030, when they actually need to fall by 45% over 2010 levels by that year to stay within the critical 1.5 C limit.

Most countries — including the United States, the largest historical emitter — are falling short of the action needed. And much of the U.S. ability to meet its pledges will depend on the budget legislation currently before Congress, which faces stiff resistance.

A detailed report by Inside Climate News breaks down the billion tons of greenhouse gas emission cuts at stake in the budget package, showing why the outcome of legislative tussling over the bill will be critical, not just for the U.S., but also for November's international climate negotiations.

Among other things, the bill supports a shift to renewable energy. But this video from Vox explains in six minutes how the network of transmission lines in the U.S. will need to expand to move that energy from the Midwest to urban centers, and why that could be an obstacle to rapid greening of the energy grid.

A new clean energy and climate bill signed into law in Illinois on Sept. 15 offers a window into the battles brewing over clean energy at the national level. In that debate, Democrats argued for the bill's long-term benefits, while Republicans decried the costs and critics said the measure favored energy-hungry urban areas.

The global shortfall in pledges is why young people around the world took to the streets again Sept. 24 to stage climate strikes, just days after the release of a new study showing high levels of sadness and anxiety about climate change among 16- to 25-year-olds.

And this is why faith leaders call passage of the budget bill a moral imperative, as NCR environment correspondent Brian Roewe wrote recently. In the coming weeks, EarthBeat will be delving further into what's at stake in the Glasgow negotiations — and why Catholics should care.

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

This week we highlighted people of faith who are speaking out and taking action on climate and other environmental issues.

- Molly Burhans, a young Catholic who is passionate about maps, told us how mapping enables people to better understand the social, ecological and economic values of their land — and how she is helping the Catholic Church put that knowledge to use to benefit the planet.
- In the Midwest, the Catholic head of Iowa Business for Clean Energy — who describes himself as a "tree-hugging Republican" — told NCR environmental correspondent Brian Roewe that faith can inspire business owners to make their operations greener, even if they don't completely buy into a national climate agenda.
- And during this third week of the Season of Creation, EarthBeat's "At Home in Creation" reflection series has drawn our attention to air — the air we breathe, the breath of the Spirit, the inequities in exposure to pollution and a remarkable Catholic community leader who has spearheaded the fight against more pollution in Louisiana's "Cancer Alley."
- In Brazil, Catholic leaders have decried not just the wildfires raging in the Amazon Basin and other important ecosystems, but also the human activities — especially unregulated gold mining and poorly managed agriculture — that lead to the fires, writes Eduardo Campos Lima.
- Those activities threaten Indigenous territories, and Brazil's Supreme Court is considering the constitutionality of proposed legislation that could further undermine Indigenous land rights, reports Lise Alves for Catholic New Service.
- On the other side of the globe, CNS reported that a new bishop in the southern Philippines vowed to center his ministry on the environment and urged Catholics in his diocese to care for the Earth as outlined by Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato Si*'.
- CNS also reported that faith leaders in the United Kingdom issued a declaration calling for government leaders to take urgent climate action and pledging that their congregations will do the same.
- And in Africa, Catholics marked the Season of Creation with a virtual event that emphasized the importance of the Congo Basin for global climate stability and examined the threats to its forests and wetlands, writes Frederick Nzwili for CNS.

Here's what we've heard from our readers:

Although EarthBeat reader Rosalind Carr was inspired by Burhans' work, she was also reminded that women's contributions are too often overlooked:

"Molly Burhans work sounds so ... I can't think of enough adjectives to laud it. BUT I will draw attention to one thing she said. 'One of the original, beautiful visions of GoodLands that we still have,' she said, 'is let's see Catholic conservation [reach] the scale of Catholic health care and education globally, as the largest global network the world has ever seen.'

"We have to remember that the health care and the education were built by the women of the church. If it hadn't been for the nuns, I seriously doubt that any of that would have come to fruition. In fact, now that the number of women entering the religious life has dwindled, Catholic health care and education are dwindling also. Catholic hospitals are being taken over by big corporations and schools are closing all over the country. ... We need a conversion of leadership."

And readers Frank and Jerry Gold found this week's "At Home in Creation" reflections to be a breath of fresh air: "What a great reminder! I am always amazed and saddened that all of us humans can't recognize our intimate connection and unity as we breathe the same air! ... Yes to life and hope!"

Thanks to our readers who take the time to let us know what we're doing well and where we're falling short. To weigh in on a story, drop us a line at earthbeat@ncronline.org.

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And here's some of what's new in other climate news:

- The Biden administration has finalized its first climate rule, which will sharply cut the use and production of hydrofluorocarbons, a potent greenhouse gas that often leaks from supermarket freezer cases, writes Dino Grandoni at The Washington Post.
- Reuters reports that Minnesota's Department of Natural Resources has fined Enbridge Inc. $3.32 million for perforating an aquifer during construction of its controversial Line 3 pipeline.
- Jack Igelman at Carolina Public Press dives into North Carolina's commercial fishing industry, which is struggling to adapt to climate change, on top of other stressors.

- New research shows that in Australia, about 20% of climate credits for "avoided deforestation," paid for with some $310 million of taxpayer funds under a government program, probably did nothing to help the climate, reports Adam Morton for The Guardian.

Upcoming events:

There's lots going on this week in Catholic climate cyberspace, from a webinar about climate refugees to a guided tour of the Laudato Si' Action Platform. And on Sept. 29 at 2 p.m. Central Time, EarthBeat and Global Sisters Report will host a conversation about how women's religious communities are protecting parts of their land for future generations.

You can find more information about these and other upcoming events on the EarthBeat Events page. And you can add your own group's events here.

Closing beat:

This week EarthBeat told stories about some inspiring Catholics who are addressing climate issues. Who has inspired you on this journey? Tell us about them in 150 words or less in a Small Earth Story.

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