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Pope Francis walks in the Clementine Hall after meeting with a delegation of Pacific leaders to discuss climate issues, at the Vatican in November 2017. Francis will be one of several world leaders to present a joint declaration to the U.N. climate conference, COP26. (L'Osservatore Romano/Pool Photo via AP)

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Pope Francis, along with other religious leaders and scientists, will present a joint declaration to the president of the COP26 climate summit on Monday at the Vatican, promising to encourage the faithful to care for creation and, in turn, urging governments to do their part to curb climate change.

"We were very glad to be able to work with our colleagues in the Italian embassy and at the Holy See in bringing together a wide group of faith leaders in advance of COP and to think about the role of faith leaders in messaging to our political leaders about the importance of this meeting," the recently appointed U.K. ambassador to the Holy See, Christopher Trott, told Vatican reporters Oct. 1.

The U.K. and Italy will preside over the COP26 climate negotiations and summit of world leaders in Glasgow, Scotland, Nov. 1-12. The event is intended to build on the 2015 Paris Agreement and other U.N. declarations on the environment to reduce carbon emissions and promote a global framework for combating climate change.

Almost 40 faith leaders, representing a wide range of religious organizations from Jews to Christians to Buddhists, were brought together to discuss climate change and its consequences over the past six months.

Francis will personally hand over the appeal at the Vatican to Alok Sharma, COP26 president, and Luigi di Maio, Italian minister for foreign affairs.

The joint appeal is expected to urge political leaders to commit to achieving net-zero carbon emissions and limit the rise of global temperatures to 1.5 degrees Celsius. Faith leaders will also pledge to promote climate awareness not only among decision makers in their countries, but also among the faithful in their communities, providing a powerful stage for the environmental discussions at COP26.

"It's important for all of us to recognize that a spiritual leader in a way speaks on behalf of and speaks to his or her faith congregations," Trott told a small group of Vatican reporters.

While recognizing the divisions that exist within religious groups, the ambassador said that "this kind of messaging from a very, very well-respected group of people is going to have an impact" on the COP26 discussions and beyond.

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Ever since Francis released his "green encyclical" *Laudato Si*' in 2015, he has become a prominent figure in promoting care for the environment and the fight against climate change. Francis recently sent a message encouraging the activism of young people gathered in Milan, Italy, for the Youth4Action meeting to discuss new ideas for sustainability and the environment.

The Vatican has also launched a Global Compact for Education in 2019 that seeks to promote environmental education and awareness in Catholic and non-Catholic schools and universities.

Francis showed his willingness to cooperate with other religious leaders in advocating for the environment when he issued a joint appeal to the UN on Sept. 10, co-signed by Anglican Archbishop Justin Welby of Canterbury and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew.

Cooperation among different religious leaders was a key objective in preparing the joint appeal that will be presented Oct. 4.

"I was very struck in the discussions by the commonalities among these different faith leaders, in their approach and the way they think about our responsibility for the planet," Trott said.

"Whether or not it's a creation story, as you would find in the Abrahamic religions, there is an absolute sense that we don't own this planet. It's not ours to do with as we wish but, rather, we are temporary tenants of this planet, and we are required to pass this planet on to future generations in a state of wellbeing," he added.

The influence religious leaders have on their faith communities has increasingly caught the attention of secular governments. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Francis used his moral pulpit to promote vaccination among the world's 1.2 billion Catholics, and political actors hope the same influence may be harnessed again to raise awareness for the environment.

"Our hope is that at COP in Glasgow, the appeal that is coming out on [Oct. 4] will be born in mind by world leaders as they sit down and negotiate the outcome of the agreement," Trott said.

Francis is expected to attend the COP26 summit, where he will likely deliver a speech, though the Vatican has still to confirm the papal trip. While the Vatican has sent representatives to U.N. climate conferences before, this would be the first time a pope personally attended such a gathering.