News
EarthBeat
Pope Francis joins in a selfie with Indigenous participants at the Synod of Bishops for the Ama

Pope Francis joins in a selfie with Indigenous participants at the Synod of Bishops for the Amazon in October 2019. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)



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Editor's Note: *EarthBeat Weekly is your weekly newsletter about faith and climate change. Below is the Oct. 29 edition. To receive EarthBeat Weekly in your inbox, sign up here.*

The Synod of Bishops for the Amazonian region ended two years ago, but its message about protecting tropical forests and defending the lives of the people who inhabit them is as urgent as ever.

The synod's emphasis on protecting Amazonian ecosystems — crucial for both the survival of Indigenous and traditional communities and regulation of the global climate — echoes in the messages Pope Francis has been delivering ahead of the

U.N. climate conference, COP26, which begins Oct. 31 in Glasgow, Scotland.

And the wider church participation seen at the Amazon synod — where lay people, priests and religious took part in a pre-synod "listening" process as well as in the meeting of bishops in October 2019 — is serving as a model for a Latin American Ecclesial Assembly scheduled for November as well as for the Synod of Bishops set for 2023.

Francis has paid particular attention to the relationship that Indigenous people have with the places where they dwell, and that is one of the things that Yésica Patiachi remembers about the synod. During a virtual panel discussion organized by the Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network on Oct. 27, the young Harakbut woman from Peru's Madre de Dios region said that when she was chosen to attend the synod, "I thought I would just be there to listen, to watch. I didn't think I would be one of the protagonists."

She had always thought of the pope as inaccessible, so she was surprised to find that he stood in line for refreshments like everyone else and she could approach him for a chat over coffee.

But although the pope understands clearly what is needed in the Amazon, she said, other church leaders do not. During the synod, she heard some of those in the meetings asking why attention should focus on the Amazon when there are so many other problems in the world.

"I was afraid that everything we'd talked about in the synod would come to nothing," Patiachi said. So when it was her turn to address the assembly, she said she thought the pope might be "rowing alone" in his efforts to lead the church to wider participation and greater environmental awareness.

Yésica Patiachi, second from left, leaves the final session of the Synod of Bishops for the Ama

Yésica Patiachi, second from left, leaves the final session of the Synod of Bishops for the Amazon at the Vatican Oct. 26, 2019, with Comboni Fr. Dario Bossi of Brazil and Leah Casimero of Guyana. (CNS/Paul Haring)

With *Laudato Si*' in 2015 and his messages this year ahead of the Glasgow summit, Francis is clearly trying to mobilize the world's 1.3 billion Catholics to take action themselves and to press their governments to take stronger steps to put the brakes

on global warming.

His most recent message was broadcast by the BBC on Oct. 29, just before he met with U.S. President Joe Biden at the Vatican.

NCR environment correspondent Brian Roewe writes that Francis said the dual crises of climate change and COVID-19 call for "radical decisions that are not always easy," but that such moments of difficulty "also present opportunities ... that we must not waste."

On EarthBeat this week, commentators have challenged the U.S. bishops to follow Francis' lead. Just as the bishops spoke out courageously against nuclear war nearly 40 years ago, they should raise their voices now about climate change, which threatens to end the world as we know it, writes Mary Jo McConahay. And an NCR editorial offers the bishops some specific suggestions.

Meanwhile, José Aguto, executive director of the Catholic Climate Movement, urges politicians and people of faith to let themselves be guided by the greatest commandment.

And although Francis will not attend in person, people of faith will make their voices heard in various ways during the climate negotiations in Glasgow.

Brian, who will be reporting from Glasgow during the first week of the conference, writes that Scotland's Catholic bishops' conference and dioceses are among 72 faith institutions on six continents that announced new fossil-free commitments Oct. 26. And Jonathan Luxmoore reports that Catholic organizations in the United Kingdom are calling for Prime Minister Boris Johnson's government to show leadership in holding countries to bolder climate targets.

The world is waiting to see how deep the U.S. emissions reductions will be as the Biden administration pares back the infrastructure and social spending bill before Congress. By Oct. 28, the bill had been reduced from an initial $3.5 trillion to $1.75 trillion, with the largest chunk, $555 billion, earmarked mainly for incentives aimed at reducing fossil fuel use.

Meanwhile, outside the White House, five Sunrise Movement climate activists have been on a hunger strike since Oct. 20, calling for Biden and congressional Democrats to keep their climate pledges, reports Melissa Cedillo, NCR's Latino Catholics Project

fellow. The Ignatian Solidarity Network and Catholic Climate Covenant are inviting people to join a 24-hour fast in solidarity with the hunger strikers, from sunrise Nov. 1 to sunrise Nov. 2.

In her remarks during REPAM's virtual panel discussion, Patiachi reminded her audience that there are no quick fixes. "The Amazon is complex and there isn't a recipe that says 'this is the way,'" she said. "We're discovering the way."

Here's what else is new on EarthBeat:

- In the first article of a series, Chris Herlinger, Global Sisters Report international correspondent, describes efforts by women religious to ensure that the shift from fossil fuels to renewable energy is a "just transition" that considers workers as well as the environment.
- Inspired by their faith education, 16-year-old twin brothers in Albany, New York, have launched a climate-friendly lawn care service using muscle, elbow grease and pedal power. Emily Benson has the story for Catholic News Service.

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

- As climate negotiations call greater attention to India's reliance on coal for energy, Salimah Shivji at CBC News explains why it is difficult for the country to cut its use despite the negative health and environmental impacts of mining and burning coal.
- Saudi Arabia announced that it plans to reach net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2060, but offered no details about how it would do so while continuing to pump and export large amounts of oil, reports Deutsche Welle.
- Meanwhile, Feargus O'Sullivan at Bloomberg City Lab writes that Paris is betting on bikes, with plans to add more than 100 miles of segregated bike lanes and triple the number of bike parking spots by 2026.
- Although carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuel combustion fell by 5.6% in 2020, probably because of the pandemic-related economic slowdown,

greenhouse gas concentrations continued to rise, reaching levels not seen since long before humans existed, writes Peter Wade at Rolling Stone.

- As countries shift to renewable energy sources, fossil fuel companies have found a new market in plastics manufacturing, which could outpace coal-fired power plants as a source of greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, writes Elizabeth Gribkoff at Environmental Health News.
- Also at EHN, Theresa C. Guillette, a Hispanic wildlife biologist and ecotoxicologist, writes that encouraging diversity in environmental sciences must begin by making it possible for children in communities of color to connect with the outdoors.
- And perversely, a study has found that knowing that a product is likely to be recycled or turned into energy may actually make people more wasteful in using the product, writes Sarah DeWeerdt at Anthropocene Magazine.

Upcoming events:

"Uniting the World to Tackle Climate Change: Perspectives from Religion and Politics," a three-day virtual conference sponsored by the University of St. Andrews in Scotland in preparation for COP26, began Oct. 29 with an address by Karenna Gore, executive director of the Center for Earth Ethics, and will conclude Oct. 31 with a presentation by Franciscan Sr. Ilia Delio of Villanova University.

You can find more information about this and other events on the EarthBeat events page, where you can also add your own group's events.

Closing beat:

Keep an eye on EarthBeat this week for Brian's reports from COP26 in Glasgow. If you know someone who would be interested in following those activities, please encourage them to sign up to receive EarthBeat Weekly in their inbox, along with alerts about other stories at the intersection of climate and faith.

Thank you for reading EarthBeat!

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