News
EarthBeat



Pope Francis visits the lake as he participates in the Lac Ste. Anne pilgrimage and Liturgy of the Word July 26, 2022, in Lac Ste. Anne, Alberta. (CNS/Paul Haring)



by Christopher White

Former Vatican Correspondent (2021-2025)

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Ahead of the this year's upcoming United Nations' COP28 climate conference, Pope Francis on May 25 used his 2023 message for the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation to call for an end to "the fossil fuel era," saying it is "madness to permit continued exploration and expansion of fossil fuel infrastructure."

"Let us heed our call to stand with the victims of environmental and climate injustice, and to put an end to the senseless war against creation," wrote the pope in a message released ahead of the annual celebration on Sept. 1.

In 2015, the pope decided that Catholics would officially join with the Orthodox Church, which has designated a special calendar day for praying for creation since 1989. At the time, Francis said the goal was two-fold: to provide Catholics an opportunity to reflect on how they might be better stewards of the environment and also to deepen the ecumenical bonds between Christian churches.

At a Vatican press conference launching the message, Jesuit Cardinal Michael Czerny said that this year's theme, "Let Justice and Peace Flow," brings "the biblical image of the river to underscore the 21st century, calling our attention to the real rivers that are so badly mistreated that they starkly symbolize the ecological crisis."



Speakers present Pope Francis' message for the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation during a news conference May 25 in the Vatican press office. From the left are Cecilia Turbitosi, a volunteer from the Missionary Center of Italy's Porto-Santa Rufina Diocese; Tomás Insua, executive director of the Laudato Si' Movement; and Cardinal Michael Czerny, prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. (CNS/Lola Gomez)

Czerny, who is head of the Vatican's Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, told reporters that the pope's message is a call for a change in hearts, lifestyles and, ultimately, public policies.

Since the 2015 release of the pope's ecological encyclical, "*Laudato Si*', on Care for Our Common Home," Czerny said the Vatican is not simply advocating a technical solution to today's environmental challenges, but also is advocating for the personal, moral and spiritual dimensions, hence the pope's continued call for "ecological conversion."

"There's no conversion that doesn't begin by recognizing one's sinfulness," said the cardinal, who added that there should be a recognition of "where one is personally, community-wise, city or region, country, even continental, sinful — and that's what needs to be converted."

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Ecological sins, the pope writes in this year's message, "harm the world of nature and our fellow men and women."

"With the help of God's grace, let us adopt lifestyles marked by less waste and unnecessary consumption, especially where the processes of production are toxic and unsustainable," he continues.

Today, said the pope, the "the heartbeat of creation and the heartbeat of God ... do not beat in harmony. They are not harmonized in justice and peace."

On an individual level, the pope used his message to call for change through "positive choices" that include an overall commitment to less consumption, using environmentally friendly and sustainable products and recycling.

On a macro level, the pope went on to lament a culture of "consumerist greed," as evidenced by "predatory industries [that] are depleting and polluting our freshwater sources through extreme practices such as fracking for oil and gas extraction, unchecked mega-mining projects, and intensive animal farming."

"Economic policies that promote scandalous wealth for a privileged few and degrading conditions for many others, spell the end of peace and justice," wrote the pope. "It is clear that the richer nations have contracted an 'ecological debt' that must be paid."



St. Peter's Basilica is seen across the Tiber River March 5, 2019, as the sun sets in Rome. (CNS/Paul Haring)

At the Vatican press conference, Tomás Insua, executive director of the Laudato Si' Movement, said that "while most other global leaders, particularly the most powerful ones, remain lukewarm and subservient to corporate interests, Pope Francis continues to be a beacon of moral leadership."

Insua went on to emphasize the pope's call for ending fossil fuels ahead of the COP28 climate summit in Dubai, which begins in November 2023, saying that while this is the mainstream view of scientists, it remains an unpopular one among the world's largest powers.

Rev. Rachel Mash, environmental coordinator of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa who joined the press conference via video link, said that given this reality, it's all the more important for people of faith not to stand on the sidelines.

"Today God is calling us to work together in humility and love, to join hands so that the rivers can flow together, to become a mighty river of justice and peace, a river of worship and prayer, of lament and tears, of actions and stubborn hope," said Mash.

"And then in the power of the mighty Spirit of God," she continued, "we will see the face of the earth renewed for the sake of our children and children's children."

This story appears in the **COP28 Dubai** feature series. View the full series.