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Late evening sun illuminates rock formations at the Garden of the Gods in Colorado Springs, C

Late evening sun illuminates rock formations at the Garden of the Gods in Colorado Springs, Colo., July 23, 2020. (OSV News photo/Bob Roller)

Maria Wiering

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August 29, 2023
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Terrence Thompson's work gives him an up-close view of the impact of climate change and other environmental factors on public health around the world. Becoming a Laudato Si' Animator has helped him unite faith and action with his knowledge and experience, Thompson said.

"My wife and I wanted to do something in the Catholic tradition," said Thompson, who worked on health and environment issues for the World Health Organization and is now a consultant in the same field. "I have personal, firsthand awareness of the effects of climate change on public health and the delivery of health services on hospitals and health care facilities, health centers, things like that. And I'm anxious to share that knowledge and raise awareness."

Launched in 2016, the Laudato Si' Animators Program is an initiative of the Laudato Si' Movement, an international organization founded in 2015 as the Global Catholic Climate Movement. It changed its name in 2021 to better reflect its mission. Its Animators Program certifies individuals committed to its three pillars of ecological conversion, sustainability and prophetic advocacy, thus creating "a global network of motivated Catholics who are empowered to bring *Laudato Si*' to life in their communities," its website states.

Erin Lothes, a Catholic theologian and senior manager of the Laudato Si' Animators Program, described an animator as "a person who joins in our mission to care for our common home; to begin a journey of ecological conversion, as Pope Francis has called us all to do; to take action to care for our common home; to bring this into parish life, community life; and to raise a prophetic voice for the changes we need in society."

"*Laudato Si*'" — Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical subtitled "On Care for Our Common Home" — opens with a quote from St. Francis of Assisi's "Canticle of the Creatures": "Laudato Si', mi' Signore" ("Praise be to you, my Lord"). With the letter, Pope Francis reflected on the relationship between human beings and creation, stating environmental problems have "ethical and spiritual roots" that lasting solutions must seek to address.

In the encyclical, Pope Francis rejected "throwaway culture" and called for an "integral ecology" that recognizes that "everything is connected." He also called for Christians to seek "ecological conversion," "whereby the effects of their encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them," both with the environment and other people, especially the poor and vulnerable.

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"Living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience," Pope Francis wrote.

Lothes told OSV News "*Laudato Si*'" shows the "cry of the earth and the cry of the poor" are linked, and are actually a single crisis.

"What the encyclical does so powerfully is ... spiritually remind us how we are all graced by belonging to this sacramental world that God has given us, this gift that is meant to sustain us all, be our home, share the good gifts of creation with everyone, and invite us to to care for it lovingly and reverently," she said. "That's our spiritual, religious invitation. And there's many ways we live that out."

Animators Program resources include a daily newsletter, monthly prayer guides and connections to Laudato Si' Circles, monthly prayer-based small groups that meet throughout the world. As part of its initial training, it supports its animators as they create and execute projects in their own parishes or communities.

The program has nearly 13,000 certified animators globally, with about 730 in the U.S., Lothes said. Registration is open for a self-paced, on-demand animator training course beginning Oct. 7.

Program materials say the free course teaches "the main concepts of Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si*' and how it fits into the Catholic social teaching principles of human dignity, the common good and solidarity."

Thompson, 68, and his wife, Cheryl, joined the Animators Program and began a training course in April, receiving certification at the end of May. As part of their formation, they identified ways to connect the youth in their parish — first, with the screening of the Laudato Si' Movement-produced documentary "The Letter" that connects the encyclical and people affected by contemporary ecological challenges, and second, by organizing a youth group trip to a nature education center at protected wetlands.

"We reflected on something that the pope says in the encyclical ... that it's difficult for people to care about nature and the environment if they don't feel connected to it," said Thompson, who, with Cheryl, is a member of St. Anthony of Padua Parish in Hightstown, New Jersey. The Thompsons perceived their parish's youth felt a greater connection to the human-built environment and cyberspace than the natural world around them.

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The field trip "helped us to see the interconnectedness between all living things within the marshland itself, and the interconnectedness between the marshland and

the surrounding communities, surrounding human settlements," Thompson told OSV News. "It brought out this concept that the pope talks about in his encyclical about how all living things are interconnected."

Thompson said the couple hopes to raise broader environmental awareness within the Diocese of Trenton, New Jersey. In the immediate future, however, their parish's youth group is hosting a poster competition for the Season of Creation, an annual ecumenical observance Sept. 1-Oct. 4 the Laudato Si' Movement describes as "a time to renew our relationship with our Creator and all creation through celebration, conversion and commitment."

The season opens with the Sept. 1 World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, which Pope Francis established in 2015. The day's 2023 theme is "Let Justice and Peace Flow," drawn from the prophet Amos: "Let justice flow on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream."

As part of their own ecological conversion, the Thompsons have made adjustments to their own lifestyle. Thompson said they try to live modestly, recycle, keep clothing longer before replacing it and reuse things they own before buying new. They recently renovated a house and chose to exclusively use electricity for energy instead of natural gas, a fossil fuel.

"Combustion of fossil fuels is one of the main drivers, if not the main driver, of global warming," he said. "Additionally, burning fossil fuel inside the home emits carbon monoxide inside the home as well as some other byproducts, so it's not healthy for the indoor environment. It's not healthy for us to be breathing it."

Thompson said he would encourage fellow Catholics to become Laudato Si' Animators "because the need is critical."

"I believe that humankind is facing an existential crisis," he said. "And I believe that God our creator has called upon us in the Scripture, if we have a proper understanding of Genesis 1:28." The passage states, "God blessed them (the male and female) and God said to them: Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things that crawl on the earth."

"God our creator has called upon us to care for our common home and to respect all of his creation," Thompson said. "Every blade of grass, every ant that crawls on the ground is part of God's creation and deserves respect and care."

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