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Cardinal Robert McElroy of San Diego speaks about his experience as a delegate to the synod on synodality in October 2023 at the Vatican during a talk Feb. 16 at the Los Angeles Religious Education Congress in Anaheim. (OSV News/Courtesy of Archdiocese of LA Digital Team)



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Pope Francis' call for the world to address the coming consequences of global climate change has not garnered enough attention at the U.S. Catholic bishops' conference, said a leading American cardinal.

In an exclusive interview with National Catholic Reporter in late February, San Diego Cardinal Robert McElroy said the pope's environmental vision "has not gotten the attention of the conference that it should get, and that the pope is calling us to get."

"It has not been institutionalized in the conference in the same way that other major initiatives and priorities within the life of the church in the United States have been," said the cardinal, speaking in an interview for NCR's "The Vatican Briefing" podcast.

McElroy, who has led the San Diego Diocese since 2015 and was made a cardinal by Francis in 2022, was speaking in particular about reception among U.S. bishops of the pope's 2015 environmental encyclical "*Laudato Si',* on Care for Our Common Home," which called for dramatic action to confront climate change.

The "most important" part of the encyclical, said the cardinal, "is Pope Francis' assertion of what is Catholic faith: that nature is graced, that God has given us the gift of the created order and it's our responsibility to sustain [it]."

"And now it's in danger on a variety of fronts," said McElroy. "So, with the eyes of faith, we've got to see this is God's gift which is in jeopardy now."

The cardinal was speaking to NCR on the sidelines of a conference hosted at the University of San Diego, which included some 80 bishops, theologians and Catholic leaders for two days of conversation to reckon with what was described as the failure of the U.S. church to implement the pope's environmental teachings.

In the interview, McElroy said the Catholic Church "needs to be … a leading voice in the world on the dangers to our environment."

"Creation is not just a thing that we encounter," said the cardinal. "It's not disposable. It's not something given to us simply to use and toss away."

Addressing climate change, he said, is "a moral, religious, spiritual challenge."

"It's not primarily even a scientific challenge," said McElroy. "It's a moral challenge."

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