News
EarthBeat



Pope Francis greets Father Manuel Dorantes, the new administrative management director of the Laudato Si' Center for Higher Education at Castel Gandolfo, in this file photo taken in the Vatican audience hall in October 2014. (CNS/courtesy Father Manuel Dorantes)

Cindy Wooden

View Author Profile

Catholic News Service

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Vatican City — November 18, 2024
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Pope Francis has appointed a priest of the Archdiocese of Chicago to serve as administrative management director of the Laudato Si' Center for Higher Education, which is based at the papal villa and farms at Castel Gandolfo.

Father Manuel Dorantes, pastor of St. Mary of the Lake and Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in Chicago, will begin a four-year term at the center Dec. 1, the Vatican announced in early November.

Francis established the center in early 2023, saying he wanted "to make a tangible contribution to the development of ecological education by opening a new space for training and raising awareness," according to the Vatican City governor's office.

The initiative, called the "Borgo Laudato Si'" project, will have "the beauty of the Villa Barberini gardens and the papal villas as the natural setting for developing a center for education in integral ecology, open to all people of goodwill," it said.

The papal property at Castel Gandolfo extends over 135 acres — surpassing the 108.7 acres of Vatican City. It includes 74 acres of gardens — 17 of which are formal gardens — 62 acres of farmland, three residences and a farm with chickens, hens, rabbits, assorted fowl, cows and a small dairy operation. There are also fruit and olive orchards, vineyards, hayfields, vegetable patches, aromatic herbs, flowerbeds and plants that often are used to decorate the papal apartments and meeting rooms at the Vatican.

Advertisement

Meeting in September with people involved in the center, Francis noted that they were developing a new vineyard for wine production. "It is intended to act as a synthesis of tradition and innovation, as a 'trademark' of the Borgo," he said.

The vineyard is made up of a variety of grapes sourced by experts at the University of Udine with the goal of producing an excellent wine that also "symbolizes a communion in diversity," the center said in September.

In a statement Nov. 13, Dorantes said his appointment was unexpected and left him "humbled and appreciative."

"I look forward to collaborating with the men and women who work daily toward the realization of the Holy Father's vision expressed in Laudato Si': to create tangible examples of the church's contribution to the care of our common home and to the integral development of the human person," he said. "The potential of the center in the areas of education, the economy of sustainability, ecological training and service is both challenging and inspiring."