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Pope Francis greets Lorna Gold, recently named new executive director of the Laudato Si Movement, during a private audience at the Vatican Jan 30, 2025. (OSV News photo/Vatican Media via CPP)



by Brian Roewe

NCR environment correspondent

View Author Profile

broewe@ncronline.org
Follow on Twitter at @brianroewe

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The Laudato Si' Movement, the global network of Catholic organizations dedicated to Pope Francis' calls for ecological concern and a churchwide response to climate change, will undergo its second leadership change in the past year.

Lorna Gold has been named its new executive director. She will take over the position beginning in late February from Susana Réfega, who entered the role in January 2024.

In a Jan. 29 blog post on its website, the Laudato Si' Movement board said that Réfega had stepped down to spend more time with her family. Réfega had been hired as the network's second director, succeeding founder Tomas Insua who held the position for the organization's first nine years.

"Susana's leadership has been such a gift to our movement," said Yeb Saño, chair of the Laudato Si' Movement board. "We pray that all good things come to her and her family, and we trust that as a Laudato Si' Animator and friend, we will continue working together in the years to come."

Réfega in a message called leading Laudato Si' Movement a "unique, deeply inspiring, and humbling experience."

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Gold, a founding member of the lay-led Laudato Si' Movement, had been board president since 2020 and a board member since 2017. Now she will lead the network — consisting of more than 900 member organizations in 192 countries, 70-plus chapters and 20,000 "animators" — with its mission of bringing to life Francis' 2015 encyclical "*Laudato Si*', on Care for Our Common Home."

2025 marks both the 10-year anniversary for the landmark papal teaching document and for the Laudato Si' Movement (originally called Global Catholic Climate

Movement). It also marks the 800th anniversary of St. Francis of Assisi's "Canticle of the Creatures," from which the pope's encyclical draws its name.

Speaking to EarthBeat Jan. 30 by phone from Rome, following a meeting with the pope on *Laudato Si*' anniversary plans, Gold said her passion for ecological justice and desire to see Francis' encyclical "become a lived reality in the church and wider world" drew her to the position.

"I believe that given the crises we face today we have a responsibility to play our part and lead where we can. … I feel this is my time to lead," she said.

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Originally from Scotland, Gold has been an active leader for years in Catholic work on integral ecology and creation care. As an official with Trocaire, the Irish bishops' overseas development agency, she was instrumental in campaigns that led to Ireland and its bishops financially divesting from fossil fuels.

More recently, she served as executive director of FaithInvest, an international network of religious social impact investors. She has attended numerous United Nations climate summits and has met with Francis on multiple occasions.

One of those meetings was featured in the 2022 documentary film "The Letter" about the *Laudato Si*' encyclical. The film, made available for free on YouTube, has been viewed 8.9 million times.

That film, which Laudato Si' Movement helped produce and distribute, led to a vast expansion of the network. The challenge now, Gold said, is how to sustain that growth.

"My vision for LSM is that the movement continues to grow and flourish both at the grassroots and as a global presence — giving witness to an ecological conversion and advocating courageously for ecological justice," she told EarthBeat.



People pose for a photo at the premier of the "The Letter: A Message For Our Earth," a film on Pope Francis' encyclical, "Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home," in the Paul VI hall at the Vatican Oct. 4, 2022. Pictured from left are the film's writer and director, Nicolas Brown; U.S. coral reef scientist Greg Asner; Arouna Kandé, a climate refugee from Senegal; Ridhima Pandey, a 13-year-old climate activist from India; U.S. coral reef scientist Robin Martin; Chief Cacique Odair "Dadá" Borari from the Amazon rainforest in Brazil; and Lorna Gold, then-president of the board of the Laudato Si' Movement. (CNS/Laudato Si' Movement)

Since its creation, Laudato Si' Movement has organized both ecological spirituality reflections and advocacy campaigns — opposing fossil fuel infrastructure, endorsing an international fossil fuel non-proliferation treaty and mobilizing Catholic institutions to divest from coal, oil and gas companies. It worked with the Vatican in developing the Laudato Si' Action Platform, which has nearly 5,000 enrolled Catholic institutions as of the end of 2024.

Plans are still in development for celebrating the *Laudato Si*' 10-year anniversary. For its part, Laudato Si' Movement is set to hold a pilgrimage in Assisi in June. It is also making preparations for the COP30 U.N. climate summit, to be held this year in Belém, Brazil — a country home to the ecologically critical Amazon rainforest and one of the largest Catholic populations on the planet.

In the Laudato Si' Movement blog post, Gold said "our work for climate justice is facing significant headwinds right now," calling on Catholics "to ensure that the urgent message of *Laudato Si'*, which calls for an end to fossil fuels, is heard loud and clear at COP30 in Brazil this November."