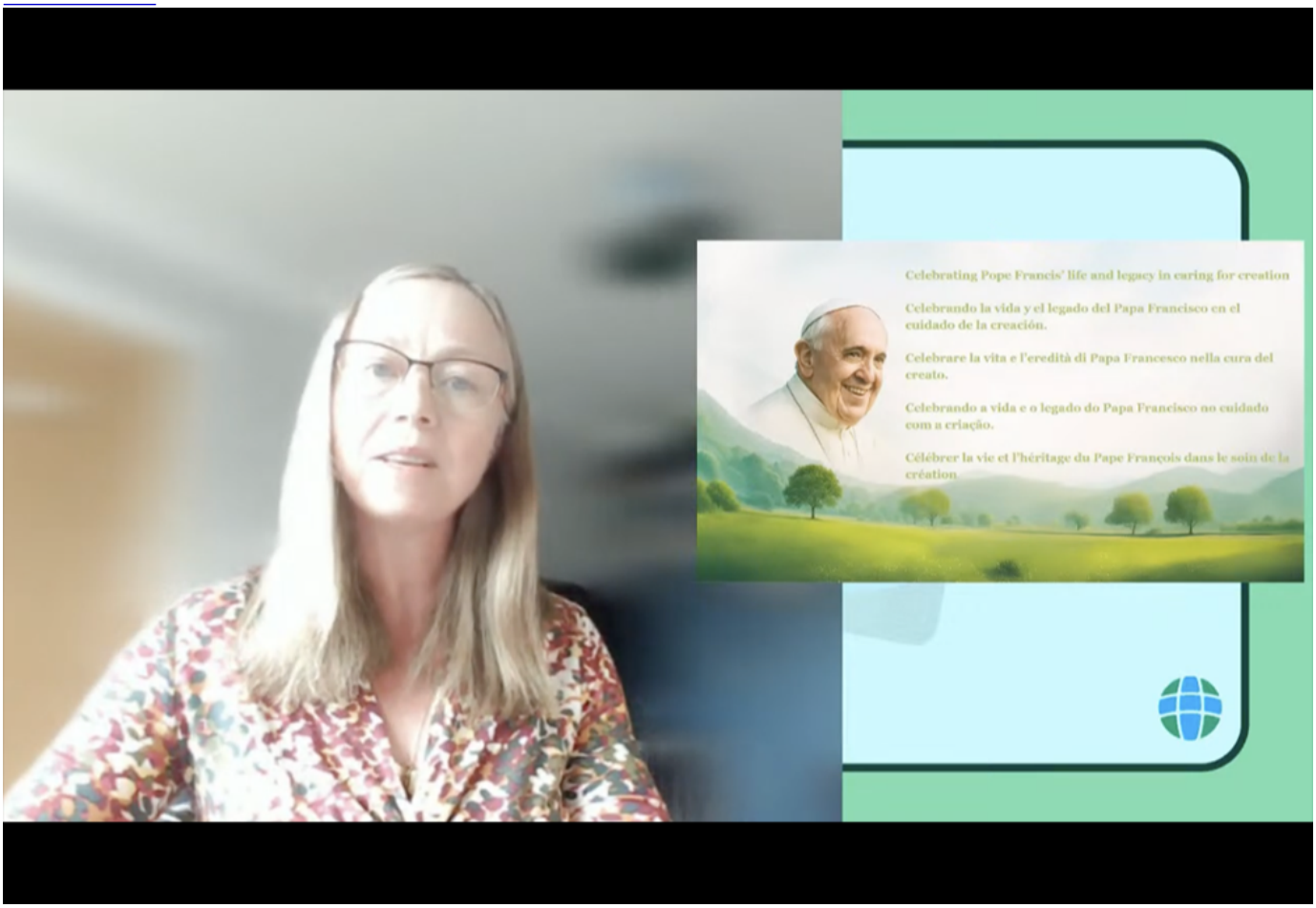
News
EarthBeat



Lorna Gold, executive director of Laudato Si' Movement, speaks during a digital wake for Pope Francis on April 25, 2025. Laudato Si' Movement convened the wake. Pope Francis died April 21, 2025, at age 88. (NCR screengrab/YouTube)



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Across nearly two hours Friday, a queue of clergy and religious, politicians and activists, scientists and everyday Catholics each took their turn at a digital wake expressing both sorrow and gratitude for Pope Francis and his leadership in protecting and preserving creation.

Their shared stories, personal testimonials and raw emotions highlighted the multitude of ways Francis impacted the global environmental movement, and in many cases individual lives, too.

"My biological DNA, my parents gave me. Pope Francis gave me my spiritual DNA. That's the gift he gave me," said Christian Br. Sunil Britto, who works on creation care efforts in India.

The digital memorial offered many of those gathered a final chance to remember Francis and his environmental legacy before his funeral in Rome April 26. While some attention has turned toward the upcoming conclave, those at the digital wake April 25 were focused on celebrating a pope that gave life to a renewed environmental movement in the Catholic Church and beyond.

Gathering and remembering a loved one after they pass away is a family tradition in every culture, said Lorna Gold, executive director of Laudato Si' Movement, which convened the digital wake.



Pope Francis accepts the gift of a handmade "Abraham's tent" from a boy during his general audience in the Paul VI hall at the Vatican Sept. 1, 2021. The gift was given by members of the Laudato Si' Movement. The Laudato Si' Movement convened a digital wake for Francis on April 25, 2025. (CNS/Vatican Media)

"So today, we are gathering as a global family who share one home, our Earth … to remember the unique contribution [Pope Francis] made to global efforts to safeguard our common home in this time of profound ecological crisis.

"In this respect, Pope Francis was not only the leader of the Catholic Church, he was a world leader of great stature, perhaps unparalleled in our times," Gold said.

Like any wake, the digital celebration of Francis' life was filled with anecdotes and emotions. Tomas Insua, the founder of Laudato Si' Movement who met numerous times with his fellow Argentine, Francis, fought back tears as he concluded the event by reading passages from the final chapter of *Laudato Si*'.

Now a movement of 900-plus Catholic organizations in 140 countries, Laudato Si' Movement has been intimately linked with Francis since its founding.

Its launch in January 2015, then as the Global Catholic Climate Movement, coincided with Francis' visit to the Philippines — including his journey to typhoon-ravaged Tacloban, donning a yellow poncho over his white papal cassock — and in anticipation of the encyclical he would release later that year, "*Laudato Si*', on Care for Our Common Home."

In the time since, Laudato Si' Movement has been the leading organization in elevating Francis' encyclical and teachings on the environment and climate change, using his words to mobilize Catholics to action, whether forming parish creation care teams, diving deeper into ecological spirituality, advocating politicians at the national and international levels, or divesting from fossil fuels.

One of the biggest initiatives, the Laudato Si' Action Platform, was a joint collaboration between the Vatican's Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development and Laudato Si' Movement. Clips of "The Letter," a 2022 documentary that Laudato Si' Movement and the Vatican developed on Francis and *Laudato Si*', played during the online memorial.

Francis undoubtedly placed environmental issues high on the agenda of the Catholic Church, said Msgr. Robert Vitillo, a member of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. That began with *Laudato Si*', issued just two years into his papacy as his first encyclical.

"He urged us all to turn away from this throwaway culture and recognize the intrinsic value in other human beings and in creation above all," Vitillo said.

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Johan Rockström, chief scientist at Conservation International and co-director of the Potsdam Institute who led research on planetary boundaries, praised Francis' grasp of climate science and his ability to tie those findings to social injustices exacerbated by the impacts of a rapidly heating world.

Francis raised a prophetic voice through *Laudato Si*', one which spurred women religious "to return to the roots" of agroecology and sustainable agriculture in local

communities to feed the hungry, provide dignified work and address food insecurity, said Sr. Maamalifar Poreku, executive co-secretary of the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Commission of the International Union of Superiors General.

"Inspired by Pope Francis, these women preach not merely with words, but with seeds, sweat and sacred actions," said Poreku, a Missionary Sister of Our Lady of Africa. "They remind us that the Earth is not a resource, it is a gift."

In the online comments, one person marveled that Pope Francis was the first under that name, saying, "So proud to have [been] Catholic under his guidance."

Even as a Methodist, climate activist Bill McKibben said he felt chills hearing that Jorge Mario Bergoglio had chosen St. Francis of Assisi as his namesake. He praised Francis' intellectual prowess in *Laudato Si*', his command of powerful gestures and understanding of the important role of beauty in environmental work.

"Everything about his papacy filled out the promise of that name," he said.

> 'Everything about his papacy filled out the promise of that name.'
>
> —Bill McKibben, on Jorge Mario Bergoglio choosing St. Francis of Assisi as his namesake
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Several speakers highlighted Francis' contributions to climate diplomacy. He timed the release of *Laudato Si*', in June 2015, to influence United Nations negotiations later that year that ultimately produced the Paris Agreement.

"His leadership played a crucial role for leading us to the success at COP21 and the Paris Agreement," said Laurence Tubiana, France's climate change ambassador at the Paris negotiations. She credited Francis with coalescing the faith movement in the lead-up to raise the moral stakes for a deal.

"With *Laudato Si*', he reframed totally the faith message around nature and the relation between human society and nature. He reframes ecological crisis as a moral crisis," Tubiana said.

Former Irish president Mary Robinson was among the political leaders who met with Francis around climate change. She too referred to his impact in the U.N. meetings — "*Laudato Si*' was referred to over and over again" — but she also recalled private and personal encounters with Francis where his simplicity and humor were on display.

Iyad Abumoghli, director of U.N. Environment Programme's Faith for Earth Coalition, shared how Francis through *Laudato Si*' shaped his understanding of the moral principles underlying ecological justice. It also informed the creation of Faith for Earth, and inspired him to initiate the creation of a Muslim sibling document to Laudato Si', "Al-Mizan, A Covenant for the Earth."

"Pope Francis [is] a man whose light has touched the world in ways we are only beginning to fully understand," he said, predicting his legacy "will echo through generations."

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>
> —Laurence Tubiana, speaking about Pope Francis
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A theme throughout the online memorial was a resolve that the responsibility for bringing Francis' full vision for *Laudato Si*' to life now falls on others.

The encyclical and Francis' entire papacy represent a call to action for all, said Yeb Saño, board chair of Laudato Si' Movement.

"As pilgrims of hope, I'm sure he wants us to transform the hope he has inspired in us into action to protect the ultimate cathedral that is planet Earth, to bring Laudato Si' to life," Saño said.

"At a time when the words 'hope' and 'climate change' don't often appear in the same sentence, let's all remember Francis' courage, and let's shoulder together the yoke of prophetic resolve that he embodied, because anything less would be a sin," said the Rev. Fletcher Harper, an Episcopalian priest and executive director of

GreenFaith.

Peruvian Auxiliary Bishop Lizardo Estrada Herrera of Cuzco, secretary-general of the Latin American Episcopal Council, told those gathered that through their work for climate and socioenvironmental justice they serve as a living expression of Francis' papal legacy.

"In every gesture, every word, every action for our Common Home, you bring to life Pope Francis' dream: a humanity reconciled with God, with one another, and with all of creation."

"And may we all, like Saint Francis of Assisi, joyfully sing: '*Laudato Si*', mi Signore' in every step, every struggle, and every new dawn," he said.

This story appears in the **The Legacy of Pope Francis** and **Laudato Si' at 10: Impact on the church and world** feature series.