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Pope Leo XIV, the former Cardinal Robert Prevost, waves to the crowds in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican after his election as pope May 8, 2025. The new pope was born in Chicago. (CNS/Vatican Media)



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May 9, 2025

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The world is still getting to know Pope Leo XIV, and that includes where he stands on environmental issues like climate change.

Even with few details, environmentalists both within and outside the Catholic Church seem optimistic based on what they have learned so far about Cardinal Robert Francis Prevost, the Augustinian friar and first successor to St. Peter from the United States.

Ronald Moreno, a Peruvian grassroots leader and Catholic environmental activist, was familiar with Leo during his time as bishop of Chiclayo. He called him "a pope with a Peruvian heart."

"He showed his preference for the most vulnerable," Moreno said. "I am convinced that his leadership will inspire us to keep working for justice and the care of our common home."

That phrase — care for our common home — became synonymous with Pope Francis throughout his 12-year papacy, offering a subtitle to his landmark 2015 social encyclical on the environment, *Laudato Si*'.

How Leo might carry forward Francis' emphasis on ecological concern, including church and global action on climate change, is not yet known.

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As an Augustinian friar, he spent two years in mission work in Trujillo, Peru. He returned to Peru in 2014 when Francis named him bishop of Chiclayo, a mission diocese in the northern part of the country. He remained there nine years until Francis appointed him as prefect of the Vatican's Dicastery for Bishops.

In that capacity, Prevost attended a November 2024 conference at the Vatican on environmental crises. He said the answer to such challenges must be based in the church's social doctrine.

"Dominion over nature — the task which God gave humanity — should not become 'tyrannical.' It must be a 'relationship of reciprocity' with the environment," Prevost said at the event, according to a Vatican News report.

Prevost, who was also president of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America, expressed caution about harmful costs that can be associated with technological development, while also noting Vatican initiatives to install solar panels and employ electric vehicles.

The time had come, he said at the event, to move "from words to action."

"We couldn't agree more," said Lorna Gold, executive director of the Laudato Si' Movement, a network of 900-plus Catholic organizations globally working to live out Francis' calls for ecological conversion and action.

"We look forward to working with Pope Leo XIV in this 10th anniversary year of *Laudato Si*'," she told EarthBeat.

Gold, along with other Catholic and non-Catholic environmentalists, have drawn hope from Leo's references to Francis in his opening message to the world as a sign he will continue the Argentine pope's emphasis on the poor and marginalized of the world, including those facing disproportionate impacts from rising temperatures, pollution and deforestation.

"We welcome Pope Leo XIV with open arms and pledge to walk beside him and, as he said, to build bridges, work for peace, and live the Gospel without fear," Dan Misleh, executive director of the Washington-based Catholic Climate Covenant, said in a statement.



A drone view Feb. 4, 2025, shows the 8-mile-long Avenida Liberdade being constructed through protected rainforest to Belém, Brazil, which will host the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP30) in November. (OSV News/Reuters/Adriano Machado)

Catholic environmental activists also applauded the new pope's selecting of the name Leo XIV, an apparent nod to Pope Leo XIII, who laid the foundation for modern Catholic social doctrine with his 1891 encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*.

"In choosing Leo XIV, he's really recalling Pope Leo XIII, who was somebody who broke the mold and shifted the attention of the church onto the pressing issues of the time," Gold told EarthBeat.

"We are expecting Leo XIV to walk in the footsteps of Pope Francis on the journey of synodality and in care for creation and care for the poor, and especially in the times that we're living in, coming with a message of peace for all of humanity and all of creation."

Some clues that he may do just that are found on the X (formerly Twitter) account of Robert Prevost.

In 2015, in the run-up to the United Nations climate summit in Paris, Prevost tweeted in all caps "SIGN THE CLIMATE PETITION" and included a link to the petition organized by Laudato Si' Movement (then the Global Catholic Climate Movement) to collect 1 million Catholic signatures in support of a global climate deal that became the Paris Agreement.

Earlier that month, he posted a photo of Catholics carrying a banner picturing Francis and referencing *Laudato Si*' at a climate march in Chiclayo, Peru. He wrote on the post "*El planeta nos necesita*" — "The planet needs us." It is not clear if Prevost attended the march, as well.

In June 2017, the account retweeted a post from Laudato Si' Movement urging President Donald Trump to read *Laudato Si*' — a copy of which Trump received from Francis — as he was considering a U.S. withdrawal from the Paris accord, which he ultimately exited days later.

Earlier that year, Prevost retweeted a story from Catholic News Service about Catholic Relief Services — the U.S. bishops international development agency — expressing worry that the U.S. would not meet its carbon emissions target under the Paris Agreement after Trump issued an executive order to weaken emissions limits on power plants and roll back international climate financing.

Other social media posts acknowledged Francis inviting Catholics in 2015 to mark the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation and Earth Day (April 22) 2019, where he reshared a Peruvian Episcopal Conference post with an illustration of Francis hand-in-hand with Indigenous people and the message "Let us take care of our Mother Earth, just as different cultures have done throughout history and as they do today."

Ana Toni, Brazil's secretary for climate, energy and environment and incoming president of the COP30 U.N. climate summit to be held in the Amazon in November, called it encouraging to see some early signs that Leo may be aligned with Francis on environmental challenges. His comment — "move from words to actions" — happens to be the motto of this year's summit.

"The COP30 Presidency hopes to welcome Pope Leo XIV in Belem in November to help us reach a climate agreement that will mark a turning point in the creation of a more prosperous, safer, fairer and sustainable future," she said in a statement.

On the social media platform X, Brazilian president Lula Inácio Lula da Silva joined in welcoming Leo, a second pope with deep ties to Latin America.

"I hope he continues Pope Francis' legacy, whose main virtues included the incessant search for peace and social justice, defending the environment, dialogue amongst all people and religions and respect for all of humanity," Lula wrote.

This story appears in the **Pope Leo XIV** and **Looking for Leo in History** feature series.