Opinion
EarthBeat
Man holds sign: "Climate Emergency."

A climate activist wears a protective mask during a protest June 8, 2023, while smoke and haze caused by wildfires in Canada pass through New York City. Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical "Laudato Si' " has spurred many Catholics to advocate for care of all God's creation. (OSV News/Reuters/Amr Alfiky)

by Laudato Si' Movement U.S. Advocacy Working Group

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Ten years ago, Pope Francis' groundbreaking encyclical *Laudato Si'* sparked a global awakening among Catholics and others to the need to care for all of God's creation — people and planet. Reading the signs of the times and urgently calling for action, it was perhaps the first encyclical to inspire a global grassroots movement.

Francis made clear that protecting creation is essential to the Catholic faith. It is not a political trend, but rather a moral and spiritual imperative grounded in the Scriptures, decades of papal teachings, and the guidance of bishops, women and men religious, priests and laity.

Across the United States, many people have become passionate advocates and evangelists for the care of our common home through engagement with efforts by the Laudato Si' Movement, Catholic Climate Covenant and other offices and organizations dedicated to the same cause.

"*Laudato Si'* has opened for me new understanding, connections for prayer and advocacy," said Holy Spirit Missionary Sr. Rose Therese Nolta.

"It grounded me in my work on the environment by giving a spiritual context for it," said Nancy Lorence, leader of Metro New York Catholic Climate Movement, one of LSM's first chapters. "It became my 'north star.' "

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Movements toward healing the planet are happening both inside and outside the church, as it becomes increasingly clear that Catholicism's commitment to honor all of God's creation — all life — makes a difference.

Laudato Si' **impact in the church**

The U.S. church has more than 2,300 registrations on the Laudato Si' Action Platform, according to Alonso de Llanes García, program manager of LSAP. The list of individuals, families, parishes, dioceses and other religious communities committed to the multiyear Vatican initiative continues to grow.

Women religious are instigating incredible transformations on their properties, from installing solar arrays to surveying grounds to discover ideal locations for native plants, removal of aquatic barriers, creation of pollinator pathways, and more. Catholic universities are investing in more environmental studies options, and divesting their investments from the further use and abuse of fossil fuels. Catholic hospitals are supporting initiatives to keep caring for our common home as part of their missions.

Dioceses across the country have staff devoted to implementing and advocating for proposals in *Laudato Si'*. In the Diocese of San Diego, Cardinal Robert McElroy (now in Washington, D.C.) assigned staff to implement a Creation Care Action plan. At the Pastoral Center in Boston, parking lots have been covered with solar arrays, offsetting energy consumption in the building itself. The Diocese of Davenport, Iowa, has committed to net zero emissions from its chancery buildings.

solar panels

Immaculate Conception Church installed more than 400 rooftop solar panels on several buildings of its campus in Hampton, Va., in 2019. The project was one of several the parish has undertaken in response to Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical "Laudato Si', on Care for our Common Home." (CNS/Courtesy Immaculate Conception Church)

This Jubilee and anniversary year, Catholics are taking Pilgrimages of Hope for Creation, with communities coming together throughout the country to plan and implement powerful journeys of faith across sites of ecological beauty and destruction — from the Salton Sea in California to mountaintop removal sites in Kentucky, from the lakes of Minnesota to the coast of Texas.

As Francis wrote in *Laudato Si'*, "The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change."

But these changes do not just happen automatically when an institution decides it would like to do things differently. They are dreamed, offered and implemented by Catholics at the grassroots who step up, ask questions and pursue the support needed to shift the way an institution works at the structural level.

"One impact *Laudato Si'* has had on me is that I am more active in my parish," said Glen Miller of Newark, New Jersey. "I saw it as a call to create a Creation Care Team and lead fellow parishioners to do small acts in response to the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor. I spend much more time actively engaged in our parish than before."

Adam Fitzpatrick, Minnesota LSM Chapter co-leader and social mission outreach coordinator for the Center for Mission serving the Archdiocese of Minneapolis-St. Paul said, "*Laudato Si'* has served as a foundation for how I operate as a leader in Catholic spaces and has acutely drawn my attention to the interconnection of how different social crises are all affected by each other."

flood

This is a view of a flooded area in Pikeville, Kentucky, Feb. 16, 2025. At least 24 people died when severe weather hit the state. (OSV News/Reuters/Justin Prater)

Laudato Si' impact in the world

Through grassroots advocacy and local legislative efforts, Catholics are supporting policies and legislation focused on healing the planet. Even amid setbacks, Catholics across the country remain committed to changing hearts and minds.

The Inflation Reduction Act was one such win in efforts to address the climate crisis. This Environmental Protection Agency program includes support to churches in the form of tax credits for clean energy projects and to families for energy efficiency improvements in homes. Nonprofit Catholic organizations, such as religious orders that are not eligible for the tax reductions, benefit in other ways, such as direct payment for energy efficiency initiatives.

The measure was passed with advocacy from hundreds of Catholics contacting their legislators through "Encounter for Our Common Home," a campaign organized by Catholic organizations, including the Catholic Climate Covenant, Catholic Health Association of the United States, Franciscan Action Network, Laudato Si’ Movement in the U.S., Leadership Conference of Women Religious, Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, St. Columban Mission for Justice Peace and Ecology, Sisters of Mercy and Society of the Sacred Heart.

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And in statehouses throughout the country, Catholic advocacy inspired by *Laudato Si*' has helped move local legislative victories which contribute to addressing the global challenge.

In Florida, the Everglades Forever Act restricts fossil fuel drilling within protected areas. In Illinois, the Climate and Equitable Jobs Act offers comprehensive energy legislation. Washington state won funding to explore the breaching of the Snake River Dams, which would help stop the impending extinction of Snake River salmon.

Catholics organized coalitions and campaigns which supported the passing of these initiatives, and many more. Benedictine Sr. Jean Marie Ballard, in Ferdinand, Indiana, said she is not sure she would be involved in climate justice were it not for Pope Francis' invitation.

Laudato Si' impact in the future

The papacy of Pope Leo XIV is still fresh, but organizations such as Laudato Si' Movement are hopeful. In his time as president of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America and prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops, then-Cardinal Robert Prevost said that when it comes to the ecological crisis, it is time to move "from words to action."

He stands alongside a global movement of bishops, women and men religious, priests and lay leaders who have been moving the words of *Laudato Si'* to action for the past decade, and who are ready to support him in continuing that work.

In these next 10 years, we hope even more people join the movement, for as Francis said, "Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home."

This story appears in the **Laudato Si' at 10: Impact on the church and world** feature series. View the full series.