News
EarthBeat



Bishop John Stowe of Lexington, Kentucky, stands beside a newly planted tree in Hisle Park. In September 2023, the diocese partnered with Green Forest Work on a tree planting day to celebrate the Season of Creation, with 300 new saplings placed in the ground. (Kevin Steele)

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This month, Pope Francis' landmark encyclical on ecology, "*Laudato Si*', on Care for Our Common Home," turned 10. To mark the occasion, EarthBeat and National Catholic Reporter are revisiting some of our coverage from the past decade with a series of "Laudato Si' 10 for 10" lists.

We start with U.S. dioceses.

In the 10 years since Francis released *Laudato Si*', dioceses across the United States have responded to varying degrees to the encyclical's call to care for the planet and its people. Below are 10 of those stories.

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1. Diocese of Lexington

The Diocese of Lexington, Kentucky, a mission diocese in the heart of Appalachian coal country, has pledged to reach net-zero emissions across its 59 parishes as well as schools and other institutions by 2030. Bishop John Stowe said the ambitious initiative was in response to increasingly urgent calls from Pope Francis that the church take concrete actions toward the preservation of the planet, including dangerous threats posed by climate change. Part of the process had each parish devise individualized plans to apply the teachings of *Laudato Si*' at the local level, with the pastor or parish life director directly involved.

Read this next: Bishop John Stowe urged Appalachia to heed the call of Laudato Si'. Here's how parishes are responding.



The creation care ministry of the San Diego Diocese has led a number of environmental initiatives, including tree plantings at parishes and schools, inspired by Pope Francis' encyclical, "Laduato Si', on Care for Our Common Home." (Courtesy of Emmet Farrell)

2. Diocese of San Diego

In 2021, the Diocese of San Diego, then led by Cardinal Robert McElroy, began to explore the process of removing direct and indirect investments in fossil fuel companies from its portfolio of trust funds, retirement funds and health funds. By the end of 2022, it had eliminated all direct investments in the extraction and production of coal, oil and gas and reduced its indirect holdings, through mutual funds, to 3%. The pivot in investment policy away from fossil fuels was done "in keeping with Pope Francis' ideas about stewardship of the environment and not wasting resources," along with addressing human-driven climate change, said Kevin Eckery, diocesan communications director.

Read this next: In first for US church, San Diego Diocese divests from fossil fuels



A 300-kilowatt solar energy project went into commercial operation Dec. 25, 2021, on the campus of the University of St. Mary of the Lake/Mundelein Seminary in Mundelein, Illinois. (UMSL/Mundelein Seminary)

3. Archdiocese of Chicago

Today, the power of the wind powers the Catholic Church in the Windy City. Beginning in January 2024, the nearly 400 parishes, schools, cemeteries and offices of the Chicago Archdiocese switched to 100% renewable energy sources for its electricity needs. Through its energy supplier Direct Energy, the archdiocese had purchased enough renewable energy certificates, or RECs, to cover the electricity consumption for the coming year for the more than 2,000 buildings under its purview. Each REC represents one megawatt-hour of electricity generated from a renewable source.

Read this next: Chicago Archdiocese to power parishes, schools with 100% renewable energy



A dried-up creek bed is pictured along Camino de Oeste Trailhead in Tucson, Ariz., Jan. 28. This year, Tucson has had 92 days above 100 degrees Fahrenheit." Experts say climate change in Arizona is causing more frequent and intense droughts and a shrinking snowpack, (OSV News/Bob Roller)

4. Diocese of Tucson

Tucson, Arizona, boasting upwards of 350 days a year with clear skies, lays claim as one of the sunniest cities in America. While the searing desert sun can pose unsafe and hazardous living conditions, its intensity provides its residents with an increasingly valuable resource — solar power.

As of September 2024, 12 of 77 parishes had installed solar power systems in the Tucson Diocese, the country's fifth-largest diocese by land, covering nearly 43,000 square miles across southern Arizona. The gradual shift to solar began in 2008 when Our Mother of Sorrows Catholic Church became the first in the diocese to tap the power of the sun. Others have followed, with interest growing. One factor triggering the diocese's growing adoption of solar power then-Tucson Bishop Edward

Weisenburger wasn't shy to name: climate change.

Read this next: In sunny Arizona's Tucson Diocese, solar power makes moral, economic sense



In May 2021, 76 trees were planted at St. Thomas More Academy in Washington D.C., through the Laudato Trees program and in partnership with local nonprofit Casey Trees. Later, 12 more were added to the campus. (St. Thomas More Academy/Gerald Smith)

5. Archdiocese of Washington

In Washington D.C., a volunteer group called Laudato Trees — a play on the name of Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical "*Laudato Si*', on Care for Our Common Home" — has sought out Catholic locations to plant American beeches and chestnut oaks alongside other native and well-adapted species, seeing potential in the church's expansive property footprint in the nation's capital.

Laudato Trees formed as a volunteer team of five lay Catholics looking to use tree planting as a way to more deeply ingrain *Laudato Si'* and church teachings around environmental justice across the Washington Archdiocese.

Read this next: Laudato Trees planting program enlists Catholic properties to help increase DC's canopy



Catholic University of America students take measurements of the pastoral center for the Newark Archdiocese as part of a pilot course providing energy and sustainability recommendations to Catholic dioceses. (Patricia Andrasik)

6. Archdiocese of Newark

When the idea of a sustainable architecture college course was pitched to bishops during a February 2024 meeting on amplifying the U.S. church's response to *Laudato Si'*, Cardinal Joseph Tobin of Newark, New Jersey, was intrigued. Less than a year later, Catholic University of America students traveled to the New Jersey archdiocese and later delivered an in-depth report on ways to improve energy use at its pastoral center.

Read this next: Laudato Si' 101: Catholic University students boost energy efficiency at Newark Archdiocese



The community garden at St. Pius X Church in Conyers, Ga., which was started in March, is seen Nov. 20. The garden, which feeds families in need, is an example of ways the Atlanta archdiocese hopes Catholics and parishes can implement Pope Francis' encyclical on the environment. (CNS photo/Michael Alexander, Georgia Bulletin)

7. Archdiocese of Atlanta

When people talk about examples of successful implementations of *Laudato Si'* at the diocesan level, they often point to Atlanta, where in December 2015, the Atlanta Archdiocese unveiled its Laudato Si' Action Plan, a 38-page document meant to turn the pope's words into work. Commissioned by then-Archbishop Wilton Gregory, now retired, it was compiled by scientists at the University of Georgia. Numerous other dioceses have since borrowed portions of the action plan in their own sustainability efforts.

Read this next: Action plan offers Atlanta Catholics down-to-earth ideas to implement encyclical

8. Archdiocese of New York

With the backing of Cardinal Timothy Dolan and top chancery officials, the New York Archdiocese hired Martin Susz in November 2014 to form its first energy management department. The New York Archdiocese set a goal of reducing its total energy costs, approximately $40 million annually, by 10%. From 2014 through summer 2018, they conducted energy audits at 108 sites, counting 300-plus buildings. That information allowed them to identify what upgrades to explore with pastors and principals.

Read this next: How four dioceses are actually doing something about the climate crisis



Bulletin boards display parish-led efforts to care for the environment at the Sacramento Diocese's Laudato Si' kick-off event on Sept. 9, 2022, at St. Anthony Catholic Church, in Winters, California. (Courtesy of Kim-Son Ziegler)

9. Diocese of Sacramento

In early 2020, members of the newly formed creation care committee at St. Anthony Parish were exploring ways to raise ecological issues within the parish. Their bright idea to install solar panels on the roof of the parish's Memorial Center soon became a first step toward flipping the switch on a wider effort to electrify the entire Sacramento Diocese into living out the message of *Laudato Si*'. Within months, a new diocesan creation care committee was established, and California's geographically largest diocese enrolled in the Vatican's Laudato Si' Action Platform.

Read this next: Sacramento parish goes solar, helps spark diocesewide movement to care for creation

10. Diocese of Burlington

An effort by the bishop of Burlington, Vermont, to promote greater care for the Earth and the teachings of *Laudato Si*' resulted in a diocesan-wide celebration of a Year of Creation in 2017.

The idea came about while Bishop Christopher Coyne and his advisers planned the diocese's 2016 celebration of the Season of Creation, an annual event that encourages Christians to pray for the Earth from Sept. 1 until Oct. 4, the feast day of Francis of Assisi.

Read this next: Green Mountain State's diocese gets greener
This story appears in the **Laudato Si' at 10: Impact on the church and world** feature series. View the full series.