Opinion
EarthBeat



Cactuses are pictured at Gates Pass May 20, 2022, in Tucson, Arizona. (CNS/Bob Roller)

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This year, 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.

A study published in 2021 found that in more than 12,000 columns by U.S. bishops between 2014 and 2019 — the period directly before and after the publication of *Laudato Si*' — only 93 mentioned climate change, global warming or their equivalent.

Today, we're featuring 10 bishops who *have* spoken about *Laudato Si*', ecological theology and spirituality, climate change or environmental justice, either in columns, speeches, statements or interviews. Below are 10 select quotes, with links to their full remarks.

Bishop Joseph Tyson

"As a group, the USCCB has taken important stances on the climate crisis, asserting its voice with clear policy positions. Last year, I advocated for their climate positions as part of a delegation of Catholic leaders visiting the White House to amplify Pope Francis' exhortation on climate, *Laudate Deum*. Archbishop John Wester, Bishop Edward Weisenburger, Sister Carol Zinn from Leadership Conference of Women Religious and Lonnie Ellis from In Solidarity made the trip together.

"It was quite an experience to bring the pope's message to the building where so much national policy takes shape. Within five months of our visit, the Environmental Protection Agency enacted all four of our policy stances — on mercury, methane, carbon pollution from power plants and emissions from heavy-duty vehicles. We weren't the only people raising our voices — groups advocating for public health and the environment have long pushed for these protections."

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Bishop Edward Weisenburger of Tucson, Arizona, from left, Archbishop John Wester of Santa Fe, New Mexico, Sr. Carol Zinn, Bishop Joseph Tyson of Yakima, Washington, and Lonnie Ellis at the White House, Nov. 17, 2023, for a meeting about climate change. (RNS/In Solidarity)

Archbishop John Wester

"Technology and human experience keep telling us that our planet is small and interconnected. I would argue that faith tells us something similar. Faith tells us that we are one human family living together in a common home. This common home belongs to God, as the Bible's Psalm 24 states: 'The earth is the Lord's and all that it holds.'

"That is why Francis can boldly assert that polluting our air and water is 'a sin against ourselves and a sin against God.' We commit grave harm against ourselves through environmental destruction and we go against God's plan for us, which is to live in right relationship with one another and with God's creation."

Read this next: Three Catholic bishops and a nun walk into the White House. Here's why it's no joke.



Bishop Robert McElroy of San Diego celebrates a bilingual Mass for Earth Week at St. James Church in Solana Beach, California, April 17, 2021. The San Diego Diocese has divested its financial holdings from the fossil fuel industry, the first Catholic diocese in the United States to make public such a move. (CNS/The Southern Cross/John Gastaldo)

Cardinal Robert McElroy

"Climate change and the degradation of the earth are the most important global moral challenge that we face at this moment in our history. For this reason alone, *Laudato Si*' should be a focus for every Catholic university.

"But *Laudato Si*' is so much more than this. It is a profound call to all women and men to recognize God's personal and loving presence in the wonder of creation. For the Catholic university, which seeks to bring to its students a genuine recognition of the existence and the benevolence of God, *Laudato Si*' points to the single most universally inviting pathway to encounter with God that exists for the young people whom we are forming in faith and character."

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Cardinal Blase Cupich

"While the sense of absolute freedom without responsibility has led us to take from the Earth more than we need, it has also alienated us from our fundamental identities as brothers and sisters of the same human family. Let us be clear. Sharing, solidarity, and communion are neither anti-freedom values nor the basis of an anti-American 'socialist' plan. They are first and foremost Christian values, deep human values that are vital for actual human development.

"What is needed are new political systems 'capable of reforming and coordinating institutions' (LS 181) and producing policies that are 'far-sighted [...] and interdisciplinary' (LS 197) systems that intrinsically include the notion of justice. We also need bold politics capable of challenging long-standing idols and free-market fundamentalisms, while also maintaining integrity and transparency (cf., LS 182; 189). Above all, we need open, participatory and inclusive political systems that involve all forms of wisdom (cf., LS 63)."

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Cardinal Joseph Tobin

"How predictable it is that the countries and people who are the poorest in the world and have contributed the least to the crisis are the most affected. The most vulnerable populations are again paying the price for choices made by wealthier and more powerful nations. In my work as the leader of the Archdiocese of Newark, I listen to the stories told by immigrants from various corners of the globe who are arriving at our parishes and church institutions. They come seeking refuge from situations imposed on them by others, decisions that undermine their ability to sustain themselves on their land or support their families.

"The faith community, with its vast reach and moral authority, has a pivotal role to play in engendering the kind of change we need to see. Pope Francis has shown the way as a staunch advocate for the environment."

Read this next: Cardinal Tobin: Faith leaders can influence the world on climate change

Bishop Thomas Gumbleton

"We're destroying this world that Jesus taught us to love. Do you remember how he spoke so fervently about the flowers of the field and the birds of the air? God takes care of them, Jesus says, because God loves them. We destroy them.

"In the past 50 years, over 26 billion species of birds have been destroyed. That means lots of dramatic and disastrous changes in our planet because our ecological system is all connected. When we destroy one part, it affects other parts. If we don't stop within 15, 20 years, our planet will not be able to support human life. As the youngsters throughout the world this past Friday went on strike, they were demanding that we make the changes.

"There is a climate treaty. Our country pulled out of it; we're not supporting it any longer. The young people are saying, 'This is wrong.' "

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A man from a homeless encampment receives care from Circle The City's mobile medical unit on the 14th day of temperatures rising to 114 degrees F July 13, 2023, in Phoenix. Bishop Edward Weisenburger of the Diocese of Tucson, Arizona, calls climate change a critical topic. (OSV News/Reuters/Liliana Salgado)

Bishop Edward Weisenberger

"The National Weather Service recorded that we hit 111 degrees Fahrenheit on a day in September. That affects not just Catholics. That affects everybody.

"We've had thousands of dead bodies found in the desert. A third of the heat deaths we've had in Arizona in the last couple of months were migrants.

"From March to August, the Pima County medical examiner said there were 178 heat-related deaths. Yuma County, about four hours west of Tucson, which is also part of my diocese, is oftentimes one of the hottest places in the nation. From May to August, Yuma County had 29 heat-related deaths. Those numbers add up, and many are migrants and poor people who can't escape the heat.

"Climate change isn't a theoretical issue. It is a practical, local issue of local concern."

Read this next: Bishop Weisenburger says climate change is an issue of 'life and death'

Bishop John Stowe

"Investment in clean energy is both a strategy for creating jobs and reducing environmental destruction to our common home. The rural poor have regularly paid a higher price for the cheap energy from fossil fuels enjoyed throughout the country: illnesses like black lung disease, destruction of natural resources like water, and economic overdependence on the extractive industries have disproportionately affected poorer rural populations.

"To effectively work for justice for rural people living in poverty, and for all the economically disadvantaged, we will need to relearn our basic civics lessons and promote true participatory democracy. President-elect Biden will have to work hard to restore damaged institutions and promote the kind of trust that is necessary in

working for the common good."

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A bulldozer is at the edge of the Route Fire burning near Castaic, Calif., Aug. 31, 2022. (CNS p

A bulldozer is at the edge of the Route Fire burning near Castaic, Calif., Aug. 31, 2022. (CNS/Reuters/David Swanson)

Archbishop Paul Coakley and Bishop David Malloy (joint statement)

"We must learn the art of listening to sustain our faith, lest we end up among those, as the Old Testament prophets wrote, 'who have ears, but hear not.' We must also learn the art of listening to protect the environment. With careful attentiveness, the Holy Father rightly identifies a dissonance in the world, also resoundingly true in the United States. The beauty of the natural world and the harmony that comes from the integrity of creation speaks to us. Yet we also hear the 'cry of the earth and cry of the poor,' the 'little ones' being wounded by a throwaway culture fueled by greed, over-consumption, technocratic power, and indifference. We continue to experience the destructive force of natural disasters, floods, fires and heat waves and the consequent suffering of people, animals and ecosystems.

"However, by listening attentively, we can also catch the sound of hope emerging from our collective actions to protect creation, perhaps surprisingly, from our national politics and within our pilgrim Church."

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