Opinion
EarthBeat
Smoke from the American Electric Power's coal-fired Mountaineer Power Plant along the bank

A file photo shows smoke from the American Electric Power's coal-fired Mountaineer Power Plant along the banks of the Ohio River in New Haven, W.Va. (OSV News/Jim West)

by NCR Staff

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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.

Over the years, the National Catholic Reporter has consistently called for climate action — and applauded when it happens — from U.S. bishops leading individual dioceses to the national bishops' conference and the global Catholic Church, from one country's political agenda on the environment to worldwide climate negotiations at the United Nations, and from how we embrace Catholic social teaching in our own hearts and minds to how it's lived and learned at Catholic universities and colleges.

Here are the 10 most recent NCR editorials focused on the climate, environment and Catholic teaching on care for creation.

Advertisement

1. We must oppose Trump's immoral environmental agenda

We are urgently called to restore what has been recklessly damaged. We must reclaim a vision of Earth as our home, to act swiftly and compassionately, recognizing the deep interconnectedness and sacredness of all life. Only by embracing this truth can we begin the necessary healing — dedicated, humbly, to preserving this planet for ourselves and countless generations to come.

We must oppose Trump's environmental agenda firmly and persistently. Our resistance must be grounded in moral clarity and ecological responsibility, rooted in community action and personal choices. The urgency we face requires indefatigable advocacy for policies that restore and protect the environment and frontline communities. We must demand accountability, reaffirming our commitment to a future that respects science, honors nature and prioritizes life over profit. Only then can we reclaim the role God assigned to us as responsible caretakers, safeguarding the sacred community of Earth.

Read this next: Editorial: We must oppose Trump's immoral environmental agenda



Bishop John Stowe of the Diocese of Lexington, Kentucky, at a press conference April 23, 2024, announces a net-zero initiative to make the diocese one of the first in the U.S. to adopt such a commitment. At right is Adam Edelen, founder and CEO of Edelen Renewables. At left is Joshua van Cleef, director of the diocese's peace and justice office. (Courtesy of Diocese of Lexington)

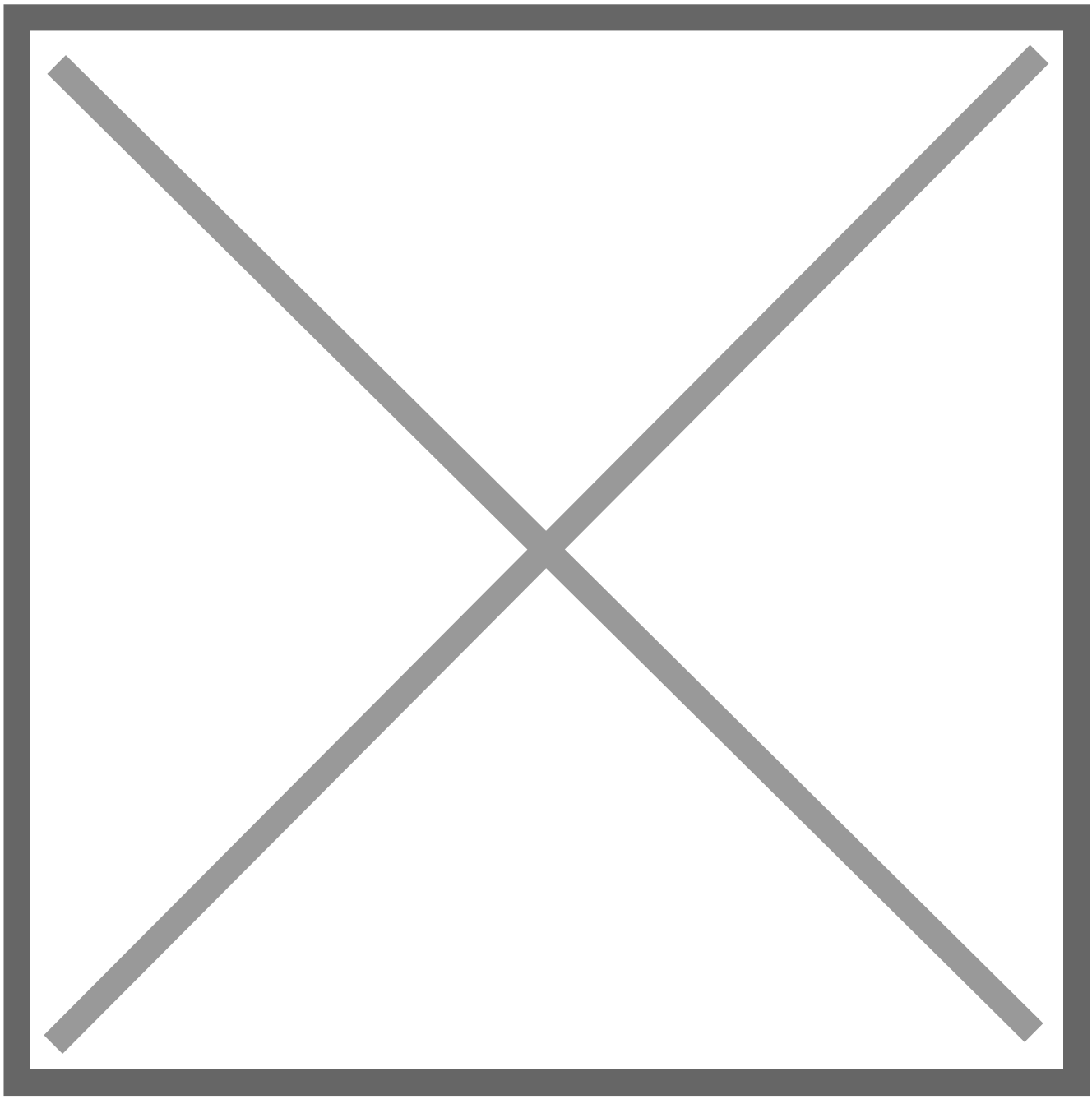
2. Finally, (some) US dioceses are taking the pope's climate message seriously

There are measurable, long-term and large-scale systemic changes to how Catholic dioceses operate in the United States that reflect a holistic approach to creation care beyond the ministry office. These initiatives require cooperation with the offices of facilities, finance, maintenance, human resources and more. They require input from experts in sectors outside religion, including energy, economics, sustainability, labor and business.

"It's one thing to talk about doing something. It's another thing to put something out there that you can be held accountable to and have measured for you," Bishop John Stowe said of the net-zero plans for the Diocese of Lexington, Kentucky.

And while the first U.S. diocese to commit to net-zero emissions is incredibly important news, it's that invitation for accountability and the implementation of a structure to follow through with it that may signify an even more important shift for the church in the U.S. today.

Read this next: Editorial: Finally, (some) US dioceses are taking the pope's climate message seriously



The University of Dayton removed half the lights in Roesch Library and upgraded the others to high-efficient double-life lamps and electronic ballasts, cutting energy use by half with a barely noticeable reduction in light output. (University of Dayton)

3. Catholic universities should make *Laudato Si*' central, not extracurricular

Rarely have we seen examples of the Catholic tenets highlighted in *Laudato Si'* woven into the fabric of how the church and its people operate in the world the way for which Francis' integral ecology calls. Safeguarding the planet is not an extracurricular activity, but that's how it is too often viewed.

And yet, along with various pollutants, change may well be in the air. At a conference on Catholic higher education at the University of San Diego in mid-January, San Diego Cardinal Robert McElroy urged Catholic universities to use *Laudato Si'* as a central pillar to their missions. This is the type of integration required to truly live out church teaching on integral ecology, solidarity and justice. It can't just be a lens through which we sometimes view our world. Rather, it must constitute the foundation and framework of a Catholic worldview.

If Catholic universities can do this well, they might serve as models for other church institutions, and dioceses and bishops conferences themselves.

Read this next: Editorial: Catholic universities should make 'Laudato Si' central, not extracurricular



Pope Francis begins his weekly general audience in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican Oct. 18, 2023. (CNS/Lola Gomez)

4. US bishops' response to *Laudate Deum* was underwhelming and odd

"USCCB President Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio has been on retreat with the Synod delegates and is participating in the opening sessions. Archbishop Broglio and his brother bishops in the United States look forward to spending time with the exhortation in prayer and identifying ways to continue their shared witness on behalf of God's creation," said a statement from James Rogers, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' chief communications officer.

The conference's official response to *Laudate Deum* did not even warrant the attention of an actual bishop. Furthermore, its brevity and vagueness read more like an "out of office" kickback email than the "welcome" its title claimed it to be for the pope's new exhortation on the environment. Were it not for an indistinct mention of "God's creation" at the end, readers would not even know about which exhortation the so-called statement speaks.

Read this next: Editorial: US bishops' response to 'Laudate Deum' was underwhelming and odd



Members of the Cristo Rey Parish perform during the Parade of Faiths for the Parliament of the World's Religions, Aug. 13, 2023, in Chicago. (AP photo/Paul Beaty)

5. Climate action requires interfaith collaboration

We need interfaith climate action to continue with increased intensity. It doesn't make sense for faith groups to approach climate action only from their own respective traditions. As Pope Francis said in *Laudato Si*', "We need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all. ... We require a new and universal solidarity."

The vital work of care for creation must be done together, and in working together across denominational lines, people of faith take the first step toward the integral ecology about which Francis so often speaks.

Read this next: Editorial: Climate action requires interfaith collaboration



In a view from the Empire State Building observatory June 7, 2023, New York City is engulfed in a haze of thick, smoky air from Canadian wildfires. (AP/Yuki Iwamura, File)

6. Air quality is a justice issue — and not just when it hurts NYC

While the source of the poor air quality that plagued New York in early June 2023 wasn't directly from burning fossil fuels, it came from wildfires. And science now confirms that the more intensely hot, dry and windy conditions that ignite and stoke such flames are tied to climate changes caused by human activity.

As Francis so often says, "Everything is interconnected." The causes and the effects of climate change do not respect economic districts or international borders. What happens in one part of the world can affect and is affecting everyone and everything else.

Francis and the teachings of the Catholic Church ask us to consider the impact of our choices on those most in need of protection. We are called to care about God's

creation — human and non — even when New York's skyline does not look like a caution sign warning of suffocation risks.

Read this next: Editorial: Air quality is a justice issue — and not just when it hurts NYC



(Dreamstime/Mrsash174)

7. Why have no US Catholic dioceses divested from fossil fuels?

Other Catholic entities in the United States have chosen divestment in the name of Catholic social teaching. The list maintained by the Laudato Si' Movement boasts U.S.-based religious orders, universities, Catholic charities, parishes, foundations, associations, societies and other organizations. (NCR announced our own divestment plans in 2021.) But when it comes to archdioceses and dioceses led by the U.S. bishops, not a single one has seen fit to take this important (and relatively easy) step toward a more just future — or any future, for that matter — for life on Earth.

For a faith that claims, as reflected in Francis' 2015 encyclical, Laudato Si', that "regarding climate change, there are differentiated responsibilities," it seems inconsistent for the country responsible for the most greenhouse gas emissions in history not to take up an equally substantial role in changing that behavior for the sake of the planet and those who live here.

[Since this editorial was published in May 2023, NCR environment correspondent Brian Roewe reported that the San Diego Diocese was the first in the U.S. to make public its divestment from fossil fuels in January 2024.]

Read this next: Editorial: Why have no US Catholic dioceses divested from fossil fuels?



Activists hold signs at the COP27 U.N. Climate Summit on Nov. 19, 2022, in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt. (AP/Nariman El-Mofty)

8. Climate change needs a Catholic 'both/and' solution

Surpassing the Paris Agreement's limit of heating 1.5 C will result in irreversible and catastrophic changes to our world that will make now-populated places uninhabitable for human life.

Can a loss and damage fund help? Maybe. But with important details like how much money will be in the fund, who will contribute and who is eligible for withdrawals yet to be determined (specifics that could take years to decide), we can't yet know if this landmark decision at COP27 will indeed provide the life raft vulnerable communities so desperately need to reach safe shores, or if it will merely keep them adrift for a bit longer on waters that continue to rise because we're not doing enough to stop them.

We need to both aid vulnerable communities with compensation for decades of loss and damage that climate change has already wrought, and stop the ongoing destruction at the source by divesting from and phasing out use of coal, oil and gas.

Read this next: Editorial: Climate change needs a Catholic 'both/and' solution



Nicole Brown wipes sweat from her face while setting up her beverage stand near the National Mall July 22, 2022, during a heat wave in Washington, D.C. (AP/Nathan

Howard)

9. The Vatican acts on climate change, but US bishops dawdle

In a message from Pope Francis for the 2022 Season of Creation, he said the planet is reaching "a breaking point" and urged "all of us to act decisively."

The Vatican continues to do just that, announcing on July 8, 2022, that it is now a formal party to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and intends to formally join the 2015 Paris Agreement. On July 19, it announced a new investment policy for all Vatican offices that discouraged "speculative investments" in oil and mining industries and encouraged investment in companies working to protect the environment and promote the use of clean energy.

Francis has urged nations to collaborate on pursuing ecological justice at two upcoming U.N. conferences — COP27 on climate change and COP15 on biodiversity. And a top Vatican official has expressed support for the proposed Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty.

It is clear that creation care is a priority of the Vatican and the leader of the Catholic Church. Yet, it continues to feel like the U.S. bishops have missed the memo.

Read this next: Editorial: The Vatican acts on climate change, but US bishops dawdle

A coal-fired power-plant is seen along the Ohio River in Moundsville, W.Va., in this 2017 file p

A coal-fired power-plant is seen along the Ohio River in Moundsville, W.Va., in this 2017 file photo. (CNS photo/Brian Snyder, Reuters)

10. Bishops must commit to saving the Earth now

Given that the very habitability of our planet may depend on the results of the U.N. climate change summit, it is a good time for Catholics everywhere to be praying and fasting, in hopes that our leaders will finally (finally!) commit to doing whatever it takes to save the Earth we are destroying.

It is also a good time — really, well beyond a good time — for Catholics to act. Especially U.S. bishops and leaders of Catholic organizations that manage physical plants, including diocesan offices, parish churches, schools, cemeteries and

numerous other facilities across the country.

Read this next: Editorial: Bishops must commit to saving the Earth now
This story appears in the **Laudato Si' at 10: Impact on the church and world** feature series. View the full series.