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Sr. Anna Bakutara waters her brassica in the greenhouse on the farm at St. Mary's Abbey, an enclosed order of Cistercians, in Glencairn, Ireland, Aug. 30, 2022. The monastery uses green energy and sustainable farming to try to make itself self-sufficient for heating and food. (CNS/Reuters/Clodagh Kilcoyne)



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June 25, 2025
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On the final Sunday in May, environmentally minded Catholics in the Diocese of El Paso, Texas, gathered at St. Luke Catholic Church for the celebration of Mass with a special guest.

Bishop Mark Seitz presided at the liturgy and focused his homily on ecological matters, including why they are of concern for Catholics.

"Think about how all of creation reveals God's goodness and his glory. And how creation that is turned into trash is an anti-sign of God's goodness and the beautiful harmony of creation," he said.

After the homily, Seitz put pen to paper for "a covenant" on behalf of the El Paso Diocese to join the Laudato Si' Action Platform, a Vatican program to animate Catholics worldwide in living out the messages of Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical, "*Laudato Si*', on Care for Our Common Home."

"It's not just a letter. We've already begun the work," Seitz said.

The moment in West Texas came a day after the 10-year anniversary of Francis' landmark encyclical on ecology, and a month after the Argentine pope's death. Since that time, questions have surfaced asking how major pillars of Francis' papacy — among them attention to environmental crises like climate change — will continue, both under Pope Leo XIV and within the wider Catholic world, including through the Laudato Si' Action Platform.

Related: What role will Pope Leo XIV play in the future of Laudato Si' ecological action?

Officials behind the platform, along with its proponents, remain determined that the ambitious project will carry on serving as a blueprint for the church's 1.4 billion

Catholics and thousands of institutions on how to transform Francis' words into actions toward sustainability and ecological conversion.

The public commitment to the platform in El Paso offered a sign of that perseverance.

In the days after Francis' death, members of the diocesan Laudato Si' commission wondered what his loss would mean for their work, if it would continue or fall to the wayside. After reflection with Seitz and the encyclical itself, they resolved that the state of the environment is too critical not to continue forward, for present and future generations.

"We are the church, and we need to do the work, too," said Cynthia Gonzalez, co-lead of the commission. "We need to let the Holy Spirit work in us so that we can continue with this."



Bishop Mark Seitz signs a letter committing the Diocese of El Paso, Texas, to participating in the Laudato Si' Action Platform, a Vatican initiative aimed at mobilizing Catholic institutions to put into action the teachings of Pope Francis in his

2015 encyclical "Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home." (Diocese of El Paso, Texas)

Laudato Si' Action Platform grows

In November 2021, the Vatican's Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development launched the Laudato Si' Action Platform, with Francis' full blessing and endorsement.

The initiative, conceived before the COVID-19 pandemic and delayed more than a year by it, sought to ignite a mass mobilization within the Catholic Church of environmental awareness and sustainability actions capable of shifting global action on climate change and other environmental crises like pollution, deforestation and biodiversity loss. Organizers with the platform often cited the theory that mobilizing a small portion of a population — 3.5% — can yield the critical mass needed to bring about lasting political and cultural change.

The platform maps a series of suggested actions along seven thematic goals derived from Laudato Si':

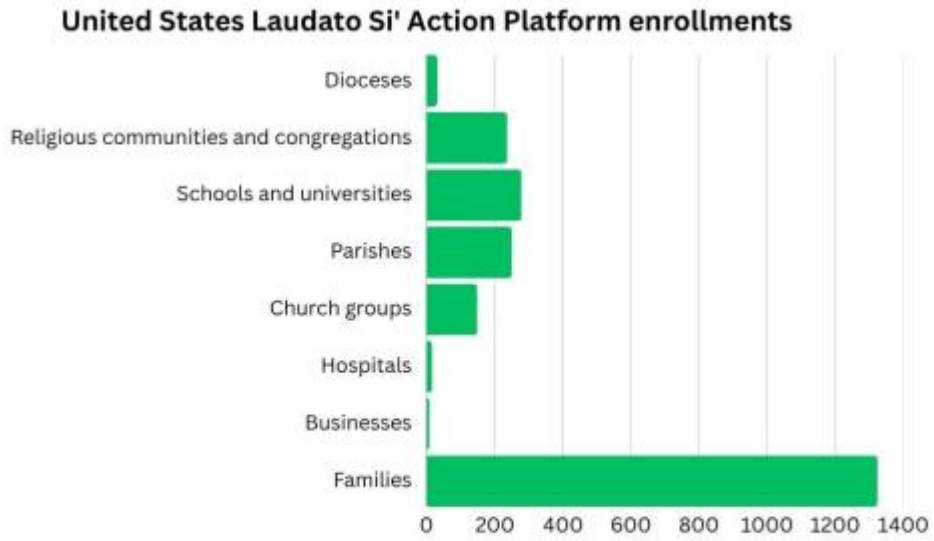
- Responding to the cry of the Earth;
- Responding to the cry of the poor;
- Ecological economics;
- Sustainable lifestyles;
- Ecological education;
- Ecological spirituality;
- Community action.

The platform was envisioned as a way for the Catholic Church to meaningfully contribute to global efforts to limit calamitous impacts of climate change. Scientists say global greenhouse gas emissions need to be nearly halved to put the planet on pace to hold temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit), the higher ambition goal in the 2015 Paris Agreement.

In three-and-a-half years, the platform in many ways has become a fulcrum for Catholic environmental action, both old and new.

Overall enrollment has eclipsed 10,600, roughly evenly split between institutions and individuals, according to Alonso de Llanes, program manager for the Laudato Si' Action Platform. Platform officials estimate the project already has directly impacted 20 million people in 150 countries.

Among enrollees, 892 have submitted individualized *Laudato Si'* action plans — outlines of actions they will take over multiple years. Schools and universities (1,546), religious congregations and communities (1,394), and church organizations and groups (1,028) have led sign-ups so far. Dioceses have lagged behind, with around 300 signed up worldwide.



As of late May, U.S. enrollments in the Laudato Si' Action Platform include 32 dioceses, 237 religious communities and congregations, 279 schools and universities, 251 parishes, 149 church groups, 17 hospitals, nine businesses and 1,324 families. (NCR/EarthBeat graphic)

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Geographically, Europe and North America have produced the largest shares of registrants, with Italy and the U.S. at the top, the latter with approximately 2,300 enrollments.

"Americans are very participative and into practical engagement," de Llanes said.

As of late May, U.S. enrollments count 32 dioceses, 237 religious communities and congregations, 279 schools and universities, 251 parishes, 149 church groups, 17 hospitals and nine businesses. In addition, 1,324 families have also signed up.

The Catholic Climate Covenant has served as lead booster for the Laudato Si' Action Platform in the United States. Likewise, Laudato Si' Movement, which operates the platform, has encouraged participation throughout its 900-institution network. And the International Union of Superiors General and the Union of Superiors General, the umbrella organizations for the church's women and men religious orders, have made enrolling in the platform a cornerstone of their Sowing Hope for the Planet campaign .

Each of those Catholic entities encouraged participation in the Laudato Si' Action Platform during their online gatherings marking the encyclical's 10-year anniversary.

"Ecological conversion is not just about caring for the environment, it's about letting our faith reshape how we live. And that's why I think that the platform is a great tool that is here to help the church concretely respond to the call for ecological conversion," said de Llanes.



Pope Leo XIV visits a field where the Vatican is studying setting up a solar farm on land surrounding the Vatican Radio shortwave transmission center at Santa Maria di Galeria outside of Rome June 19, 2025. (CNS/Vatican Media)

For its part, the integral human development dicastery, led by Cardinal Michael Czerny, continues to actively promote the Laudato Si' Action Platform in its conversations with bishops and Catholic organizations. Czerny himself did so during the Catholic Climate Covenant's *Laudato Si'* celebration May 29.

Tebaldo Vinciguerra, a dicastery official working on environmental issues, said, "I can testify the curiosity and the impact of the encyclical letter Laudato Si' didn't last only three or four years. Frankly, no, no, it's still very, very present."

Vows to fulfill Francis' call to care for creation

Still, enrollments in the Laudato Si' Action Platform represent a small fraction of the Catholic Church's hundreds of thousands of institutions, parishes and dioceses.

In May, the platform unveiled new revisions in response to participant feedback, with aims to make clearer the post-enrollment process and how to develop a plan. A more interactive website now recommends actions based on the type of institution and location. And for the first time, the platform offers participation certificates for institutions to publicize their involvement.

The original seven-year time frame for completing *Laudato Si'* plans has been replaced with an annual cycle that participants can assess and renew each year, de Llanes said, "while still maintaining the spirit and the long-term vision of ecological conversion."



Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio of Brooklyn, N.Y., completes the honors at a solar panel ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new Laudato Si Corporation June 10, 2021. The green initiative was launched to generate power with arrays of solar panels atop residential buildings operated by Catholic Charities of Brooklyn and Queens. (CNS/The Tablet/Bill Miller)

Ongoing challenges come from institutional resistance and financial limitations. The platform has sought to overcome those through hosting more than 1,300 free resources online, a mix of how-tos and case studies from other platform participants. Regular webinars also provide guidance, and staff provide direct support, as de Llanes did in May in attending a three-day retreat with a women religious congregation in Paris to help discern how their charism connects with integral ecology.

Those resources, and the webinars in particular, have been valuable for participants, said Michael Schuck, a theologian at Loyola University Chicago and coordinator for the platform's working group for universities.

"The intention [was] to animate environmental sustainability at all levels of the church. I think the Laudato Si' Action Platform has done that. It has animated various sectors of the church, but at different levels of intensity. It's just, it's spotty," he said.

Well before *Laudato Si'* was published, many religious orders had robust environmental ministries, such as advocating for communities impacted by pollution, deforestation or land grabs, and making environmentally sustainable improvements in their own properties. Through Sowing Hope for the Planet, religious communities have placed special emphasis on implementing sustainable agriculture, adopting renewable energy and mobilizing the grassroots for environmental actions.



An aerial view taken in 2023 shows solar panels installed by Mission Energy at the Passionists' provincial office at Immaculate Conception Monastery in the New York borough of Queens. Mission Energy manages the Catholic Energies program, an initiative of the Washington-based Catholic Climate Covenant, which helps Catholic facility owners with starting solar energy projects. (OSV News/Courtesy of Mission Energy)

"Women religious are trying to find concrete ways in which they can contribute to the care and the healing of our common home," said Missionary of Our Lady of Africa Sr. Maamalifar Poreku, co-executive secretary for the UISG-USG Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation commission.

Looking ahead, a main goal for organizers behind the Laudato Si' Action Platform is to enroll more dioceses — seen as a central cog that, once enrolled, could unleash a cascade of parishes, schools and other organizations following suit.

Such an example is on display in Lexington, Kentucky, where Bishop John Stowe directed all parishes in the Appalachia diocese to enroll in the platform and create Laudato Si' plans.

"The dioceses are the heart of the church in the regions, in the communities," de Llanes said. "And if the platform can serve as a tool for them in order to create awareness of interconnection, create awareness of respect for creation, then the whole world can change."

In El Paso, the platform helped spur rejuvenation in its own right.

Shortly after *Laudato Si'* was released on June 18, 2015, the diocese at the U.S.-Mexico border took steps to reduce energy use. But efforts at the chancery waned — with much attention on the plight of migrants — until recent years when several parish creation care teams, including at St. Luke, reached out to the diocese requesting that it expand efforts. In October, Seitz formed a Laudato Si' commission to take the lead.

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"It started from just individual Catholics who wanted to do more about *Laudato Si'*," said Gonzalez.

Currently, the commission is focused on the diocesan level, including making its pastoral center and other buildings more energy efficient, and raising awareness of church teaching on ecological spirituality through annual Masses. Commission members hope the diocese can set the example for the parishes, who will ultimately join the platform, too.

How quickly Catholics in El Paso and elsewhere will heed Francis' calls in *Laudato Si*' for swift action, particularly when it comes to climate change, remains uncertain. The planet is heating at a record rate due to increasing greenhouse gas emissions, and is on track to surpass the 1.5 C target of the Paris agreement some time in 2028, a new study out last week concluded.

While questions have risen about how Catholic engagement with *Laudato Si*' will sustain without Francis, Vinciguerra, the dicastery official, said that is the wrong way to think about the long-term process of building a better world that the encyclical describes. He pointed as an example to the enduring benefit from students studying integral ecology and other *Laudato Si*' principles in classes and degree programs created by Catholic schools.

"It's not about momentum. It's about conversion, perseverance and collaboration in the long term," he said. "Francis' loud voice was healthy, necessary. Indeed, in the fourth chapter of *Laudato Si*' [on integral ecology], he offered an inspiring paradigm for analysis, for commitment, for action."

"Yet what we will do with that tool, that framework, is up to us."

This is Part 2 in a two-part series on the future of Laudato Si'. Read Part 1 here.

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