

Religion and Ecology News Articles

May – June 2017

May 1, 2017

Indigenous Youth Took Center Stage at People's Climate March

By Cherri Foytlin
AlterNet

Washington D.C.—On Saturday, over 200,000 people marched through the streets of Washington, D.C. in response to the Trump administration's recent environmental policies and their possible effects upon climate change. That number included hundreds of indigenous youth who felt it was their responsibility to be present and heard.

"I've come to the march so I can stand up and show people that the youth have a voice to protect our water and the world we live in," explained 22-year-old Morgan Brings Plenty of the Cheyenne River Sioux Nation. "We only have one earth. We should make her better, not worse. Our world is showing that she is sick. We should protect her."

"If we protect the *mni* (water), it's a start," she added.

The youth began the day by gathering with their elders near the reflecting pool, just as the sun began to rise above the Capitol Building. With ceremonial sage burning, attendees began to speak and sing a greeting to the day, while offering prayers of protection for water and earth.

The ceremony, which welcomed the spirits from the four directions, officially opened the People's Climate March, a massive show of resistance on a day that also marked Trump's 100th day in office. Within a few hours, the youth would be braving record heat, to take the lead of the 1.5 mile march, which covered eight city blocks and ended near the Washington monument.

As participants made their way along the route, gigantic banners, puppets and signs could be seen above the crowd. "Water is Life," "Native Nations Rise," "Defend the Sacred," and "Respect the Rights of Mother Earth," were some of the messages.

As the convoy reached the White House, the crowd sang and native drum lines took to the front.

Merlejohn Lone Eagle, from Bridger, South Dakota, was among them. Although he is only 13, Merlejohn is already an experienced pipeline fighter. He said he worked with youth in his community to send videos to President Obama showing their opposition to the Keystone XL pipeline. He was overjoyed in the fall of 2015 when Obama rejected the pipeline.

But he couldn't celebrate for long.

"We thought we were done until we heard about DAPL," said Merlejohn. He and his family spent several months going back and forth to Standing Rock and he spent part of last school year going to the Oceti Sakowin Camp School while working with other water protectors to defeat the pipeline.

Then in January, President Trump not only approved the Dakota Access pipeline, but overturned President Obama's directive, moving forward with the KXL as well.

James Hansen has called the Keystone XL pipeline "a fuse to the largest carbon bomb on the planet," regarding its role in unleashing the carbon stored in the Canadian tar sands region. He said it would mean "game over" for the human race and the planet.

Meanwhile, DAPL runs under the Missouri River and the KXL will go through the Ogallala Aquifer. Together, they threaten drinking water for millions of people and endanger more than 30 percent of the nation's irrigation water. Merlejohn said a spill could be devastating. "It'll kill the water, and people drink that water."

Merlejohn said he plans to continue to fight the pipelines and to protect the water for future generations.

"When my kids are my age I want the world to be healthy, good and protected," he said.

Jaime Butler, a 16-year-old from the Navaho reservation in Arizona, knows what it's like not to have clean drinking water. She said uranium mining has contaminated her community's water, which has been undrinkable since before she was born.

"I think anything that has to do with saving our environment for our future—and not just for the humans—I think just in general saving the environment is very important," she said.

Jaime is one of 21 youth plaintiffs from across the country who have filed a lawsuit against the federal government for not doing enough to protect their constitutional rights to "life, liberty, and property," from the effects of climate change. The young plaintiffs, who range in age from 9 to 20, allege that while U.S. administrations and agencies have known of climate change for more than 50 years, they have done little to curb the effects and protect their families and their futures.

Seventeen-year-old Mani Wanji "Journey" Zephier, of the Yankton Sioux Nation and a plaintiff in the suit, agrees, and has seen first-hand the effects of climate change in his Hawaiian community.

"In Hawaii, I see the impacts of climate change every day," Journey said. "Our beaches are shrinking with sea level rise, our reefs are dying, half the time our island—which used to be one of the wettest places on Earth—is in a drought, then storms come and we are flooding. Everything is more extreme."

He said his small town of Kapaa, on the island of Kauai, will be mostly underwater by the end of this century unless the world makes immediate changes.

“I am at the climate march to send a message to our government that our generation is here, we are awake, we know what they did and have been doing to destroy our planet and we are rising in solidarity to stop them. I am also here to send a message to Hawaii and the world, to please, wake up to the truth, science and facts, before it's too late,” said Journey.

Issues such as those affecting Journey were front and center for tribal youth who attended the march, while they also included talking points around tribal sovereignty, water rights and environmental justice.

All of these issues will continue to directly affect indigenous youth as they age, according to a 2008 UN report titled "Climate Change and Indigenous Peoples."

“Indigenous peoples are among the first to face the direct consequences of climate change, owing to their dependence upon, and close relationship with the environment and its resources. Climate change exacerbates the difficulties already faced by vulnerable indigenous communities, including political and economic marginalization, loss of land and resources, human rights violations, discrimination and unemployment,” it reads.

Tom Goldtooth, executive director of the Indigenous Environmental Network, says it is natural that native youth would be at the march and take the lead on these issues to protect the planet.

“As indigenous peoples we feel the pain Mother Earth and Father Sky have to endure due to pollution and rising temperatures. We march to elevate the indigenous voices that have the solutions to climate crisis.”

Ozawa Bineshi Albert, also an IEN board member, agrees. “I think young people bring new ideas and new approaches to the work,” she said. “We have been in this battle for a long time and will likely be in it for a long time. In this case, young people are not 'the future'—they are being affected today and have ideas about how to address it today.

“They have to be at the table when solutions are being discussed because they are the ones who are going to have to hold people accountable to see those solutions manifested. They are our wildest dreams right now.”

“As long as Mother Earth is in danger, the youth of our Nations will continue to rise,” adds Morgan Brings Plenty. “We won’t stop, because we can’t stop.”

Cherri Foytlin is the state director for [Bold Louisiana](#), a signer to the Indigenous Women's Treaty to Defend Mother Earth and a mother of six living in South Louisiana. Follow her on Twitter [@CherriFoytlin1](#).

<http://www.alternet.org/environment/indigenous-youth-took-center-stage-peoples-climate-march>

May 1, 2017

Catholics bring Pope Francis' call to protect creation to climate march

By Dennis Sadowski
National Catholic Reporter

[Washington](#) - Carrying banners and signs with quotes from Pope Francis' encyclical "Laudato Si'," hundreds of Catholics joined the People's Climate March to call for moral and prayerful action to protect creation.

On a sweltering day that reinforced the message about the need to respond to climate change — the 91-degree temperature at 3 p.m. April 29 tied a 43-year-old Washington record for the date — many in the Catholic contingent said they felt they had a moral obligation to witness in the streets.

"We march for our grandchildren. Stop global warming," read one sign propped up in the back of St. Dominic Church in Washington, where about 300 people gathered before the march for Mass celebrated by Dominican Fr. Hyacinth Marie Cordell, the parish's parochial vicar.

"The Vatican is solar. What about US?" read another. "We resist, we build, we rise," read a sign from St. Francis and Therese Catholic Worker Community in Worcester, Massachusetts.

Underlying the messages on the signs and banners were people who shared a heartfelt concern to carry out Francis' call in his 2015 encyclical to live responsibly with the planet, remember the needs of others around the world and to reduce consumption and energy usage for the sake of God's creation.

They also wanted to send a message to President Donald Trump that his policies on the environment and energy development do not follow the pontiff's call to protect Earth.

For Manny and Mary Hotchkiss, the march was their second in two weeks. Both scientists, the couple from Portland, Oregon, joined a regional March for Science in New Orleans April 22 as they made their way on a cross-country trip to a meeting of Maryknoll affiliates in Ossining, New York.

After the Mass, Mary Hotchkiss, 72, a chemist, said the couple's involvement was required by their Catholic faith. Manny Hotchkiss, 74, a mechanical engineer, expressed dismay about the president's policies.

"The most important thing I see with this political scene, and it brings a tear to my eye to think about it, is that everything I tried to teach our kids growing up (about science) is fully rejected by the current administration," he said.

The 300 people at the Mass heard Cordell call for an "ecological conversion" during his homily. He said each person must act in any way possible to protect God's creation: reducing energy usage; limiting waste; choosing carpooling or biking and walking more; and buying less.

"We can learn increasingly to act not only with our own good and convenience in mind, but above all to think and choose according to what is best for all, especially for the poor and for future generations," the Dominican said. "This ecological conversion calls us to self-examination, to make an inventory of our lives and habits so that we can learn to be better stewards of our common home and its resources, which are meant for the good of all."

He said such steps require a revolution of the heart, as Francis has called each person to undertake. He described it as a "change toward responsibility and virtue, a transition to thinking about the common good, future generations, the poor, other living beings, God's glory and the environment in all of our decisions instead of thinking only in terms of a short-term, fleeting and superficial good or convenience for ourselves."

Sr. Kathy Sherman, a member of the Congregation of St. Joseph in LaGrange Park, Illinois, was pleased to hear Cordell stress the encyclical's themes.

"I feel like I'm marching for the children, for the future," she told Catholic News Service. "Earth is getting bad for us. If we don't do something there's not going to be anything like we've known for the future generations, and it breaks my heart."

Other members of Sherman's congregation joined a satellite march in Chicago, but she made the trek to Washington on her own because she said she felt it was important to take a message directly to administration officials.

"I think it's so essential that we connect climate degradation with economic and racial justice," Sherman added. "It's just the whole sense of the oneness."

A large banner mounted on a 12-foot bamboo pole carried by Malcolm Byrnes, 57, a member of St. Camillus Parish in Silver Spring, Maryland, was one of several that quoted the pope's encyclical. It read: "We need to reject a magical conception of the market."

"We have to bring things back into focus and see climate change as a human issue involving all of humanity, especially the poor," Byrnes said as he waited for the Mass-goers to begin walking to the assembly point for faith communities near the U.S. Capitol.

Byrnes explained that Francis' words had inspired him to consider his own actions in response to the divisive language the president and members of his administration have used during the first 100 days in office.

"We have to be activist," he said. "We have to continue to put the pressure on and to be active. Doing it as a Catholic is ever more poignant for me."

March organizers said the event had been planned as a follow-up to the September 2014 People's Climate March in New York City before Trump's election in November. The April 29 march was led by indigenous people who already are facing disrupted lives as the climate warms and causes drought and rising ocean levels.

The march kicked off less than 48 hours after the Environmental Protection Agency began to revamp its website, taking down pages devoted to climate science. The agency said in a statement late April 28 that the information was "under review."

Some of the Catholic marchers, a multicultural mix of young and old, families, and clergy, religious and laity, said they never had been involved in such a massive event, but that it was time to put their faith into action.

Rosio Ramirez, 58, a member of St. Jerome Church in New York City, said as she waited for the march to start that she decided to travel to Washington "for our rights."

"This president does not believe in science, so I'm trying to raise my voice for my grandson, his future," said the native of Mexico City.

Along the march route on Pennsylvania Avenue from the Capitol to the White House, Nancy Lorence, a member of St. Francis Xavier Parish in New York City, said personal actions are crucial if people of faith are going to make a difference. She carried a colorful cardboard sunflower on a short stick that read, "Catholics 4 the EPA," one of 45 similar signs that she and others making the trip had made.

"We feel like 'Laudato Si' calls us to be in the streets, as Pope Francis says, and be active on the social justice issues and climate change," Lorence told CNS.

"I've read enough to really think that this is an emergency," Lorence continued. "It might not affect us directly right now. But I think we are all called to think about the common good. We're all called to think about the least of these, and the people who are the least of these are being affected by climate change."

<https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/catholics-bring-pope-francis-call-protect-creation-climate-march>

May 2, 2017

Could making climate change a 'pro-life' issue bring conservatives on board?

By Ben Rosen
The Christian Science Monitor

The terms "pro-life" and "pro-environment" are not normally linked, but a growing number of Christian leaders insist they should be.

Pope Francis said so in [his 2015 encyclical](#) on the environment and human ecology. Now, the Evangelical Environmental Network (EEN), a nondenominational organization committed to “[creation care](#),” is promoting the argument that if you value life from its conception, you should value a clean Earth for the rest of a child’s life and for future children.

“When we talk about creation care in pro-life terms, in caring for our children, both born and unborn, 97 to 98 percent of people get it,” says Rev. Mitch Hescoc, president and chief executive of the Pennsylvania-based Evangelical Environmental Network. “That’s one of the reasons that I believe our community is growing to take more action, to protect God’s creations and to protect children.”

Associating "pro-life" with "pro-environment" is just one branch of religious environmentalism, a movement that frames conservation in religious terms. The idea has been around for decades, but has only started to gain traction among evangelicals recently, especially among Millennials. Still, most Americans [do not yet](#) associate climate change with religion and morality, according to the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication.

Groups like the Evangelical Environmentalism Network hope to change that. If they are successful, it could have a major impact on the way much of America views the issue, as evangelicals are estimated to make up [nearly a third of the population](#). But some sociologists and historians doubt that reframing climate change as a moral responsibility can reverse deep-seated skepticism among some conservative Christians about environmentalism, especially among older generations of evangelicals who have associated it with the culture wars over abortion and same-sex rights.

“[The religious environmental movement] doesn’t appear to have gained a lot of traction,” says Stephen Ellingson, a sociologist at Hamilton College in Clinton, N.Y., and author of “To Care for Creation: The Emergence of the Religious Environmental Movement.” “For a small number, it is primarily a moral and religious issue, but for many it’s not seen that way. It’s not seen as important, I think, because the environment is so highly politicized ... in some ways, it’s framed really technically, as lobbying, litigation, and legislation.”

The Evangelical Environmental Network and other faith-based organizations do not try to separate climate change from politics. Both EEN and the San Francisco-based Interfaith Power & Light, which encourages environmental stewardship among religious groups, were on Capitol Hill the past two weeks. But the groups try to downplay partisanship by emphasizing a moral obligation for action.

For Mr. Hescoc, religion provides the “biblical imperative” to act, while so-called market-based solutions are the answer on how to achieve results. Since EEN is anti-abortion, he says, it believes all lives must be cared for from the moment of conception. But the only way he believes he and other conservative Republicans can get on board is through solutions such as cap-and-trade programs or a carbon fee and fee dividend.

“It’s the only way we’re going to breach the chasm to conservatives,” he says.

Anti-abortionists have been highlighting the threats that pollution is thought to pose to unborn children for a dozen or so years, says Hescocx. Rev. Jim Ball, the past president of the network, tied [the rights of the unborn to the fight against mercury pollution](#).

Pope Francis also integrated environmentalism and abortion in his second encyclical, “Laudato si’,” when he wrote that environmental stewardship is simply “incompatible with the justification of abortion.” But the pope seemed to argue that people who care about endangered species and the melting of polar ice caps [could not also support abortion](#), as Crux reported. The Evangelical Environmental Network’s argument appears to fit more into the religious environmental movement, linking morality to the environment, not the other way around.

Many Christian denominations have long supported the modern environmental movement, in the 1960s and 1970s. Not evangelicals, however, writes Mark Stoll, a historian at Texas Tech University who specializes on religion and environmentalism.

“In the late 1970s they seized on the notion of the ‘culture wars’ and [lumped environmentalism together with abortion, feminism, gay and lesbian people’s rights](#), and secular humanism as contrary to Christianity,” he writes. “Hostile to environmentalism ever since, evangelicals cast even the solid science on global warming as a conspiracy against freedom and faith promulgated in schools and universities.”

This skepticism has continued until the present day. In 2014, The Pew Research Center found only 28 percent of white evangelicals said “climate change [is occurring](#) mostly because of human activity such as burning of fossil fuels,” the lowest of any religious group Pew surveyed.

Those attitudes [have softened](#) among some millennial evangelicals, led by the likes of Jonathan Merritt, author of “Green Like God: Unlocking the Divine Plan for Our Planet.”

A pro-life, pro-environment association, then, is about gaining a foothold among mainstream evangelicals and older generations, says Dr. Ellingson at Hamilton College.

“It’s almost like reasoning by analogy. ‘It’s like one of those issues for us. Then I can go ahead and support it,’” he tells The Christian Science Monitor in a phone interview.

Katharine Hayhoe, an atmospheric scientist and political science professor at Texas Tech University in Lubbock and an evangelical Christian, says EEN’s argument makes more sense than the “cognitive dissonance” she describes among some conservatives.

“So often it seems like pro-life stops when you’re born. If you’re really pro-life, you should be pro-life from conception to death,” she says, mentioning United Nations efforts to [calculate the human costs of climate change](#).

This strategy is being used in other conservative circles as well. Susan Bratton, an environmental science professor at Baylor University in Waco, Texas, says many conservative Protestants emphasize a humanitarian need to stop climate change. This includes helping communities under threat from natural disasters and food shortages. Rev. Canon Sally Bingham, president and

founder of Interfaith Power & Light, says that when she visits conservative congregations in the South, she does not mention climate change. Instead, she focuses her message on clean air, clean water, and a clean environment.

Two years ago, in 2015, this moral framing of climate change had not yet resonated with most Americans, according to the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication. In the spring of that year, 10 percent of Americans viewed global warming as a religious issue, 13 percent viewed it as a spiritual issue, and about 36 percent viewed it as a moral issue. But if this reframing does take hold, it could have a widespread impact, according to the study's authors. Americans tend to be more religious than citizens in many other industrialized nations, they write.

<http://www.csmonitor.com/Environment/2017/0502/Could-making-climate-change-a-pro-life-issue-bring-conservatives-on-board>

May 5, 2017

Earth Charter Affiliate speaks in UN General Assembly Dialogue on Harmony with Nature

Earth Charter Initiative

The Seventh Interactive Dialogue of the United Nations General Assembly on Harmony with Nature took place on Friday, 21 April 2017 under the Theme: **Earth Jurisprudence**.

The event counted with the participation of Professor Klaus Bosselmann, ECI Affiliate from New Zealand and Director, New Zealand Centre for Environmental Law, University of Auckland, who, as an Earth Jurisprudence expert, made a presentation on “The Next Step: Earth trusteeship”.

In Professor Bosselmann's speech he made a proposal to “accompany the current SDG process with high-level ethical dialogue and promote the idea of nation-states as trustees for the Earth and that the UN should provide a forum for achieving that.”

Below you can find Professor Bosselmann's intervention:

Interactive Dialogue of the General Assembly on Harmony With Nature

Friday, 21 Apr 2017

Trusteeship Council, UN Secretariat Building, New York

Theme: Earth Jurisprudence

“An Earth-centred worldview recognizes the intrinsic value of Nature; understands humans as fundamentally part of the natural world, that is, one life-form among many evolved from the

same natural processes. It further recognizes that there are biophysical limits to human activity and that our socioeconomic systems are embedded in natural systems. In this worldview, human-Earth relationships are based on a symbiotic connection, are interconnected and are subject to the natural laws of the Universe.

Indigenous peoples' philosophies, spiritualities and traditional forms of knowledge worldwide express the understanding that human governance systems must be derived from the laws of the Earth and comply with them.

Experts from around the world working in the natural and social sciences similarly recognize the need for an evolved, holistic worldview that must be rooted in respect for Nature and in the interdependence of the well-being of humankind and of the Earth.

In order to forge a balanced, healthy relationship between human activity and the Earth, there is an urgent need for society to reconsider how it perceives and interacts with the natural world.

Earth Jurisprudence recognizes that the Earth is the source of laws that govern life. It provides a cohesive framework reflecting the integrated nature of the world in which we live. And, as the source of laws that govern the community of life, Earth Jurisprudence also provides a cohesive framework underpinning many disciplines, weaving them together to create a more effective, holistic governance approach, one that reflects the integrated nature of the world in which we live."

In 2009, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 22 April as International Mother Earth Day. In so doing, Member States acknowledged that the Earth and its ecosystems are our common home, and expressed their conviction that it is necessary to promote Harmony with Nature in order to achieve a just balance among the economic, social and environmental needs of present and future generations. The same year, the General Assembly adopted its first resolution on Harmony with Nature.

[Click here](#) for more information.

<http://earthcharter.org/news-post/earth-charter-affiliate-speaks-dialogue-united-nations-general-assembly/>

May 9, 2017

Vatican conference unites science and religion's search for truth

By Junno Arocho Esteves
Catholic News Service

[Vatican City](#) - Science and religion are not at odds but are united in the continuing search for truth in unlocking the mysteries of the cosmos.

The scientific conference titled "Black Holes, Gravitational Waves and Space-Time Singularities" is an opportunity to show that "the church supports good science," said Jesuit Br. Guy Consolmagno, director of the Vatican Observatory.

"We are hoping that this meeting will also be an encounter of people with very different opinions but very close friendships that come from having the same common desire to understand the truth of the universe and how we can understand that truth," he told journalists May 8.

Renowned experts from around the world were to meet at Vatican Observatory in Castel Gandolfo for the May 9-12 conference, which seeks to bring together science and religion in the continuing search for truth in understanding the mysteries of the universe, he said.

The 2016 discovery of the existence of gravitational waves, predicted nearly 100 years ago by Albert Einstein in his general theory of relativity, was to be one of the topics of discussion. The discovery could open a new chapter in understanding celestial events and black hole regions in the universe, something that previously could only be hypothesized.

The conference also will celebrate the scientific legacy of Msgr. George Lemaitre, one of the fathers of the theory that the expanding universe could be traced to an origin point, also known as the "Big Bang theory."

As historic as Lemaitre's theory was, Consolmagno said, the Belgian priest was also mindful that the God's creation of the universe wasn't just a one-time occurrence but an event "that occurs continually."

"If you look at God as merely the thing that started the Big Bang, you reduce God to a nature god, like Jupiter throwing lightning bolts," he said. "That is not the God we as Christians believe in. We must believe in a God who is supernatural and we then recognize God is who is responsible for the existence of the universe and our science tells us how he did it."

Alfio Bonanno, an Italian cosmologist at the National Institute for Astrophysics, told journalists that the conference also aims to dispel the "myth" that religion fears science, because the search for truth "will bring us to God."

"We should not be afraid. Fear is not from God. Rather, we should go in search of this truth because truth — if we have this attitude of humility which was Lemaitre's attitude — we can also change our ideological preconceptions," he said.

"The search for truth is what unites us," Consolmagno added. "Those of us who are religious will recognize in the truth the presence of God, but you don't have to make that theological leap to have a desire to know truth."

"The first step in recognizing the truth is that you don't already have it," he said, adding that people cannot consider themselves good scientists nor good religious people "if we think that our work is done."

Regarding intelligent design, Consolmagno said that its original intention as a way of looking at the universe and seeing "the design of a good God" has been misused.

"If you mean that you can use our scientific ignorance as a way proving the existence of God, that would not be a God I would want to believe in," he said.

God, he continued, is not something one arrives to at the end of scientific research, but rather its starting point. In that way, "we then can see the hand of God in how we observe the universe."

"I am afraid of a God that could be proved by science because I know my science well enough to not trust it," the director of the Vatican Observatory said.

Consolmagno said it was important for scientists who are believers to make their science known to their fellow parishioners and remind them that "science was an invention of the medieval universities that the church founded."

"The logic of science comes out of the logic of theology and if there is a rivalry, it's a sibling rivalry," he said. "We need to know that it's a crime against science to say, 'only atheists can do it' because that would eliminate so many wonderful people from so many different religions who could contribute so much to science."

<https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/vatican-conference-unites-science-and-religions-search-truth>

May 9, 2017

A morning in Chile, after the forest fires

By María de Lourdes López Munguía
Global Sisters Report

This morning I look and enjoy the sunrise from the mountain ... but also I can smell the smoke from the forest fire.

I am sitting next to Eleuterio, a man who knows the heart of the trees, a man who has heard in his 80 years the sound of the wind embracing the hills and reaching the sea.

Sitting under an almond tree, the tree of solidarity (as poet [Gabriela Mistral](#) called it), we silently observed the destruction left behind by the [forest fires](#) in Chile earlier this year, the largest in the country's history, according to the authorities. The [fires](#) left 11 dead — including two policemen and four firefighters — destroyed about 3,000 homes, and devastated about 400,000 hectares (more than 1,500 square miles).

In his heart Eleuterio sees the house of his parents, where he himself was born; the memories of his childhood playing in the middle of the forest and his youthful dreams of having a family and

a simple wooden house. He remembers, too, his daily work in the forest, hoping it would allow the wood necessary to provide food and a dignified life for his children.

Today, all that has been destroyed. Although there is speculation about the causes of the fires, what touches my heart is what God has allowed me to share with people who were stripped of everything overnight: their homes, their clothes, their everyday lives — and even their dreams.

We were invited to share with them during a weekend in the region of El Maule, through a service of listening in the town of Santa Olga. We also visited people living in little villages in the woods.

I certainly did not do much, simply lent my heart and my ear to the cry of each person who, in the midst of tears, experienced a strong moment of unexpected and inexplicable mourning and loss. Their safe space, their home, their lands, had become a nightmare. Many families tried to save their homes by putting water in them, until the closeness of the fire and smoke drove them away.

Today, a month after the fires, the smoke is still perceptible in the air, and many people still sleep in tents. I see the pain in their eyes, I can feel the tears in their hearts for the suffering of this land and for the hopes that were lost.

In the midst of all this, two people gave me a sacrament of God's presence.

Eleuterio, looking at the horizon and recalling stories of his life, told me about his knowledge of the trees, his relationship with them and how, in the silence of the forest, he can feel their pain and their joy.

Each tree has a history, he told me. It is the story of when it was planted and how it turned itself to the sun, growing and standing witness to each season — but also to the story of the families. And Eleuterio let me see with his wisdom that life begins to rise in the midst of the ashes.

Antonia, an elderly woman who cares for her son with special needs, is really grateful for the presence of the God who saved them. She shows this with a beautiful smile.

When I was leaving her home, which was nearly destroyed, she embraced me and gave me a little plant that was beginning to grow again. I received it as a sacrament of life. Even in the midst of the damage, Antonia catches her breath before the life around her. Life is a beautiful journey because, finally, God does not take the pain from us; God is with us through it. Antonia reminded me of this.

Maybe sitting here under the almond tree, I can at least understand the love these people have for their hometown, and the power of fire as both a destructive and life-sustaining force. (For the indigenous Mapuche people here, fire is a place where families gather around and where they cook.)

But I also see the power of community, a solidarity that the almond tree has come to represent. People told me that the morning after the fire has passed, families and neighbors came together and began to clean up what seemed like a battlefield. Young people came from all over Chile to help and start rebuilding.

Yes, the almond tree is not just an image Gabriela Mistral used, it is the power and love the Chilean people have for each other in their shared history of earthquakes and tsunamis. If they know something, it is this: the power of being together and getting on their feet again.

I was so touched with a symbol that I saw. In every place where there had been a house, and now there was debris, you could see a Chilean flag. This is a sign of struggle and an expression of the internal strength of the Chilean people. Perhaps we could call it resilience, the strength that leads the people to say:

Death does not overcome us, despair does not eliminate us, because we believe that together we can rebuild our houses, our towns and our lives.

That is a message for me, at the heart of this Lenten season, about how to live my own life in keeping with this town's powerful sign of the Resurrection.

[María de Lourdes López Munguía is a Franciscan Missionary of Mary from Mexico who now lives in Chile.]

<http://globalsistersreport.org/column/gsr-today/environment/morning-chile-after-forest-fires-46536>

May 10, 2017

Italian archdiocese, five religious orders to divest from fossil fuels

By Dennis Sadowski
Catholic News Service

[Washington](#) - Nine Catholic organizations, including five religious orders and an archdiocese in Italy, plan to divest from fossil fuel corporations in an action timed to send a message to the upcoming G7 summit.

Representatives of the groups said May 10 that they were inspired to act by Pope Francis' two-year-old encyclical, "*Laudato Si'*", on Care for Our Common Home."

Joining the divestment movement were the Wheaton Franciscan Sisters and the Daughters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary of Wheaton, Illinois; MGR Foundation in New York City; the Mission Congregation of the Servants of the Holy Spirit; St. Joseph's Province of the Passionist order in the United Kingdom; and in Italy, the Archdiocese of Pescara-Penne, Il Dialogo

magazine, the Society of Jesus, Interdiocesan Network New Lifestyles and the Siloe Monastic Community.

The announcement came as part of a broader global divestment campaign running May 5-13 that finds organizations pulling funds from companies involved in the extraction of coal, oil and natural gas, and turning to firms developing renewable energy instead.

Up to 97 percent of climate scientists have attributed climate change to human activity, at least in part.

The announcement also comes as the G-7 nations prepared to meet in southern Italy May 26-27 and a meeting of representatives of nearly 200 countries underway in Bonn, Germany, through May 18 for negotiations on the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

"This announcement is stressing the urgency of the climate crisis. It's a reminder that the world needs to transition extremely quickly away from fossil fuel to clean energy," said Tomas Insua, executive director of the Global Catholic Climate Movement, a coalition of more than 100 organizations. "It's about responding to Pope Francis' appeal in '*Laudato Si*' to care for our common home and care for the poor and our children who will suffer the worst consequences of climate change."

Each organization pledged to begin divesting as soon as possible. It is expected to take up to several years before full divestment occurs.

In announcing the action, the Global Catholic Climate Movement released statements by representatives of the organizations involved.

Sr. Sheila Kinsey of the Wheaton Franciscans said her religious order has long considered the "root causes of violence" in society and that it became necessary to end all investments in fossil fuels. "Through our study and discernment we compassionately respond both to compelling immediate and systemic needs at the local and global levels," she said. "We find that it is imperative that we move away from fossil fuels because of the impact they have on the environment."

In Italy, Fr. Mario Parente, prior of the Siloe Monastic Community, said: "Strongly committed on the issues of caring and safeguarding the creation, we consider it is important to be part of an initiative that is in very deep harmony with the value in which we believe and that gives a concrete answer to Pope Francis' call in his encyclical '*Laudato Si*' asking for a real ecological conversion and a new way to inhabit the earth."

Archbishop Tomasso Valentinetti of Pescara-Penne, Italy, supported divestment and a turn toward clean energy. "This statement aims to be the a first concrete commitment in the logic of the integral ecology and the care of the common home, which Pope Francis called us to in the encyclical letter '*Laudato Si*,' with a view of a progressive and effective process of divestment," he said.

With the announcement, 27 Catholic entities have divested from fossil fuel corporations, according to the Global Catholic Climate Movement.

<https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/italian-archdiocese-five-religious-orders-divest-fossil-fuels>

May 11, 2017

Returning to a Place of Belonging: An interview with Sufi mystic Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee

By Sam Mowe
Garrison Institute

When you pay attention to what’s happening to the world—the destruction of our air, soil, and water—it is common to want to *do something* to help the situation. But what if part of the reason that we’re in this perilous ecological situation is our tendency to treat the world as if it’s a problem to be solved?

In his book *Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth*, Sufi mystic Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee writes that much of our understanding of the ecological crisis belongs to “the mindset that has caused the imbalance.” To restore balance we need a shift in consciousness and then action that embodies this shift. In answer to the question, “What can we do?” Vaughan-Lee has recently written a follow-up book, *Spiritual Ecology: 10 Practices to Reawaken the Sacred in Everyday Life*, which explores practices that can help us to experience a deep, lived connection with the planet. And while this is an [urgently important task](#), it will not be achieved by a quick fix of technology and policy, but rather through multigenerational spiritual work.

Vaughan-Lee is a lineage holder in the Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya Sufi Order and the founder of The Golden Sufi Center. In addition to *Spiritual Ecology*, he is the author of *Fragments of a Love Story*, *Darkening of the Light*, and other books. We corresponded with him recently about the challenge of bringing humanity back into harmony with the life-systems that support us.

In *Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth*, many of the contributors suggest that ecological crisis is rooted in urgent spiritual and moral questions. Can you give me some examples of these spiritual questions?

Today we are faced with an ecological crisis of rising sea levels, polluted air, toxic oceans, and a mass extinction of species. One response to this crisis is “greening the economy,” which looks to technological innovation to ensure sustainable development without further degrading the environment. But in recent years there has been a deeper questioning that suggests that [the ecological crisis requires a spiritual and moral response](#). This has been forcefully articulated in Pope Francis’s encyclical, *Laudato Si’: On Care for our Common Home*, which asks us to look at the spiritual and moral issues underlying the unprecedented destruction of ecosystems we are inflicting upon the Earth.

Native American Faithkeeper Chief Oren Lyons offers another example of a spiritual response to our ecological crisis when he describes the spiritual laws of nature and the need for thanksgiving. The Zen monk Thich Nhat Hanh sees our present ecological crisis as “bells of mindfulness” to wake up and change our consciousness in order to be aware of what is happening to the Earth. He says that we have to [“fall in love” with the Earth](#), echoing the poet Wendell Berry who says that the world “can only be redeemed by love.” While the Buddhist activist Joanna Macy speaks of how our hearts can be cracked open by the grief at what we are doing the world and says, “as your heart breaks open there will be room for the world to heal.”

All these voices speak to the need to search beyond a merely physical or technological response to the present crisis and ask the deeper spiritual questions, which they believe are at the root of our present imbalance.

These examples suggest that spiritual responses to the ecological crisis have an important role to play in healing the Earth moving forward, but *Spiritual Ecology* also suggests that it was a spiritual *crisis* that has led us to our current situation. Can you comment on this?

There is an argument that the origin of our present ecological crisis can be traced back to the Age of Enlightenment, when the emerging Newtonian model saw the physical world as unfeeling matter, a clockwork mechanism that we should understand and control. This consciousness may have given us the fruits of science and technology, but its cost was to create a mindset of separation that cut off humanity from the awareness of our natural interrelatedness with our world.

But perhaps we can look even deeper: How have we lost and entirely forgotten any spiritual relationship to life and the planet, a central reality to other cultures for millennia? For indigenous peoples the world is a sacred, interconnected living whole that cares for us and, therefore, we need to revere and care for it. Instead, in our Western culture it has become a “resource” to exploit. The question then is whether we can correct our present imbalance through returning to an awareness of the sacred nature of creation, the Earth, as a living being which needs our love and attention. As I have written previously, “The Earth is not a problem to be solved; it is a living being to which we belong. The Earth is part of our own self and we are part of its suffering wholeness. Until we go to the root of our image of separateness, there can be no healing. And the deepest part of our separateness from creation lies in our forgetfulness of its sacred nature, which is also our own sacred nature.”

Do you see evidence that we are currently up to the task of answering the spiritual and moral questions at the root of our ecological crisis?

The last decades have seen the globalization of our Western materialistic values. Driven by greed and endless desires we have attacked and destroyed the fragile web of life that physically supports us. But we have also created a soulless wasteland that no longer nourishes us with any connection to the sacred nature of creation, a connection that has spiritually sustained humanity for millennia. Thomas Berry, one of the earliest voices to articulate a spiritual ecology, writes, “We are not talking to the rivers, we are not listening to the wind and stars. We have broken the great conversation... all the disasters that are happening now are a consequence of that spiritual

‘autism.’” If we are to cease this destruction and desecration, if we are to no longer pollute the soul as well as the soil, we need to regain a connection to the sacred nature of the Earth. How to reestablish this connection, rejoin this conversation, is a fundamental question we should be asking.

Are we prepared to embrace a new story of life and civilization, one that is radically different to our present story of a consumer-driven culture based upon exploitation and the myth of continual economic progress? Many people today long for such a new story, one that recognizes the [Earth as a single interconnected living whole to which we belong](#). This is a story that nourishes our deeper selves with a sense of connection to the sacred and to the wonder and joy of life that is our heritage.

But collectively we are still caught in the dream, or nightmare, of materialism, which the Earth can no longer support. Indeed it could be argued that the root of the present collective anger, or deep dissatisfaction we are witnessing, comes from a primal knowing that this dream has passed its sell-by date, that its promises of prosperity are empty. And yet because our culture does not ask the right questions, there is no possibility for a real answer.

The ecological issues we face today require solutions urgently. Is telling new stories about our relationship with the Earth really going to bring about the solutions we need right now? What you’re describing strikes me as a slow process.

Although the environmental crisis has accelerated in recent years, it is the result of a mindset that the West has embraced for centuries. And it may take centuries for a new story to unfold.

It can be asserted that our present ecological problems are too dire to be answered by a “new story,” an idealistic vision of recognizing the unity of life and reconnecting to the sacred within creation. And yes, there are critical issues that need to be addressed at the present moment: reducing carbon emissions, the loss of species, acidification of the oceans, and the widespread pollution of our “throw-away culture.” But can science and technology take us to the root of our present predicament, can “greening the economy” be a real answer to ecocide, or do we need a more radical response? Science and technology are born from the reasoning that we are separate from the Earth, a mindset that is at the foundation of a culture where the exploitation of the natural world is now global and catastrophic.

Our present scientific responses may offer valuable short-term fixes, but do not begin to address the deeper issues. What will it take to change our pathological behavior towards our common home? To quote James Gustave Speth, former U.S. Advisor on climate change: “I used to think that top environmental problems were biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and climate change... I was wrong. The top environmental problems are selfishness, greed, and apathy, and to deal with these we need a cultural and spiritual transformation.”

The first step is to recognize our present predicament and to become aware that materialism is in fact just a story we have been sold, which has us in its grip even as it is destroying our own ecosystem. There is actually no rationale that more “stuff” will make us happy and fulfilled, but rather it appears to have the opposite effect of empty promises that leave us emotionally and

spiritually starved. Recognizing the power of stories or myth we come to understand the need for a new story—a story that includes a sustainable relationship to the Earth. Real sustainability does not mean the ability to continue our present energy-intensive consumer-driven culture, but sustainability for all of creation, for the living Earth to which we belong.

But before we can fully articulate—or live—such a new story, we need to reconnect with the sacred nature of creation, rejoin the great conversation that was central to the way of life of our ancestors. This “work that reconnects,” as Joanna Macy calls it, has many forms, but a central theme is empowering the individual, opening our eyes and ears to the mystery and wonder of creation in all of its diversity, and returning each of us to our real place of belonging within life.

<https://www.garrisoninstitute.org/blog/spiritual-ecology/>

May 15, 2017

EcoJesuit Newsletter

Our editorial shares the press release from the Global Catholic Climate Movement that announced on 10 May 2017 the largest joint Catholic fossil fuel divestment to date. The Italian Jesuits joined other Catholic organizations from around the world and announced their decision to divest their portfolios from coal, oil, and gas companies. In October last year, the Jesuits in English Canada joined other Catholic institutions around the world and announced their divestment from fossil fuel extraction, immediately stopping all future investments in fossil fuels and working to divest such holdings from the current portfolio within five years. It was the largest faith-based divestment announcement then.

In a recent radio interview in Chicago, Pedro Walpole, SJ briefly shares his thoughts and reflections in a conversation with Worldview host Jerome McDonnell on climate change and responses, community and social justice, youth and hope, and the need to come together and build a stronger sense of human society and care and reconciliation. Pedro is Research Director at the Environmental Science for Social Change, a Jesuit research and training organization in the Philippines. He serves as Coordinator for both the Reconciliation with Creation program of the Jesuit Conference Asia Pacific and the Global Ignatian Advocacy Network-Ecology.

Sergio Coronado Delgado, a researcher at the Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular (CINEP, Center for Research and Popular Education) in Bogotá, Colombia, writes about how Jesuits and their institutions contribute to the responses to environmental issues in Latin America, focusing on the work of Jesuit social centers in the region, especially on mining-related concerns. The article is an excerpt from Sergio’s full paper “Latin American Jesuit Social Centers and Environmental Justice: Advocacy and Support to Local Communities and Knowledge-Building from below” published in a special issue of the Journal of Jesuit Studies.

Emilio Travieso, SJ, a PhD student at the Oxford Department of International Development, shares his field report from Chiapas, Mexico where the Misión de Bachajón assists in the redesigning of food systems, sharing the engagement with the Tseltal community in the

production of organic coffee with partner Yomol A'tel, a group of cooperatives and social businesses.

Thank you for the continued support and we are happy to hear from you at [ecojesuit\(at\)gmail.com](mailto:ecojesuit(at)gmail.com) for your comments and for stories you may want to share.

The Ecojesuit team

Latest this month

[Italian Jesuits join largest Catholic divestment from fossil fuels](#)

[A conversation on climate change and responses, community and social justice, youth and hope](#)

[Redesigning food systems in Chiapas, Mexico](#)

[Latin American Jesuit work on social and environmental justice through local community support and building knowledge from below](#)

<http://www.ecojesuit.com/>

May 15, 2017

Mountains and Sacred Landscapes Conference Report

By Sarah M. Pike

International Society for the Study of Religion, Nature, and Culture (ISSRNC)

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the ISSRNC, I want to convey our thanks to all of you who attended our conference on “Mountains and Sacred Landscapes”! A special thanks to those who served as presiders and discussants. We had 225 attendees from over 25 countries (every continent was represented), 39 sessions of panels, papers, roundtables, and alternative formats, six keynote or plenary sessions, and other special events.

For those of you who were unable to join us, some of the conference highlights included our banquet, during which we celebrated Bron Taylor’s Lifetime Achievement Award, with a moving talk by Taylor about his career and the early roots of the ISSRNC, and launched our first student paper award, which went to Lily Zeng for her paper, Problematizing Ideas of "Purity" and "Timelessness" in the Conservation Narratives of Sacred Groves; a field trip to the Rubin Museum for presentations by curators on “Sacred Landscapes in the Himalayas”; a book launch featuring three new books (monographs by James Miller and Georgina Drew and a collection of essays edited by ICI Fellows Jayanta Bandyopadhyay, Sanjay Chaturvedi, and Dong Shikui); and six keynotes, performances, or plenary sessions featuring Karenna Gore, Edwin Bernbaum, David Rothenberg, Gregory Cajete, and Steve Paulson, as well as the India China Institute’s Sacred Himalaya Initiative.

Read the full report here:

<http://mailchi.mp/0ce9d4b59d2d/mountains-and-sacred-landscapes-conference-report?e=b609397549>

May 15, 2017

US Bank to Stop Funding Pipelines as Divestment Movement Expands Worldwide

By Nika Knight
Common Dreams

As a nearly ten-days-long [global mobilization](#) calling for divestment from fossil fuels comes to an end, climate campaigners are celebrating a major victory stateside: U.S. Bank has announced that it will no longer finance fossil fuel pipeline construction.

The announcement came during the company's April shareholder meeting, [reported](#) MN350, a state arm of international climate justice group 350.org, on Monday.

As a result of the new policy, MN350 observes that the bank will no longer provide "project financing for the construction of oil or natural gas pipelines," and will also apply "enhanced due diligence processes" to oil and gas industry clients.

"U.S. Bank's new policy is an important step in protecting the environment and moving towards a fossil free future," [said](#) Wichahpi Otto, a MN350 volunteer, who attended the shareholder meeting in Nashville. "We applaud them for responding to the community and contributing to worldwide efforts to address climate change."

The group writes:

This move comes after ongoing pressure on U.S. Bank locally from MN350 and from the Minnesotans for a Fair Economy coalition, and on banks nationally from indigenous groups including [Honor the Earth](#), the [Indigenous Environmental Network](#), and the Dakota Access resistance movement.

Beginning in 2015, a regional partnership of climate, labor, and indigenous rights advocates has urged that U.S. Bank divest from fossil fuels, in particular from Enbridge Energy, and move its financing into the clean energy economy. [Local actions](#) have included letter-writing, [account closures](#), and social media campaigns. In response, in May 2016 the bank made changes to their Environmental Policy restricting lending to coal.

"We applaud this progressive decision from U.S. Bank," said Tara Houska, National Campaigns Director of Honor the Earth. "A strong message is being sent to the fossil fuel industry: we are consumers, we have agency and the right to know how our money is being invested. Move to a

green economy and a future that does not profit off the destruction of Mother Earth and our communities."

Meanwhile, 260 events in 45 countries saw people worldwide campaign for banks to divest from fossil fuel projects. The [Global Divestment Mobilization](#) (GDM) ran from May 5 to May 13, and included events in Europe, Africa, Australia, Asia, and South America.

"Divestment is a powerful act of solidarity and justice for the world's most vulnerable people, a defense of nature and our planet," said Lidy Nacpil of the Asian Peoples Movement on Debt and Development (APMDD) in a statement.

"We urgently need a transformation in the global energy system, away from the fossil fuel dependence that drives climate change, and challenge fossil fuel corporations that oppose progress in climate action and prioritize profits over people and planet," Nacpil continued. "Divestment has proven to be one of the most effective ways to push for this much needed transformation."

"During the GDM citizens and respected institutions across the world were able to enact an immediate and a much needed transformational form of climate leadership," wrote 350.org. "This included the announcement from nine Catholic organizations from around the world about their decision to divest their portfolios from fossil fuels in the largest joint Catholic divestment to date. A total of [27 Catholic institutions](#) have now divested. Meanwhile in Brazil over 3000 people participated in prayers in a vigil outside the Umuarama Cathedral, to voice their hopes for a fossil fuel free future."

The organization went on to describe the varied actions in far-flung locations around the world:

Across Europe, the links between municipalities and fossil fuel companies came under scrutiny. Over 1,000 people marched in Munich, Germany and demonstrations took place across the UK including rallies at 14 Town Halls across London demanding divestment. Campaigners also put pressure on universities pension funds, faith, health and cultural institutions such as the Louvre in Paris, the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam and the British Museum.

The battle to safeguard people and planet is linked worldwide, the money in one part of the world is linked to infrastructure projects being built elsewhere. Hundreds gathered in Jakarta to listen to community representatives from Indramayu recount the struggles they encounter living in the shadow of a coal power plant. During an event in Japan case studies of Japanese banks financing coal power plants in Indonesia and oil pipelines in the United States were highlighted to put pressure on Japanese banks to pull out of fossil fuels.

In New Zealand and Australia campaigners targeted Australian coal-giant Adani by calling on the banks that invest in it, including CommBank to stop its funding. Australia's Great Barrier Reef has suffered a large bleaching for the [second year in a row](#). Any mining expansion would jeopardise it even further.

Meanwhile in New York [150 activists rallied inside Trump Tower](#), to call on New York City officials to cut their ties with the dirty oil and gas companies that control the White House. In the face of federal government climate denial and the possibility of the U.S. leaving the Paris Agreement, demonstrating that local leaders can show impactful climate leadership, [while other parts of the country are suffering from severe flooding](#).

"There is no question we are currently in a state of emergency on climate change. Day in day out people are dying from the effects of climate change," said author and 350.org co-founder Bill McKibben in a statement. "There are many ways to confront this emergency and divestment allows us to get in the way of the money financing the fossil fuel projects behind this crisis. The fact that the fossil fuel divestment movement has grown exponentially in the last few years is the best news ever."

"From the Pacific Islands to South Africa, from the United States to Germany, people are standing up and challenging the power of the fossil fuel industry," McKibben added.

<https://www.commondreams.org/news/2017/05/15/us-bank-stop-funding-pipelines-divestment-movement-expands-worldwide>

May 23, 2017

Hoping for more in sustainable energy goals

By Donna Schaper
National Catholic Reporter

Pragmatists set small goals and achieve them. Utopians set large goals and often fail. People of faith often help the pragmatists to shake hands with the utopians, while living by hope, realistically.

How big should our goals for addressing climate change be, given what we know about how much serious trouble faces the planet? How big can they be, given what we know about human nature?

Back in 2015, Stanford University engineering professor Mark Jacobson and other researchers [calculated how each U.S. state could meet its power needs](#) entirely on the backs of clean renewable energy — specifically, solar, wind, water and geothermal.

Jacobson and others involved in the Solutions Project, as it is known, believe that all 50 states can generate 80 percent of needed energy from renewable sources by 2030 and achieve a 100-percent transition to clean energy by 2050. Backing up those beliefs are [state-by-state breakdowns](#) of a new energy mix for each, along with the health and economic benefits projected to accompany such a full shift from fossil fuels.

Others are equally optimistic.

At the beginning of 2016, the Sierra Club launched its "Ready for 100" campaign aimed at convincing mayors across the country to commit their cities to their own 100-percent renewable goals. [As of May](#), seven cities in the campaign, including Burlington, Vermont, are powered entirely by renewable energy, 20 cities have established timelines to do so, and efforts by environmental advocates in another 40 towns hope to add their communities in this utopian and hopeful pipeline.

Andrew Cuomo, the governor of my home state of New York, has [mandated](#) that we in the Empire State achieve 50 percent of our electricity from renewables by 2030, arguing that this is a pragmatically optimistic goal. But perhaps New York is being way too realistic, when so much hope is available elsewhere.

People of faith are often accused of having too much hope. We wonder if hoping for too much denies our other more interesting theologies about sin's originality or human fallibility.

I hear St. Paul in both ears: in one, "All have sinned and are deprived of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), and in the other, "For I do not do the good I want, but I do the evil I do not want" (Romans 7:19). Pragmatists at least have reasonable understandings of the human ability to reach our best goals or best selves.

Then I hear St. Paul argue for salvation as though it were a possibility — we are to "imitate" God (Ephesians 5:1). With this faith, I side with Stanford and the Sierra Club against New York in the fight about achievable goals. Why not hope against hope for perfection? New York is a great state; it can do better.

Even the White House is [in a fight about article 4.11](#) of the Paris Agreement, the piece of the international climate accord that states a nation can adjust its climate goals "with a view to enhancing its level of ambition." Can the target for our commitment to the global deal only go up, or can it also go down? Can we renegotiate the climate pact without withdrawing from it? Can we be realists without withdrawing from our faith?

Because of these more theological concerns about possible justice and eschatological justice, pragmatic justice to the Earth and beautiful justice for the Earth, I have come to really like my state electric bill.

My Central Hudson Gas & Electric bill is broken down into a delivery cost listed at the top and a supply cost just below it. Both list a total cost independent of one another, then are added together to present your "TOTAL ELECTRIC CHARGES" bolded at the end of the numeric tally. It is a privilege to pay for energy, even if the price can be confusing, if not too high. What some think as high, people of faith might think of as low. It is a privilege to have energy and to pay for it.

St. Paul might understand my dilemma. Why would I want a bargain at the cost of the planet? I wonder if we can get him on the phone from Rome or Ephesus.

Even more, I wonder if more theologizing would help governors and activists and solar engineers. When will we be able to declare victory? Do we need to put a tax on each gallon of gasoline in order to add more carrots to the renewables transition effort, or are there other ways that we can gracefully punish ourselves?

Are we happy if we make progress even if it is not enough progress? Doesn't it matter that human beings are doing the best they can?

But what if our best is not good enough?

[Donna Schaper is senior minister of Judson Memorial Church in New York City.]

<https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/hoping-more-sustainable-energy-goals>

May 24, 2017

Pope Francis Gave President Trump a Copy of His Encyclical on Climate Change

By Katie Reilly
Time

[Pope Francis](#) gave [President Donald Trump](#) a copy of his [landmark 2015 encyclical](#) on [climate change](#) when the two leaders [met at the Vatican](#) on Wednesday.

The climate encyclical — titled "Laudato Si" or "Praise Be to You" — called for strong action on climate change, which [Pope Francis warned](#) would disproportionately impact developing countries. His meeting with Trump on Wednesday comes as the White House [considers](#) whether the U.S. should leave the [Paris Agreement](#) on climate change.

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said a Vatican official on Wednesday encouraged the U.S. to remain in the Paris Agreement, according to White House pool reports. Tillerson called the discussion a "good exchange."

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, meanwhile, urged Trump to pay attention to the encyclical's message. "If President Trump reads the Pope's writings, I'm confident he'll not withdraw the agreement," Schumer [said Wednesday](#). "We gotta get him to read it."

Trump has proposed [significant cuts](#) to the Environmental Protection Agency and has begun to [roll back environmental regulations](#) implemented under former President Barack Obama.

"Regrettably, many efforts to seek concrete solutions to the environmental crisis have proved ineffective, not only because of powerful opposition but also because of a more general lack of interest," Francis [wrote](#) in the 2015 encyclical. "Obstructionist attitudes, even on the part of believers, can range from denial of the problem to indifference, nonchalant resignation or blind confidence in technical solutions. We require a new and universal solidarity."

Pope Francis gave Trump the [encyclical](#) along with a few other documents, including his 2017 [World Day of Peace message](#), which he told Trump he had signed personally for him, according to White House pool reports.

<http://time.com/4792296/pope-francis-donald-trump-climate-change-encyclical/>

May 24, 2017

Paying respect to Whidbey's nature the Tibetan Buddhist way

By Kyle Jensen
South Whidbey Record

A Tibetan Buddhist religious community will circumnavigate Whidbey Island next Tuesday in a not-so-usual boat trip aimed at honoring the island's natural life.

The group will be pouring "positive energy" into Puget Sound with prayers and Buddhist mantras.

"The purpose of the offering is for us to pay respect to this beautiful natural environment," Tibetan Buddhist spiritual leader Kilung Rinpoche said. "In particular, at this time we are going to be sending heartfelt healing prayers and energy back to the great oceans and to all beings living there in order to repair distorted energy."

Rinpoche, his students, followers and friends will circle the entire island to perform a tradition that may be a first for Whidbey Island. The ceremony, called a Naga Treasure Offering, will involve a full boat of people praying and honoring the land, the sea, the animals, the plants and everything in between on Whidbey. Rinpoche has only performed this once before during a circumnavigation of Taiwan, where he frequently teaches.

The group aims to project "healing energy" to the environment, as per Buddhist practice. Mystic Sea Charters, the whale watching tour company, will accommodate the religious community on their 12-hour trip around the island.

Although the vessel is fully booked for the circumnavigation with 60 people, Rinpoche is inviting island residents to follow the trip and meet the boat on shores and docks for a collective prayer "of any form" to bless the island and pay homage to the natural environment. The boat departs from Anacortes at 8 a.m. May 30 and is slated to return between 6 and 8 p.m. Residents can follow the trip by purchasing the "MarineTraffic – Ship Tracking" app on their smartphones or by searching "Mystic Sea" on www.vesselfinder.com.

"If people resonate with the voyage and want to witness it, they're free to meet us at the beaches and docks," said student Mully Mullaly, Langley resident. "If they want to do something at home that honors that, we encourage that also."

Rinpoche says he felt it was the right time to honor Whidbey Island's environment. The Tibetan Buddhist teacher has called the island his part-time home for nearly 20 years, splitting time between Whidbey and his native Tibet when he's not traveling the world to teach. He's found solitude on Whidbey despite being a significant figure and lineage holder in the world of Tibetan Buddhism. His branch, Longchen Nyintik, is the first Tibetan Buddhist school. At a young age, he was named the fifth reincarnation of a prominent Tibetan Buddhist teacher who built Kilung Monastery in Tibet, which Rinpoche heads.

Environmentalism is an important aspect of Tibetan Buddhism. Buddhist teachings preach the interconnectedness of all things, and for followers to respect everything outside of humanity — trees, plants, water, etc. Respect should also be paid to the Whidbey Island of the past as per the Buddhist belief of life's nonlinear nature, so the group has invited members of the Samish Nation for the trip. With respect for the past and all living things, harmony can be achieved, Rinpoche said. To learn more about Rinpoche, visit www.kilung.org/about-kilung-rinpoche/.

“All these things need some consideration to know the inter-relations of the world,” Rinpoche said. “That's so important for me, being raised in Tibet with a tremendous respect for that tradition. Buddha taught that every living being — trees, plants, insects — they all have independent characteristics, energy and power.”

Rinpoche and his students hope island residents resonate with this message and “use this kind of mindfulness in everyday life.” For him, it's not about preaching his Tibetan culture or ways, rather using his beliefs to encourage people on Whidbey to respect the natural environment.

“Our hope is that everyone will join us on the island, not just the Buddhist people” student Jeanne Lepisto said. “We want people to see the message, and we think it has the ability to resonate with a wide group of people.”

<http://www.southwhidbeyrecord.com/life/paying-respect-to-whidbeys-nature-the-tibetan-buddhist-way/>

May 24, 2017

VW's 'dieselgate' poses ethical challenge for German Protestants

By Tom Heneghan
National Catholic Reporter

The Volkswagen emissions scandal, which began when its "clean diesel" cars were found to be rigged to cheat on pollution tests, has created an environmental, commercial and public relations crisis for the German automaker in the United States.

It has been all that and worse back home in Germany. VW is a national symbol with contacts and influence far beyond just cars and drivers — and that is now posing an unexpected ethical challenge for the country's Protestant churches.

Starting on May 24, the Protestant Church Assembly, held every two years, will draw about 140,000 people to Berlin for a long weekend of religious services, political discussions and concerts. Some 200,000 are expected at the final service on Sunday in Wittenberg, where Martin Luther posted his 95 Theses in 1517.

At issue is whether the assembly, where concern for the environment and sustainable development are widely held values, should be ferrying speakers and participants around in the 239 Volkswagen cars, vans and trucks provided by its corporate sponsor.

Since this year is the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, one leading critic has come up with a slogan resonant with Martin Luther's own pithy way of speaking.

"Kein Ablass für Abgas!" (No indulgences for exhaust fumes), Hamburg pastor Matthias Kaiser wrote in an article asking whether having VW provide the assembly's official vehicle fleet was compatible with Christian values.

"I would not want to know what Martin Luther would say today," he said, referring to Luther's famous condemnation of the indulgences the Roman Catholic Church of his day was selling to help finance the construction of St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican.

The assembly, known even abroad by its German name "Kirchentag," traditionally includes high-level debates on Christians' role in public affairs and regularly gets wide media coverage.

One of its main events will come on Thursday, when former U.S. President Obama and German Chancellor Angela Merkel will discuss democracy and responsibility at Berlin's Brandenburg Gate, moderated by Bishop Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, chairman of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), an umbrella group of Protestant churches.

The "dieselgate" issue has been like an oil stain that the Kirchentag, a lay-organized event launched after the Second World War to explore the forms of Christian witness both within and beyond the churches, has not been able to remove.

The Kirchentag and its opposite number, the Roman Catholic "Katholikentag," have long had Volkswagen as a main sponsor. Having its vehicles on show there is so important for the carmaker that it has its own "church representative" dealing with religious communities.

When the scandal broke in 2015, the churches consulted with Volkswagen but decided to keep the relationship because the carmaker pledged to clean up the emissions scandal promptly.

But the scandal flared up again in Germany in February when a massive car callback to fix the emission problem backfired. Embarrassed company officials had to admit it was not that easy to retool the cars to bring their toxic exhaust down to legal levels.

"We counted on their promises to totally clear up this whole story," said Ellen Ueberschär, general secretary of the Kirchentag. "Of course, now we see that this is taking longer than expected and the whole problem is larger than we originally thought."

"What is just and sustainable work these days, how do we deal with raw materials — these have always been classic questions for the church and the Kirchentag, and they should remain so," she said.

"That makes it all the more important that we take these sponsors aside and make sure they clearly support these standards in word and deed," she explained.

Ueberschär said the Kirchentag was not against sponsoring, although certain companies — arms manufacturers or obvious polluters, for example — were excluded. "Our sponsoring contracts have the condition that companies respect the basic rules of the Kirchentag," she said.

In several interviews, she has also given pragmatic arguments for maintaining the sponsorship, for example that the Reformation anniversary program was already underway and that boycotting Volkswagen would also affect Christians who work for the carmaker.

Kaiser was not convinced. He said having vehicles with "Volkswagen" written on their sides meant "an enormous loss in credibility that is much greater than the profit it makes for using this fleet for free."

In a report, West German Radio (WDR) estimated the loan of free vehicles was worth several million euros.

Reinhard Benhöfer, environmental representative for the Lutheran Church in Hannover, also thought the Kirchentag's explanations weren't convincing. But he said churches had to raise funds and would inevitably have to make some kind of compromise.

"We're part of a society that is not clean at all — we're right in the middle of it," he said. Since all car companies seem to have cheated on emissions standards, he added, "at least for a certain period of time, we shouldn't take any gifts from them. Let's take a short break."

Kaiser said he got wide support from colleagues for the article he wrote in a Protestant magazine earlier this year pointing out the ethical challenge the sponsoring presented.

"There's a lot of resentment among them that the Kirchentag is so close to Volkswagen," he said. "The problem is not going away."

<https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/vws-dieselgate-poses-ethical-challenge-german-protestants>

May 24, 2017

Removed from the land before, Ponca nation vows to protect the Earth from Keystone XL

By Kevin Hardy
USA Today

While their reasons may differ, the Ponca Tribe of Nebraska found local farmers and ranchers on their side when the two groups raised their opposition to the Keystone XL pipeline that would carry oil from Canada to the Gulf shore. Brian Powers/The Register

NELIGH, Neb. — Under a boundless canopy of clear blue skies painted with wispy white clouds, Mekasi Camp Horinek blows a whistle as he turns and prays to the four sacred directions.

He looks up to the creator as the high sun delivers welcome relief to battering prairie winds. He kneels, clutches a few strands of ryegrass and prays to Mother Earth.

Horinek leads this corn planting ceremony at the edge of a crop field that could be mistaken for thousands of others like it across the fertile heartland.

But his feet are planted at the site of two monumental crossings — one widely perceived as a historic injustice when his Ponca tribe was forcibly marched off this land 140 years ago; the other feared as a modern one, marking the proposed route for the controversial Keystone XL pipeline.

The ancient strand of blue corn that members of the Ponca tribe and others will plant here is a modest show of resistance to the pipeline, a project President Donald Trump [resurrected in January](#) after the Obama administration had buried it.

Keystone XL has been one of the nation's most divisive environmental issues over the last two presidential election cycles.

Many Republicans argue that it will create construction jobs, safely move energy and lessen U.S. dependence on Middle Eastern oil. Democrats see it as furthering America's reliance on fossil fuels that will worsen climate change.

The fate of the \$8 billion project likely lies with Nebraska, the only state that hasn't approved the route.

American Indian tribes such as the Ponca have pledged to take a leading role in the fight, bolstered by the [months-long standoff](#) over the Dakota Access pipeline near the Standing Rock Sioux reservation in North Dakota.

Some contend that the gathering [birthed a spiritual awakening](#) among Native Americans, bringing together hundreds of tribes for one of the few times in modern history.

The heated fight over Keystone XL has proven personal for members of the once-exiled Ponca Tribe of Nebraska. Now largely landless, the tribe has lined up to protect the pastures and crop fields of white farmers and ranchers who worry about the possible environmental threat of TransCanada's Keystone XL.

"I still belong to this land. This land sustained life for my people for thousands of generations," said Horinek, a 44-year-old member of the Ponca Tribe of Oklahoma. "And though they may have removed us from this land, they could never take it away from us, because it lives in our hearts."

'Keystone is on notice'

TransCanada's 36-inch crude oil pipeline would essentially be an extension of the original Keystone pipeline.

Both come south from Canada. But the KXL would jut diagonally across Montana, South Dakota and Nebraska, rather than taking the longer L-shaped route of the original line.

The pipeline company maintains that its pipeline will be built with state-of-the-art technology and operate under "[an unparalleled maintenance regime.](#)"

Much of the debate in Nebraska plays out like déjà vu. Activists on both sides acknowledge that the controversy over Energy Transfer's Dakota Access pipeline will shade the next round of Keystone XL arguments.

At the height of the occupation in North Dakota in December, thousands of veterans marched in blizzard conditions to stand alongside natives. The same week, Obama [halted the Dakota Access line](#) for further review — a tangible, but short-lived, win for the protesters.

Since then, some big banks have pledged to be more cautious about funding future energy development projects. U.S. Bank even announced this year that it would not fund oil and gas pipelines.

"I think that Keystone is on notice that they're not going to face an easy road," said Carolyn Raffensperger, the Ames, Ia.,-based executive director of the Science and Environmental Health Network, who volunteered legal services at the North Dakota anti-pipeline encampment. "The game really shifted with Standing Rock."

In North Dakota, the so-called water protectors chanted "Mni Wiconi," a Lakota translation of "water is life."

The tribe there argued that Dakota Access' path under the Missouri River could threaten its drinking water supply, as well as that of millions of people downstream.

In Nebraska, water will again play an integral role in the debate: Much of the state sits atop the Ogallala Aquifer, also known as the High Plains aquifer, one of the world's largest freshwater sources.

The underground reservoir, which spans parts of eight states, has made Nebraska's soil viable for corn and soybeans. And wells help sustain the nearly 2 million head of cattle across Nebraska, the nation's second-leading beef producer.

Opponents say any leaked or spilled oil would run through the state's sandy soil like water in a sieve, forever contaminating the aquifer for crops or livestock.

They also worry about the chemicals infused in the thick Canadian oil sands to make them viscous enough to send through pipes.

TransCanada spokesman Matthew John said five independent environmental impact reviews and a 10-month public review from the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality dispute such claims. He also pointed to a University of Nebraska researcher who says a leak or spill into the aquifer would remain localized.

"The suggestion that a pipeline leak could threaten the Ogallala Aquifer is not supported by volumes of environmental study conducted on this project," he said.

Critics rail against the idea of a foreign company using the state's eminent domain authority to forcibly win easements on private land. They push for more sources of renewable energy, like the wind farms that have popped up within sight of the pipeline's proposed path.

Business and labor groups, conversely, tout the economic windfall of the pipeline. It would boost property tax revenues along the route, strengthen the continent's energy security and provide thousands of jobs during construction.

"It's not like we don't care about the environment," said Ron Kaminski, the political director at the Laborers International Union of North America Local 1140 in Omaha, whose members could earn as much as \$100,000 per year working on the line.

"This is our backyard. We do these projects like it was running through our own personal backyards."

'For us, it's not for sale'

The cows start ambling toward Ron Crumly's Ford flatbed pickup as soon as it crests the horizon.

"They know we're coming," he said as cattle moo in anticipation.

During his daily ritual of checking on newborn calves and laying out hay bales, Crumly explains the improvements that he's made on his family's land.

He's worked to protect native grasses on his rolling pastures, and he's shifted to no-till farming to stave off nutrient runoff on his 1,800 acres of corn and soybean fields near Page, Neb.

His mother's family homesteaded on a quarter section here in 1887, and his father's family settled just down a dirt road in the early 1900s.

Now, TransCanada wants to bury its 36-inch pipeline across two quarter-sections of his farm.

He operates 16 center pivot irrigation heads that sustain his crops from underground wells. If oil were to spill in his sandy soil, it would drop right into the aquifer, he said, and get pumped right back onto his corn and beans, forever ruining the water supply.

"I'm done farming," he said. "It's worthless."

In some places, the aquifer is hundreds of feet below the surface, Crumly said. But on some parts of the farm, he can dig a small hole and hit water.

At 68, he's preparing to hand off the farm to his son, slowly relinquishing land and equipment the same way his father did with him. His 18-year-old grandson has expressed interest in eventually joining the family business.

Seven years ago, when TransCanada first called about burying its pipeline here, he leaned over to his wife, Jeanne, and told her: "It's not about the money, it's about the grandkids."

To them, the land is not a commodity. It's an inheritance that must be protected and passed on.

"God gave us this land to take care of it," Ron Crumly said. "For us, it's not for sale."

Lessons from Standing Rock

The last time Nebraskans debated Keystone, the fight was heated and impassioned, but it was local, said Mike Flood, the former Republican speaker of the unicameral Legislature.

He worries about predictions that the massive gathering in North Dakota to fight Dakota Access could spill over into the Keystone debate in Nebraska.

He fears that a flood of outside activists could cause violent confrontations with police.

"Honestly, I wouldn't have even thought of this if North Dakota hadn't happened," said Flood, who operates television and radio stations across Nebraska. "Obviously, we're going to see national attention. I wish Nebraska wasn't the last step."

But Jane Kleeb, president and founder of Bold Nebraska, which has led the pipeline opposition here, dismisses such concerns.

"Do you really think that I would let a whole bunch of tree-huggers come on somebody's farm and ranch land that we've just spent the last seven year protecting and tear it up?" she said.

"There's no question that we would put up a very strong resistance fight, but it will not look the same as Standing Rock. No place ever will look like Standing Rock."

In North Dakota, the resistance was led mostly by tribes, Kleeb said. With Keystone XL, the opposition will center on landowners and their private property rights, with tribes and environmentalists standing in solidarity.

Several years ago, Kleeb and environmental activists across the state joined about 100 landowners who refused to sign easement agreements with TransCanada, a coalition that remains largely intact today.

"Honestly for us, the lesson at Standing Rock was to not only make it about one constituency," she said, "because it's easier for the other side to divide and conquer."

'I am a man. God made us both'

Looking over the rusty chalk bluffs at Niobrara State Park near Nebraska's border with South Dakota, a maze of grass and sand-covered tongues weave in and out of the Missouri River.

It's this confluence of the Missouri and the Niobrara rivers that the Ponca people called home for generations.

The tribe, believed to have split off from the nearby Omaha tribe, were forced from these rolling acres in 1877 and marched down to Indian Territory in present-day Oklahoma.

Along the route, at least 11 deaths were documented. In Oklahoma, more than a third of the tribe died, mostly from malaria.

The bones of an 18-month-old girl who died on the journey rest in the Laurel Hill Cemetery near Neligh, Neb. Her father asked that the locals care for the grave of White Buffalo Girl as they would their own.

Today, teddy bears, plastic flowers and child's toys surround the small headstone, the only one allowed to be decorated year-round.

Once in Indian Territory, Chief Standing Bear led a small group back north. He fled the miserable conditions in Oklahoma to honor a deathbed promise to his son, who asked that his bones be buried in the sacred hills near the two rivers.

With no food or water, they survived on the kindness of strangers, though the natives were ultimately captured by the U.S. military. The chief is best known for the landmark trial after his arrest and detainment near Omaha.

After filing suit for a writ of habeas corpus, he gave an impassioned plea to the court. He faced the audience and held up his right hand. Though his hand was of a different shade from theirs, he said, his and theirs would equally feel pain if pierced.

"The blood that will flow from mine will be of the same color as yours," Standing Bear said. "I am a man. God made us both."

The judge ruled that American Indians were people and entitled to protection under the law — a landmark decision at the time.

'We know what it's like to have land taken away'

Though Standing Bear won his freedom, the tribe never fully recovered from the removal, said Larry Wright Jr., chairman of the Ponca Tribe of Nebraska.

While the Ponca Tribe of Oklahoma has a reservation, the Nebraska tribe has never won back their land. Wright's people are spread across the state, along with a few tribal offices that provide social, medical and cultural services.

Without a base, the Ponca language, culture and traditional spirituality have waned, Wright said. The tribe now holds about 600 acres in northeast Nebraska, where it tends a buffalo herd, an educational trail system and powwow grounds.

"We know what it's like to have land taken away from us by a foreign entity," he said. "Our people were willing to die to come back to Nebraska. That's how much this land means to us."

While the tribe maintains that the pipeline would desecrate sacred sites and burial grounds, TransCanada's spokesman said the company has a strong track record of preserving important historical and cultural locations, sacred landmarks and ancient indigenous artifacts. He also cited a seven-year review of the project that examined historic sites in each state, as required under the National Historic Preservation Act.

Still, the Ponca people will prove a "powerful political unit" in the upcoming August hearings on Keystone XL, said Joe Starita, a journalism professor at the University of Nebraska who authored a book on Standing Bear and the Ponca removal.

In recent years, the chief's story and the Ponca Trail of Tears have received heightened attention from historians and the local media, Starita said. And the Ponca are more organized this time.

Like all native peoples, the most sacred thing to the Ponca, he said, is the land where their ancestors lie.

"It's not an economic value, it's a sacred value. When the Lakota saw the Black Hills, they saw god. When white Europeans saw the Black Hills, they saw gold," Starita said. "That's one letter of the alphabet different, but it's the difference of the Grand Canyon."

'I was taught you can't own the land'

To members of the Ponca tribes, maize is more than food or animal feed. It's revered as one of four gifts given to the clan from the creator, along with the sacred pipe, a bowl and a dog.

But the corn, like other traditions, was largely stripped from the Ponca over time.

This line of blue corn was revived a few years ago after kernels were found in medicine bags of Native Americans that had gone unopened for over 100 years, Mekasi Camp Horinek says.

He recently led about 90 native people, environmentalists and landowners along the Keystone route. They buried an acre's worth of the blue kernels for the fourth year in a row. Last spring's planting was an act of celebration. This time, it was an act of civil disobedience.

The 15 rows of maize confront the proposed path of Keystone XL through Art and Helen Tanderup's 160-acre farm, which has been in the family for a century. Years before, natives marched across this land during their forced removal from Nebraska.

Horinek, of the Ponca tribe in Oklahoma, said his great grandfather was among those to walk the 600-mile Ponca Trail of Tears. Though the removal split the Ponca into two separate tribes, he says every trip to Nebraska is a homecoming.

"I was taught you can't own the land," he said, "you only belong to it."

He brushes off questions about the unlikely alliance forged between the Native Americans whose ancestors grew corn, hunted buffalo and were buried here and the farmers and ranchers who now forge a living from the land.

"They buried their grandmothers and grandfathers in this land. And they have that same connection," Horinek said. "They care for this land. It's sustained their life for generations now."

View photos here:

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/business/2017/05/25/removed-land-before-ponca-nation-vows-protect-earth-keystone-xl/315018001/>

May 29, 2017

Sisters in Ontario blend ecology and spirituality in retreat center ministry

By Dana Wachter
Global Sisters Report

With master's degrees and doctorates in eco-theology and eco-ethics, St. Joseph Srs. Linda Gregg and Mary Rowell run the [Villa St. Joseph Ecology and Spirituality Centre](#) in Cobourg, Ontario. The two teach university eco-theology courses from the center, which also houses a large community garden, and offer retreats and reflection for all faiths focused on the interconnectedness of spirituality and the Earth.

The building that has become Villa St. Joseph started as a [home built around 1836](#) for a prominent local merchant, Winkworth Tremaine, Gregg said. The sisters' archivist is researching the exact story of the home, but Gregg said historians believe stagecoach and steamship executives later owned the home.

Cobourg became a summer destination for wealthy American families in the late 1800s, and as Gregg described, "many large houses were bought by both sides of the Civil War as 'boltholes' if their side didn't win." The home was eventually owned by the daughter of Gen. Ulysses S. Grant (who later became a U.S. president), Nellie Grant.

When she died, her second husband sold the home and 10 acres to the Sisters of St. Joseph in 1921 to be used as a girls' orphanage. Rowell said they have been in touch with women who were raised in the orphanage who had happy memories of their time at the house and grounds.

By the 1950s, it served as a seasonal retreat center for sisters and, later, was broadened into a year-round space for novitiate training, retreats for Catholics and, eventually, spiritual retreats for any faith.

When she arrived at Villa St. Joseph in 1994, Gregg expected to spend only a couple of years helping the effort. She hadn't imagined how her personal passion for the Earth and nature would develop into a thriving ecological and spirituality center for people from many faith backgrounds.

Gregg grew up on Cordova Bay in British Columbia in an isolated, rural setting by the sea. She describes learning to garden at just 3 years old from a neighbor who often babysat her.

As she reflected on the transition into her community, Gregg used a journal entry from the time she professed first vows to remember a crisis she faced.

"How can I live my dedication and commitment to God and not live my dedication and commitment to the Earth?" she said. "I prayed very profoundly about that, because at that time, sisters weren't into ecology. It was just some little thing that kept me happy, and they were delighted to have the flower garden. A tomato plant might appear here and there; it was nice, but it wasn't mission. I really felt God saying to me, 'This is what you need to do now, Linda. Follow this path. Make your first vows. Keep your love for your Earth in your heart, and I'll show you the way,' and God did."

Rowell credits her love for gardening to her childhood spent in England surrounded by "generations of English country gardens, rambling flowers and fruits in the gardens." She entered the Sisters of St. Joseph around 2005 after spending her discernment period ministering and writing her doctorate at Villa St. Joseph. She had already traveled the world as a nurse and nurse educator, experiencing heartbreaking images of poverty and the breakdown of cohesion between the environment and humans. After her novitiate, Rowell was assigned elsewhere before returning to Villa St. Joseph about five years ago.

"I realized that we can never separate out the suffering of humans and the suffering of the environment. It's like a vicious cycle," Rowell said. "Where there is human suffering, we have increasing environmental degradation. Where there's environmental degradation, we have increasing human suffering."

When a community garden in the region lost its land, the sisters were approached to use part of the retreat center's 10 acres for new gardening plots. Gregg was thrilled to put her market garden background into spiritual use through expanding the ministry at Villa St. Joseph. What started as six plots for groups and individuals of varying socioeconomic backgrounds to create a community garden overlooking Lake Ontario has turned into 80 plots.

In an effort to expand its outreach, the center brought on St. Joseph Sr. Christine Carbotte, who recently professed first vows, as an IT and computer expert. She helps with technology at the center and updates the center's website and social media pages so sisters, community members and others interested can learn more about the center's ecological efforts.

When Carbotte got excited about a new way to save surplus organic carrots over the winter, she shared it on [Facebook](#). She plans to use the platform to offer food sustainability and conservation advice to the public.

In the future, Rowell anticipates creating new youth-focused programming "to get them very conscious of their relationship with the Earth and understanding it in the light of their faith traditions, too."

[Dana Wachter is a freelance journalist and digital storyteller based in London, Ontario.]

<http://globalsistersreport.org/news/environment/sisters-ontario-blend-ecology-and-spirituality-retreat-center-ministry-46941>

May 30, 2017

Greed biggest issue of the environment, Tibet's Karmapa Lama says: Cohn

By Martin Regg Cohn, Ontario Politics Columnist
Toronto Star

It is not his destiny to be the next Dalai Lama. For he is already reincarnated as the 17th Karmapa Lama.

Yet he may one day succeed his 81-year-old teacher and protector.

Revered since age 7 as spiritual leader of a 1,000-year-old branch of Tibetan Buddhism, Ogyen Trinley Dorje is making his first trip to Canada this week at the age of 31.

Meeting Ontario politicians Tuesday before sitting down for an interview, the Karmapa padded around Queen's Park in a pair of brown hiking shoes peeking out from under his simple maroon robes. A picture of youthful wisdom with his direct gaze, towering above other monks at six feet tall, he may yet emerge as the public face of Tibetan Buddhism

Worshipped as a living god and the Buddha of Compassion, will he also inherit the Dalai Lama's imagery of divinity and celebrity?

"It is almost impossible to take on the role of the Dalai Lama," the Karmapa tells me cautiously, modestly, in our interview.

The politics of religion is a delicate subject, not least for the world's most suffocated and yet idealized faith. The Karmapa — which translates roughly as the [embodiment of Buddha activity](#) — is accompanied by bodyguards to safeguard him from physical threats, but also an entourage of aides to protect him from political missteps.

"I will try to do as much as I can do, but this issue about future leadership, this is not something that I alone can decide. I think this is up to the people of Tibet," he answers diplomatically.

His intonations and mannerisms are reminiscent of the Dalai Lama, whom I [interviewed at his residence-in-exile](#) in the Indian redoubt of Dharamsala more than a decade ago, after my own trip to Tibet. Like the Dalai Lama, he barrels ahead in blunt English on familiar topics, but deftly reverts to an interpreter for the stickier subjects.

In years past, the Karmapa skirted the succession question by saying he had his hands full in his current role. Now older and wiser (and bolder), he maps out another route that stresses the propitious over the ambitious.

"Maybe things need more time to resolve this problem," he concludes.

More time. In the meantime, he worries about political positions hardening on both sides, blocking the way to an eventual settlement.

The Tibet he left behind as a 14-year-old — escaping his Chinese minders in the dead of night to cross the Himalayas and reach neighbouring India — is in even more desperate circumstances today. Hundreds of monks have immolated themselves to protest Chinese repression, which has become only worse since violence erupted in the Tibetan capital of Lhasa in 2008.

In late 2003, the Dalai Lama [told me about his diplomatic dialogue](#) with Beijing, which had just resumed. All these years later, it has [reached a dead end](#), the Karmapa acknowledges.

Despite the frustration and radicalization of younger Tibetans, he still believes the middle path is the only route to a political settlement. And he may be well placed to find a way, never having been denounced by China's rulers, who continue to demonize the Dalai Lama as a "splittist."

"Dialogue between Tibet and China needs to continue," he answers in Tibetan, throwing in the English words "common sense" and "mutual understanding" to make his point.

"Far too much time is spent on discussing policy and political issues outside, when the real attention needs to be paid to the daily experiences of the Tibetan people inside Tibet," he continues. "It's very easy on the outside to get lost in this policy discussion."

In the same vein, he frets about the people's propensity to lose their way on environmental threats and the spectre of global warming, which are no less forbidding for the people of Tibet and the world. Like political obstacles, environmental challenges can seem insoluble if addressed in their entirety, rather than individually.

"I think the biggest issue is also related to humans' motivations — human greed is the biggest issue of the environment, because of consumerism," he muses. "The sad thing is, until something happens, people don't want to change."

As the Karmapa ponders the future problems of environmental depredation and the liberation of his own people, what about his own personal journey until now?

At age 7 he was discovered by a group of travelling lamas and plucked from his family to be tutored in monasteries and groomed for his reincarnated role. In later years he was watched over by the Chinese minders and spies. After his escape as a teenager, he was suspected by the Indian security services of being a Chinese plant, and largely confined to lodgings supplied by the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala. Only recently has he been given greater freedom to travel (a yellow ID document issued by India governs his movements).

Yet even when travelling he remains in a bubble, ensconced by his entourage. At home he dare not go for a walk lest he be engulfed by devotees.

I ask, teasingly, about an exercise machine in his monastery.

"But no place to put," he deadpans.

Does he miss his personal freedom of movement?

"Yes of course," he shoots back. "I don't have much choice . . . sometimes it's too much."

<https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2017/05/30/greed-biggest-issue-of-the-environment-tibets-karmapa-lama-says.html>

June 2, 2017

Church leaders express regret over US climate change decision

Anglican Communion News Service

Church leaders have expressed their regret over the decision by US President Donald Trump to withdraw from the Paris Agreement on climate change. The agreement, reached after years of negotiations culminating in the [COP21 talks in Paris](#) in December 2015, committed world leaders to work towards reducing global temperature increases.

A significant number of Anglican leaders, headed by the Archbishop of Cape Town, Thabo Makgoba, were in Paris for the talks to push the political leaders towards an agreement. Yesterday, in the Whitehouse Rose Garden, President Trump confirmed the long-signalled decision to withdraw the US from the agreement, saying it was “unfair” on the United States.

“This agreement is less about the climate and more about other countries gaining a financial advantage over the United States,” President Trump said. “The rest of the world applauded when we signed the Paris Agreement – they went wild; they were so happy – for the simple reason that it put our country, the United States of America, which we all love, at a very, very big economic disadvantage.

“A cynic would say the obvious reason for economic competitors and their wish to see us remain in the agreement is so that we continue to suffer this self-inflicted major economic wound. We would find it very hard to compete with other countries from other parts of the world.”

He continued: “We have among the most abundant energy reserves on the planet, sufficient to lift millions of America’s poorest workers out of poverty. Yet, under this agreement, we are effectively putting these reserves under lock and key, taking away the great wealth of our nation. It’s great wealth. It’s phenomenal wealth. Not so long ago, we had no idea we had such wealth and [were] leaving millions and millions of families trapped in poverty and joblessness.”

President Trump confirmed that new coal mines would be opening shortly in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and West Virginia.

Church leaders were quick to respond to the announcement.

The message of the Presiding Bishop of the US-based Episcopal Church, Bishop Michael Curry, was that: “we’re still in” – as he said that the Episcopal Church would “continue to take bold action to address the climate crisis.”

In a statement, Bishop Curry said that human beings “have been charged with being trustees, caretakers, stewards of God’s creation.”

He continued: “The United States has been a global leader in caring for God’s creation through efforts over the years on climate change. President Trump’s announcement changes the US’s leadership role in the international sphere.

“Despite this announcement, many US businesses, states, cities, regions, non-governmental organisations and faith bodies like the Episcopal Church can continue to take bold action to address the climate crisis.

“The phrase, ‘We’re still in,’ became a statement of commitment for many of us who regardless of this decision by our President are still committed to the principles of the Paris Agreement.”

He said that faith groups occupied “a unique space in the worldwide climate movement” and he highlighted the position of the Episcopal Church as an international body representing 17

countries with provisional observer status empowered to send accredited observers to UN climate change meetings.

“Furthermore, the Episcopal Church is a member of the worldwide Anglican Communion, the third-largest Christian tradition, and we remain committed to ensuring that Anglicans everywhere are empowered to undertake bold action on climate change mitigation and adaptation,” he said.

“We know that caring for God’s creation by engaging climate change is not only good for the environment, but also good for the health and welfare of our people. The US is currently creating more clean jobs faster than job creation in nearly every other sector of the economy, and unprecedented acceleration in the clean energy sector is also evident in many other major economies.

“My prayer is that we in the Episcopal Church will, in this and all things, follow the way, the teachings and the Spirit of Jesus by cultivating a loving, liberating and life-giving relationship with God, all others in the human family, and with all of God's good creation.

“In spite of hardships and setbacks, the work goes on. This is God’s world. And we are all his children.”

Across the Atlantic, the Church of England’s lead bishop on the environment, the Bishop of Salisbury Nick Holtam, went much further with an outright condemnation of President Trump’s decision, which he described as an “abject failure of leadership.”

“I am, frankly, very disturbed by President Trump’s decision to revoke the United States’ commitment to the Paris Agreement, which was a global commitment made in good faith,” he said.

“Climate change is one of the great challenges of our times. There is a moral and spiritual dimension with a strong consensus built among the faith communities about the care of our common home. The scientific, economic and political arguments point in the same direction.

“How can President Trump look in the eye the people most affected, including the world’s poorest in the places most affected by climate change now, and those affected by increasingly frequent extreme weather in parts of the USA? The leader of what used to be called ‘the new world’ is trapped in old world thought and action.”

He continued: “President Trump has not recognised the economic potential of renewable energy which represents a paradigm shift capable of generating sustainable prosperity. What will our children and grandchildren say to us about the way we respond to this extreme carelessness?

“Ours is the first generation which cannot say we did not know about the human impact on climate change.

“For the US government to withdraw from taking responsible action in keeping with the Paris agreement is an abject failure of leadership. The USA emits nearly a fifth of global CO2 emissions. This step is particularly disappointing at a time when China, the world's other mega-emitter of CO2, has committed to deep and sustained cuts in emissions to protect its own citizens as well as the rest of the world.

“In challenging President Trump’s decision, ‘We the people’, including churches and other faith leaders, must speak clearly: this decision is wrong for the USA and for the world. I commend those American churches and faith leaders who are speaking out and organising against this decision.

“How out of touch President Trump is with many of his own people was shown yesterday, when the Church of England helped lead a consortium of shareholders with \$5 trillion [USD] of assets under management at the ExxonMobil AGM. [A motion was passed overwhelmingly](#) forcing the company to undertake and disclose analysis of what limiting climate change to two degrees Celsius would mean for its business.

“Shareholders can make a difference. So can citizens and electors.”

The decision was also condemned by leaders of other Christian traditions and ecumenical bodies.

“This is a tragedy, missing an opportunity to show real, accountable leadership for the future of humanity and our common home,” the general secretary of the World Council of Churches, the Revd Olav Fykse Tveit, said. “This is a decision that is not morally sustainable; and not economically sustainable either. The struggle for climate justice has to continue.”

Rudelmar Bueno De Faria, the general secretary of the Act Alliance, an organisation which includes a number of Anglican development agencies, said: “Only 18 months ago global leaders welcomed the landmark Paris Climate Agreement for taking into account the immediate needs of countries most severely affected by the impacts of climate change. The move by the President of the United States today flies in the face of ethics and Christian values.”

Last month, Pope Francis presented President Trump with a copy of his encyclical on the environment, *Laudato Si'* during a visit to the Vatican. The chair of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops international justice and peace committee, Bishop Oscar Cantú of Las Cruces, described President Trump’s decision as “deeply troubling.”

“The Scriptures affirm the value of caring for creation and caring for each other in solidarity. The Paris agreement is an international accord that promotes these values. President Trump’s decision will harm the people of the United States and the world, especially the poorest, most vulnerable communities.

“The impacts of climate change are already being experienced in sea level rise, glacial melts, intensified storms, and more frequent droughts. I can only hope that the President will propose concrete ways to address global climate change and promote environmental stewardship.”

<http://www.anglicannews.org/news/2017/06/church-leaders-express-regret-over-us-climate-change-decision.aspx>

June 5, 2017

Sisters join chorus denouncing Trump's climate move

By Dawn Araujo-Hawkins and Chris Herlinger
Global Sisters Report

Women religious added their voices to the chorus of sharp disapproval and disappointment following President Donald Trump's announcement June 1, that he was pulling the United States from the historic Paris Agreement on climate change.

A number of Catholic organizations have condemned Trump's move as being catastrophic, as National Catholic Reporter cited in an [article](#). Women religious are also expressing their concerns about the world's No. 2 polluter reneging on its commitment to the pact, which committed 195 countries to keeping global warming below the level at which scientists believe irreversible damage could occur.

In an email to Global Sisters Report, Franciscan Sr. Joan Brown, executive director of [New Mexico Interfaith Power and Light](#) and a [Franciscans International](#) delegate at [the 2015 conference](#) at which the Paris Agreement was adopted, called the move a "mortal sin."

"This decision disregards our basic human purpose on the planet to love and care for the garden and one another," she said. "As I hold the predictable, yet dark decision of the U.S. administration in my prayer and work, the warning statement of Pope Francis re-echoes in my soul, 'Every year the problems are more grave. ... We are at the limit. We are at the limit of a suicide, to say a strong word.' "

In [a statement](#) released Friday, the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas — the largest single congregation of women religious in the U.S. — said the decision was "by far the most concerning among a number of actions taken by the Trump Administration to weaken the country's commitment to address climate change and to protect those most at risk from its effects."

They also called on Congress to take leadership in reducing the nation's carbon emissions and moving the country into the renewable energy economy.

The [Dominican Sisters of Peace](#) and [Benedictines of Erie](#), Pennsylvania, have also released statements decrying U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Agreement.

Sr. Anne Curtis, a member of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas' leadership team, told Global Sisters Report that the U.S. pulling out of the Paris Agreement was bad, but offered some

optimism: "I think the resolve that will come out of this is an even deeper commitment to the work we've already been doing."

The Mercy Sisters began their explicit commitment to "reverence Earth" in 1995 at the encouragement of their sisters in the Philippines who were witnessing, firsthand, the effects of climate change. "We also have sisters in Latin America, Guam and Jamaica," Curtis said, "and they've been on the frontlines of seeing some serious issues."

At the United Nations, where the Paris Agreement has wide support among Catholic sisters who represent their congregations, reaction to Trump's announcement was also negative.

"It is an unacceptable decision while the rest of the world is moving forward," Sr. Teresa Kotturan, the U.N. representative for the [Sisters of Charity Federation](#), told GSR. She said it will be up to individuals and other countries and states to adhere to the pact.

"Let us remain committed to implement Paris Climate Change Agreement through our individual and collective action, to ensure 'no one is left behind,' " she said.

On her Facebook page, Kotturan posted a quote from Marshall Islands President Hilda Heine, who said, "Today's decision is not only disappointing, but also highly concerning for those of us that live on the frontline of climate change."

Noting the threat that climate change poses for small island states like the Marshall Islands, Kotturan told GSR, "Think of our brothers and sisters who live on small islands with an uncertain future. What do we want to leave for the next generation?"

Sr. Margaret O'Dwyer, who represents the Company of the Daughters of Charity at the U.N., told GSR, "It is profoundly sad that there is a loss of a sense of the common good." O'Dwyer also noted that Trump's action "countervenes the message of [Francis' environmental encyclical] [Laudato Si'](#) that Earth's inhabitants are interconnected."

She also expressed worry about "the potential for chaos when world leaders agree and then rescind agreements at will."

Sr. Celine Paramunda, the [Medical Mission Sisters'](#) representative at the U.N., said she had feelings of disappointment in the short-term but hope for the long-term. Paramunda and other members of her congregation were in Paris when an agreement on the accord was reached and, she recalls, "we, the [members of civil society], rejoiced after tirelessly working for it for years."

Now, the situation is dire, she told GSR. "It is very unfortunate that even after meeting with Pope Francis — who tried to convince Trump not to back out of the global pact — President Trump took this decision."

"I feel this act is of dire consequences not only to the people of the USA but more particularly to the less privileged people living in more dangerous places like the small island states and the

least developed countries," she said, citing Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, two south Asian countries dealing now with, respectively, the effects of a cyclone and deadly flooding.

What gives Paramunda hope, she said, "is that countries like China, Germany and India are ready to take the lead in implementing it [the Paris Agreement] as they realize the global responsibility in dealing with this global problem."

Paramunda notes, too, that a number of U.S. governors, mayors and corporate leaders disagree with Trump's decision and that polls show that "a majority of the people in the United States are committed to implementing the Paris agreement."

"When it comes to actions, it is the committed people who matter," she said, noting that world leaders, including former U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan, have said the Paris agreement was the result of agreement by many nations and that it cannot be undone by a single country.

"Let this challenge unite the world to do more for a better world," Paramunda said. "The good news is that there are more good people in the world who care for the common good — our Mother Earth."

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<http://globalsistersreport.org/news/environment/sisters-join-chorus-denouncing-trumps-climate-move-47101>

June 6, 2017

'Cancer Alley' residents say industry is hurting town: 'We're collateral damage'

By Lauren Zanolli
The Guardian

"We're sick of being sick, we're tired of being tired," said Pastor Harry Joseph of Mount Triumph Baptist Church, which serves this sleepy riverside town of about 1,000 residents, mostly poor and African American. Once a bucolic village of pasturelands and sugarcane fields on the banks of the Mississippi, St James, [Louisiana](#), is now a densely packed industrial zone in the heart of Louisiana's petrochemical corridor, commonly referred to as "Cancer Alley".

A special prosecutor, the FBI and various congressional committees are all involved in inquiries associated with the US president

It's only anecdotal evidence of what life is like here, but Joseph says he has buried five residents in the last six months, all victims of cancer.

After a \$1.9bn methanol plant recently broke ground and with another \$1.3bn methanol plant and a controversial new oil pipeline planned for the area, Joseph's one-room church has become a staging ground for an environmental justice fight – albeit one with tempered hopes under [Donald Trump](#), even before he served notice on the Paris accord on climate change last week

Joseph has emerged as the de facto leader of a group of local residents demanding residential buyouts – for those who say they have had enough and struggle to sell their homes – and pressuring state and federal agencies to halt further development. With regulation that critics say is loose and incentives-rich, even by Louisiana standards, St James offers a glimpse into the type of unchecked development that Trump has hailed as a precondition for American jobs and economic growth.

The town's location on the Mississippi river and accessibility to cheap oil and gas feedstock make St James what Louisiana Economic Development, a state agency, described to the Guardian as an “ideal” site for large industrial projects. About ten years ago, the town was rezoned from residential to industrial, paving the way for the highly concentrated development seen today. Fifteen large industrial sites – mainly oil storage facilities, pipelines and petrochemical plants – now fill the 13-mile stretch of road that defines the town of St James, also known as the fifth ward of St James parish.

Yet residents here say they've seen little economic benefit – either in jobs or tax revenues – from the industry that has taken over the town. Instead, they say, they've been saddled with a myriad of health issues, medical bills and environmental degradation.

“They put [the plants] here and the other parishes are the ones that get the jobs,” claimed Joseph. “We're like the lamb that was sacrificed.”

The rise of the oil and petrochemical industry at their doorstep has thrust residents into a financial trap. They can't afford to leave without selling their houses, but the predominance of industrial plants and pipelines has slashed home values and scared off buyers. Many here see only one ticket out: a residential buyout by industrial companies operating here.

“We're going to make sure they get compensated right and they are able to move on with their life,” said Joseph of the significant population here that wants to leave, many of them elderly. “They have dedicated themselves to St James. And right now they are saying, ‘I can live in St. James, but I can't die in St. James.’”

Industrial ailments

Geraldine Mayho is one of those residents determined not to die in St James. A large suitcase and stack of boxes fill one corner of her modest home, which is bordered on both sides by the huge cylindrical oil storage tanks that dominate the local landscape. She walks through the house to point out the crooked doorways and window frames and cracked walls – an effect of the near-constant industrial activity at nearby loading docks that has shifted the house foundation.

She says she can't afford to rent an apartment on her monthly pension of about \$700 from her days as a janitor at the local high school. Her best option is to move in with her grandchildren in Mobile, Alabama, until someone – local industry, she hopes – compensates her for her home.

“Whether or not they buy me out, I’ve got to get out of here,” said Mayho. “I’m so tired of being sick.”

She says that since moving here in 1965, when the area was still mostly agricultural, she has suffered a range of ailments, from headaches to stomachaches and heart problems, that doctors could never fully explain. But several years ago, she says one doctor gave her a letter stating her conditions were the result of exposure to “toxic substances”.

Her family’s health, too, has been shaped by the town’s air pollution. She rattles off a list of six female relatives, all residents, recently diagnosed with or deceased from breast cancer. One son has had a persistent cough; another is infertile. Her daughter died in her 30s, but she says doctors couldn’t identify the exact cause.

“She was sick like I was sick,” Mayho said. Asked if she thought her daughter’s death had been caused by industrial pollution, she fought back tears: “I know it was.”

The Louisiana Tumor Registry, a state cancer tracker, only releases data on a regional level, so localized cancer rates are hard to come by. But many residents who speak to the Guardian seem to have some ailment or an affected family member, from cancer to asthma to multiple sclerosis and skin conditions, and they all trace it back to the air pollution from the chemical plants that surround them.

Isle de Jean Charles has lost 98% of its land and most of its population to rising sea levels – but as remaining residents consider relocation, what happens next is a test case to address resettlement needs

However, according to the Louisiana department of environmental quality (LDEQ), the state regulator, emissions from the collection of plants that surround St James are compliant with state and federal regulations. LDEQ representatives point to improvements in air quality over the years as a sign of regulatory success.

“It’s very clear that air quality has greatly improved over time,” Bryan Johnston, who works in the air permits division of the LDEQ, said. “Over the last 20 years and even more recently, in just the last several years, there has been dramatic declines in air emissions in St James parish.”

Johnston said the LDEQ would release its long-term emissions data for St James with its forthcoming final permitting decision for the YCI plant. Publicly available EPA data is inconclusive and often averaged across the entire county. One data set from the EPA’s Toxic Release Inventory for “core chemicals” – which does not include chemicals added since 1988 – shows wide year-over-year fluctuations in total air emissions for St James Parish since the late 1980s. In 2015, total core chemicals emissions were 501,150 pounds, scarcely below the 516,088 reported in 1988.

But few here would agree with Johnston's assessment. Some say they simply stopped reporting strong chemical smells that regularly waft across the town because, they say, local authorities don't do anything.

"Back in the day, you knew when you smelled it," said Brettaiene Celestin, 66, describing unusual emissions events. She grew up in the area and lives alone in a small trailer that borders an industrial railroad and oil storage terminals. "But now, it's like a part of your life."

Local people say wild lemon and orange trees have stopped bearing fruit, there are no more butterflies or crickets, and new flooding issues have plagued the town since their industrial neighbors began to use the agricultural ditches that once let rainwater flow through for plant drainage use.

"[We feel] totally unprotected, forgotten about," added Eve Butler, 60, a resident and local advocate.

Despite the constant refrain from politicians and companies touting job opportunities, few here of working age are employed in the local oil and petrochemical plants. Any boom in construction jobs is brief and the far fewer permanent jobs tend to go to contractors outside the parish or the state. There are some local residents employed by the nearby plants, but, according to residents, many people work outside of the town or parish, mainly in professional services positions or at other industrial plants.

"Our quality of life has deteriorated and nobody takes responsibility for that. Because you're told: it's private industry, it's going to be good for the community. But the community has not benefitted," said Butler. "We are kind of, like, collateral damage."

A state of deregulation

With two new methanol plants, plus the terminus of the Bayou Bridge pipeline – which would carry crude oil from the controversial [Dakota Access pipeline](#) – planned for the area, local and state activists see an opportunity to fight back. But Trump's dual aims of handcuffing the EPA with budget cuts while also accelerating industrial deregulation have tempered hopes for change here.

In January, Yuhuang Chemical Inc (YCI), a subsidiary of China's Shandong Yuhuang Chemical Co, broke ground on the first phase of its \$1.9bn methanol plant. When the project was announced in 2014, it was the largest greenfield investment by a Chinese firm in the United States. The plant will eventually produce 3m [metric tons](#) of methanol per year, 40-60% of which could be shipped abroad, according to YCI's general counsel, Jerry Jones.

South Louisiana Methanol's (SLM) \$1.3bn plant, to produce 5,300 metric tons per day, is planned nearby. The Bayou Bridge pipeline, another project drawing the ire of environmentalists, would, once built, cross 163 miles of delicate Louisiana wetlands, including eight watersheds, and terminate at oil storage terminals in St James. Both projects are expected to receive permits to move forward soon.

In this largely African American town that grew out of former slave plantations, people are concerned with a certain kind of environmental injustice. Two environmental groups have pushed the EPA to declare civil rights violations because the cumulative air pollution of existing and new plants disproportionately impacts a community of color.

“We felt it was a perfect example of environmental injustices happening at a community that has already got too much to be there,” said Darryl Malek-Wiley, environmental justice organizer at the Sierra Club, which, along with the local not-for-profit Louisiana Environmental Action Network, filed the EPA petitions against YCI and SLM.

The EPA did not respond to the SLM petition, but in August, the agency agreed with some parts of the group’s petition addressing the YCI plant and kicked the question of the air emissions permit back to LDEQ. The state agency floated a revised permit for public comment late last year; the same environmental groups again petitioned in March, saying the new version still failed to comply with Clean Air Act standards. But another EPA ruling in their favor is an unlikely prospect, the advocacy group fears, as the agency prepares for major cuts under Trump, including the elimination of its environmental justice program. The LDEQ says it expects to issue final approval for the new emissions permit this month.

For environmentalists in Louisiana, where the LDEQ is widely viewed as an accessory of industrial corporations, Trump’s attempts to unravel the EPA are especially worrying.

“[LDEQ] feels that it’s their goal to issue permits ... not to protect citizens of Louisiana, not to protect the environment,” said Malek-Wiley. He says that while the EPA’s Region 6 office, which covers Louisiana, has been among the weakest on enforcement, the agency has still stepped in at times when the state has not. One of the first environmental justice cases tried by the EPA put a stop to a proposed PVC plant in 1998 in Convent, Louisiana, directly across the river from St James.

Johnston, of the LDEQ, strongly rejected claims the office served as a rubber stamp for industry, citing what he said were long-term air quality improvements in the state.

Louisiana has developed an outsized role in the country’s energy and petrochemical industry, thanks in part to generous tax breaks that are largely borne at the local level. The state’s Industrial Tax Exemption Program (ITEP), which dates back to the 1930s, offers a 10-year local property tax exemption for industrial developers. Between 2008 and 2015, the state [estimates](#) it lost nearly \$10bn in revenue under the ITEP. It expects to forego an additional \$7bn from 2016 to 2020.

St James has been [one of the top](#) parishes for the ITEP over the past decade, giving out an average of \$36.5m in tax breaks every year. That’s compared to a total of \$61.8m in taxes actually collected in the parish in 2015.

Nearly 50 farm workers experienced nausea and vomiting apparently caused by a pesticide whose scheduled ban was overturned by the Trump administration

Crawfish broil

As the latest high-profile company to enter the town, in April, YCI hosted a crawfish boil with company representatives on hand to answer questions about the plant. The event turned contentious, as Joseph and a group of upset citizens peppered the company president and CEO, Charlie Yao, with questions, unsatisfied with his assertion that the plant would be built to the highest environmental and safety standards.

“No one can get 100% support of anything you do,” Yao told the Guardian. “That’s my mission, to work with people.” He said the meeting was the start of a community engagement process that would include job and vendor fairs this summer. The company plans to hire 90-100 people on a permanent basis once the first phase of the plant comes online, by October of 2019.

“We’re going to try to do the best we can to be a good community neighbor,” Jones, YCI’s general counsel, told the Guardian. When asked if the company would participate in any residential buyouts, Jones said: “I don’t feel it’s appropriate [for YCI] to bear the burden of solving that problem for the community. If the industrial complex wants to figure out a way to solve that problem, then we will be a part of that.”

Still, many here remain skeptical.

“What you are looking at is a dying community,” said Butler. “Not because of the residents, but because of the way industry is allowed to come in. And they call it progress.” Years ago, she encouraged her children, who grew up in St James, to move out of Louisiana because of the health risks. Within the next ten years or so, she expects the entire town will be nothing but plants and pipelines.

“We’ve got a president now that looks at money and not people,” said Joseph. “Our fight is just beginning, because if it’s not going to be this [plant], it’s going to be another one.” Nevertheless, he says his hope is that public pressure on YCI will force the company – and others looking at St James – to eventually pull out.

“We might not win all the battles,” he said. “But I think we are going to win the war.”

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/jun/06/louisiana-cancer-alley-st-james-industry-environment>

June 8, 2017

Standing Rock Sioux Tribe Receives Prestigious Award + \$1 Million Investment to Transition Away From Fossil Fuels

By Wallace Global Fund
EcoWatch

The [Wallace Global Fund](#) awarded the inaugural Henry A. Wallace Award and a \$250,000 prize to the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe for its unyielding courage in the fight against the [Dakota Access Pipeline](#), and its dedication to transitioning to [renewable energy](#). In addition to the \$250,000 prize, the tribe will receive up to a \$1 million investment from the Wallace Global Fund to support its transition toward fossil fuel independence.

The award was presented to Tribal Chairman David Archambault II at an award ceremony in New York on Thursday; a donor and investor lunch briefing followed the ceremony to highlight [solar](#) and [wind](#) energy projects underway at the Standing Rock Reservation.

The Henry A. Wallace Award was established in 2017 by the Wallace Global Fund to lift up the extraordinary courage and will it takes to stand up to oppressive corporate and political power. Henry A. Wallace was a visionary and progressive advocate who served as the 33rd vice president of the U.S. under President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

"Our foundation is guided by my grandfather's framing of a mighty struggle that continues to this day: protecting the interests of what he called the 'common man'—ordinary people—against the oppressive combination of corporate and governmental power. Democracy, he said, 'must put human beings first and dollars second,'" said Scott Wallace, co-chair of the Wallace Global Fund.

"This award in his honor is intended to recognize the type of extraordinary courage that ordinary people can summon to fight such abuses of power. No one represents such courage better than the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe. And never has such courage been more essential to the health of our democracy than right now."

"We hold the Standing Rock community in high regard for their care for human and ecological well-being. By resisting the dysfunctional narrative imposed by the fossil-fuel industry, Standing Rock has demonstrated what it looks like to prioritize well-being over profit for the few," said Scott Fitzmorris, co-chair of the Wallace Global Fund and great grandson of Henry A. Wallace.

Over the past year, the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe fought to protect its clean water, sacred lands and indigenous rights by resisting the Dakota Access Pipeline in a series of [peaceful protests](#) against Energy Transfer Partners' plans to build the [pipeline](#) along a route violating Treaty law. The protests drew international attention and support—running from approximately April 2016 through February 2017, attracting thousands of people and resulting in hundreds of arrests and injuries. The Standing Rock Sioux tribe and its supporters who protested in solidarity stood their ground for higher principles at grave personal risk, igniting a movement.

[President Trump's](#) executive order that gave the green light for the Dakota Access Pipeline was yet another transgression against Native Americans. Although oil began flowing through the Dakota Access Pipeline on June 1, 2017, the [danger](#) to the tribe's water supply continues and the Standing Rock Sioux are not giving up the fight. They are pursuing legal action against the pipeline, while moving toward fossil fuel independence through expansion in renewable energy.

"This is not over. We continue to fight the pipeline in court and await a decision that adequately reflects the rule of law established in this country—one so often flouted by this administration. However, we will never stop fighting for our planet and future generations; this resiliency is part of who we are as a tribe," said Archambault.

"We are grateful and honored to accept the inaugural Henry A. Wallace Award and a grant from the Wallace Global Fund that will help us continue our resistance against the pipeline and transition to clean energy technologies like wind and solar."

<https://www.ecowatch.com/standing-rock-wallace-fund-2436994680.html>

June 9, 2017

Guardians of Creation

BBC

Faith communities say these are critical times for the environment. Their driving force comes from the belief that they are guardians of creation - protectors of the earth. While people of faith the world over are working for change, Ritula Shah asks what special dynamic they bring to the environmental movement and whether they can harness religious conviction to effect global policy.

Pope Francis has joined the voices of Islamic, Jewish, Sikh and Hindu leaders, amongst others, in calling for action on climate change, imbuing the debate with a moral and spiritual imperative. And it is not just religious leaders. People of faith across the religious spectrum and around the world are actively involved in practical projects to protect the environment and raise awareness.

We visit some of these projects and meet the people running them. We attend an environmental workshop for imams, we talk to worshippers in the Punjab celebrating Sikh Environment Day, workers at an Eco Village in Tanzania run by Islamic Help and we have tea with volunteers at a Christian run community allotment in England. What difference can they make?

Dr Mary Evelyn Tucker, expert on Religion and Ecology says there are roughly a billion Hindus, a billion and a half Muslims, a billion Confucians and two billion Christians alone, making quite a moral force.

Dr Rajwant Singh from Eco Sikh says these vast faith communities have to work together and if they do, they are better placed than anyone else to influence governments.

Listen to the recording here:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p054nkxf>

June 9, 2017

Politics, culture or theology? Why evangelicals back Trump on global warming

By David Gibson
Religion News Service

(RNS) President Trump's decision to pull out of the landmark Paris agreement sparked a global outcry and provided yet another flashpoint to illuminate the nation's stark political divide on climate change: The U.S. right largely rallied to his side while those on the left gnashed their teeth over what seemed like a planet-threatening move.

But the controversial move earlier this month was also another indicator of the sharp contrast between conservative Christians and the rest of the American religious scene, as predominantly white evangelical Protestants often hailed the president's action while Catholics, mainline Protestants and leaders of other faiths decried it.

"Climate change is real. Failing to protect the earth is not just a failure of leadership. It is a moral failure," Chicago Cardinal Blase Cupich [wrote in a tweetstorm](#) of criticism that was echoed by Catholic officials from Washington to the Vatican, where Pope Francis has made environmental protection a priority.

On the other side, however, conservative Christians such as the popular commentator – and theology student – Erick Erickson were having none of it.

"I worship Jesus, not Mother Earth," [Erickson tweeted](#). "He calls us all to be good stewards of the planet, but doesn't mean I have to care about global warming."

Speaking at a town hall meeting in Coldwater, Mich., GOP Rep. Tim Walberg – a graduate of evangelical schools – [made a similar point](#): "As a Christian, I believe that there is a creator in God who is much bigger than us. And I'm confident that, if there's a real problem, he can take care of it."

Yet the question of just why white evangelicals are such outliers on this issue remains a matter of [intense debate](#).

The simplest, and most common, explanation is that conservative Christians are simply putting their [political preferences first](#), like most people do; indeed, [surveys show](#) that white evangelicals remain stalwart Trump supporters and backers of GOP economic and other policies, and that pattern seems to hold on this issue as well.

"Reports @realDonaldTrump withdrawing from Paris Accord are good news," [tweeted Ralph Reed](#), a veteran of the religious right and chairman of the Faith and Freedom Coalition. "Hurts US economy, kills jobs, goes easy on China & India. Bad deal."

But several other factors complicate the straightforward, politics-based answer.

For example, new research indicates that on environmental issues, at least, conservative Christian theology may be the driving force behind the sharply divergent views of evangelicals.

That's the upshot of a new study by Nebraska sociologist Philip Schwadel and Washington State University sociologist Erik Johnson, published in the [April edition of the Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion](#). The study uses almost three decades of repeated cross-sectional data to show that the opinions of conservative evangelicals on environmental policies are informed by theology more than ideology.

“Even in the 21st century, when politics seem to be of utmost importance, differences in support for environmental spending among different religious groups have nothing to do with political perspectives,” Schwadel said. “Theological views seem to be the biggest factor explaining differences between evangelicals and other Americans.”

In an interview with RNS, Schwadel explained that on environmental concerns, party affiliation played as large a role in influencing the views of Americans overall as did their religious beliefs, and both those factors outstripped every other variable, such as education, sex, income, race and geography.

But when comparing evangelicals to some other religious groups, the evidence indicated that religious views were far more important for evangelicals than for other Christians.

The chief theological marker of their beliefs, he said, is that evangelicals tend to have a literal view of the Bible – they believe that in Genesis the “earth was given to them to do as humans will” and that the prophecy at the end of the New Testament that Jesus will return in glory to rapture his followers is soon to be fulfilled.

Basically, if you believe that God created the world in six actual days, and that it will end in the twinkling of an eye, then you might be more prone to short-term thinking about the environment.

At the same time, other scholars caution that there's more to the story.

Molly Worthen, an assistant professor of history at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and [author](#) of “Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism,” agreed that it is important to push beyond “this tendency among many pundits and political scientists to simply read theology as a pious varnish on political opinions.”

But Worthen argues that even scriptural literalists have a cultural context to their views of the Bible, and in the case of conservative evangelicals that context has been strongly affected by their deep and long-simmering suspicion of science and professional experts as promoting an anti-religion agenda.

That attitude gained steam in the 19th century with the rise of scientific approaches to biblical interpretation and the reaction against Darwin's theory of evolution.

In the wake of the ridicule directed toward fundamentalists after the famous 1925 Scopes trial in Tennessee – in which a teacher was found guilty of teaching about evolution – conservative Christian resentment toward powerful elites and intellectuals grew even more intense.

Evangelicals, Worthen said, were trained “to see the Bible as a code book that, properly interpreted, could reveal the true meaning of current events no matter what the fancy scientists and political elites would tell you.”

In contemporary terms, that has engendered a penchant for conspiracy theories and an appetite for “fake news,” and it encourages many evangelicals to view experts – such as climate scientists, who hold a broad and deep consensus on global warming and humanity’s role in it – as “either dupes or servants of the devil’s cause,” she said.

Conservative Christians have also developed a network of institutions to provide alternative theories that seem to rebut the “secular” experts using their own tools of science and reason against them. So what may once have been theology has become its own self-affirming culture dedicated to providing an alternate answer to whatever “facts” the world provides.

Whether the effects of climate change in the coming years will change evangelical minds isn’t clear; surveys show the rest of the country is increasingly concerned, and [6 in 10 disagreed](#) with Trump’s decision to withdraw from the Paris agreement.

For now, however, conservative Christians like Erickson seem to be doubling down on their biblical worldview.

“The truth is we are all going to die. But it won’t be because of global warming,” Erickson wrote [in an epic response](#) that threw the Book of Revelation back in the face of liberals and scientists. “I have read the end of the book. There will be famine. There will be drought. There will be flood. And there will be war. Then there will be a last day where we stand before our Maker and are called to account.

“Worrying about global warming and social justice won’t get you past the pearly gates,” Erickson continued. “Saving souls will. But it is hard to save souls when you don’t believe in the God of creation because you are too busy worshipping that creation.”

<http://religionnews.com/2017/06/09/politics-culture-or-theology-why-evangelicals-back-trump-on-global-warming/>

June 10, 2017

Religious Liberals Sat Out of Politics for 40 Years. Now They Want in the Game.

By Laurie Goodstein
New York Times

“We’re in a real battle for the soul of faith, of Christianity, of this nation,” said the Rev. Troy Jackson, executive director of the [Amos Project](#), a multifaith social-justice coalition in Cincinnati.

The last time the religious left made this much noise was in protesting the Vietnam War, when the members of the clergy were mostly white men. Now, those in the forefront include blacks and Latinos, women and gays, along with a new wave of activist [Catholics inspired by Pope Francis](#). And they include large contingents of Jews, Muslims and also Sikhs, Hindus and Buddhists in some cities — a reflection of the country’s religious diversity.

Most surprising of all, perhaps, is that religious progressives are being joined at the ramparts by a noticeable number of energized [young evangelicals](#).

Such a loose alliance of people of many faiths, many causes — and no small number of intractable disagreements — may never rival the religious right in its cohesion, passion or political influence. And its mutually standoffish relationship with the [Democratic Party](#), dating to the 1970s, stands in stark contrast to Christian conservatives’ sway over the Republican Party.

But those on the left say that they do not need to mirror the Christian right’s strategic alliance with the Republican Party to gain a healthy measure of political influence — and that they are undaunted by how long it might take.

A Fight for the ‘Moral Center’

Late on a Friday three weeks into the Trump administration, the [Rev. William J. Barber II](#) was in a Raleigh, N.C., hotel room, talking through his speech for the next day with advisers, including fellow ministers, a Muslim activist and a couple who had marched with the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. All confessed they remained demoralized since the election. But they also marveled at the surge in political protests, fueled in part by Christian, Jewish and Muslim activists working together.

Dr. Barber, fighting a flu, smiled broadly. “Rosa Parks didn’t just decide to sit down one day,” he said. “We can’t choose the moment that the flame bursts out, but we can be the kindling.”

He has been piling up sticks for years.

As president of the North Carolina N.A.A.C.P. and pastor of a small Disciples of Christ church in Goldsboro, Dr. Barber began staging [“Moral Monday” protests](#) in Raleigh in 2013 to oppose voting-rights restrictions and other policies of the Republican-led state government. The demonstrations attracted thousands of participants and helped defeat the governor in 2016.

Last year, he branched out. Along with the Rev. Traci Blackmon, a well-known supporter of the Black Lives Matter movement, and other clergy members, Dr. Barber trained thousands of activists in 32 states, an effort that continues.

“If we’re going to change the country,” he says, “we’ve got to nationalize state movements. It’s not from D.C. down. It’s from the states up.”

To his admirers, Dr. Barber, a gifted preacher with a big-tent vision, is the strongest contender for King’s mantle. And he invites the comparison. In April, to mark the 50th anniversary of the landmark sermon at Riverside Church in Manhattan in which King denounced the Vietnam War, saying, “I cannot be silent,” [Dr. Barber preached against Mr. Trump from the same pulpit](#) and denounced what he saw as pervasive racism across the political right.

“When we see signs of a rising fascism,” he said, “we know that we cannot be silent.” In May, he [stepped down from his N.A.A.C.P. post](#) to announce a latter-day version of King’s 1968 Poor People’s Campaign.

“If you think this is just a left-versus-right movement, you’re missing the point,” Dr. Barber [said in Raleigh](#). “This is about the moral center. This is about our humanity.”

Loath to be labeled left-leaning or liberal, Dr. Barber cites the Constitution and the common good as freely as the Bible. “We use the words that progressives have thrown away — morality, welfare, poor, faith — because those are soul words,” he says.

He calls himself an evangelical “who takes seriously the Old Testament and Jesus.” Yet he has fully embraced gay and transgender rights — and in North Carolina, home of the [law restricting bathroom use by transgender people](#). The Bible, he notes, says far more about caring for the needy than it does about homosexuality or abortion.

“How do you take two or three Scriptures and make a theology out of it, and claim it is the moral perspective, and leave 2,000 on the table?” he said. “That is a form of theological malpractice.”

This stance has cost Dr. Barber some allies, including in black churches, but has won him others. [Imam Abdullah Antepli](#) of Duke University said he had hesitated to march alongside gay pastors until he realized their struggles were linked.

“We can’t have only Jews cry for anti-Semitism, and Muslims cry for Islamophobia,” Imam Antepli said. “We can only win this if we see it as one big fight.”

The fervor powering that fight could be seen in Raleigh the next day. Behind Dr. Barber, Imam Antepli, two rabbis and a lesbian bishop were some 80,000 people.

Hunched over a cane he has used since his 20s, when he was struck with debilitating arthritis, Dr. Barber took the first step.

“Forward together!” he bellowed, calling for a response.

The crowd supplied it: “Not one step back!”

Tense Ties to Democrats

Just how much ground the religious left must cover before it amounts to a meaningful counterweight to the Christian right was evident last November, when, despite deep concerns, [white evangelical conservatives rallied behind Mr. Trump](#) in overwhelming numbers.

Muscle memory alone could have played a part: For nearly four decades, Christian conservatives have coalesced around the Republican presidential nominee, reaching right into the pews to mobilize voters.

Relations between Democrats and religious progressives have been more difficult since 1980, when evangelicals deserted Jimmy Carter — one of their own, whom they had supported in 1976 — for Ronald Reagan.

As Republicans cemented the Christian right as a cornerstone of the party's base, Democrats moved in the opposite direction, so intent on separating church and state that they recoiled from courting religious blocs of voters, recalled Gary Hart, the former senator, who grew up in the Church of the Nazarene and graduated from divinity school.

During his ill-fated [1988 presidential campaign](#), Mr. Hart said, he was often asked, “‘Why don't you talk about your religious background more?’ And the answer was, ‘I don't want to be seen as pandering for votes.’”

Issues on which the religious left is at odds with Democratic doctrine include military spending and the death penalty, though the most polarizing is abortion — the main barrier, for many liberal evangelicals and Catholics, to voting as Democrats — as could be seen when [the party split recently](#) over whether to endorse an anti-abortion Democrat running for mayor of Omaha.

Setting abortion aside, political appeals based on religious beliefs continue to carry risk for Democrats, given the growing numbers of Americans who claim no religion: [Secular voters overwhelmingly vote Democratic](#), and younger voters are far more secular than older voters.

Still, Hillary Clinton's snub of even moderate evangelicals in the 2016 presidential race squandered many opportunities to cut into Mr. Trump's support. Where [Barack Obama had worked hard in 2008 to show he would at least listen to evangelicals](#), Mrs. Clinton rebuffed interview requests from evangelical media outlets and signaled leftward moves on abortion rights that [helped many conservative voters overcome their doubts about Mr. Trump](#).

“The fact that one party has strategically used and abused religion, while the other has had a habitually allergic and negative response to religion per se, puts our side in a more difficult position in regard to political influence,” said the Rev. Jim Wallis, the evangelical social justice advocate who founded the Sojourners community and magazine [in 1971](#).

“Most progressive religious leaders I talk to, almost all of them, feel dissed by the left,” he said. “The left is really controlled by a lot of secular fundamentalists.”

If Dr. Barber works from the outside in, Mr. Wallis is the consummate inside player. His Capitol Hill operation is on an upswing, its big new offices bustling with interns plotting social media campaigns like a [“Matthew 25 Pledge.”](#) to “protect and defend vulnerable people in the name of Jesus.”

Mr. Wallis counsels lawmakers on applying faith to public policy — as when [Representative Joseph P. Kennedy III scolded the House speaker, Paul D. Ryan,](#) a fellow Catholic, for saying it would be an “act of mercy” to repeal the Affordable Care Act. “He and I must have read different Scripture,” Mr. Kennedy, a Democrat, said in a well-watched floor speech.

Others on the religious left are eyeing more direct forays into politics. The PICO National Network, a [faith-based community organizing group](#) active in 22 states, is recruiting clergy and lay leaders to run for office next year, said its political director, [Bishop Dwayne D. Royster,](#) a former Norristown, Pa., councilman. And not necessarily as Democrats, he added: “We have to make the parties work for us, not us work for the parties.”

Those rooting for a progressive religious revival, [mindful of past failures,](#) harbor few illusions that it will be easy.

“The movement never does arrive,” the Rev. Daniel Schultz, who pastors a United Church of Christ congregation in Wisconsin, [wrote in a piece on the Religion Dispatches](#) website. “It never arrives because the left (or at least the Democratic Party) is too diverse and its priorities too different for anything like a mirror image of the religious right to coalesce.”

[Sister Simone Campbell,](#) a liberal Catholic lobbyist who also barnstormed with Dr. Barber, said the movement’s diversity could be an obstacle, as she discovered in a room full of white Catholics, black Baptists and agnostic Unitarians.

“People are trying to figure out: How do we get traction? But it has not yet jelled,” she said. “So I yell at the Holy Spirit, ‘Hurry up!’”

Responding to a Threat

Religious conservatives have taken notice of the stirrings among liberals. The Rev. Franklin Graham, a Trump supporter, has told audiences in North Carolina to beware of preachers like Dr. Barber who “call themselves progressive,” warning: “It’s just another word for ‘I’m an atheist.’” And Gary L. Bauer, the social conservative leader, said he worried more about nonbelievers than about the religious left, citing what he called its affinity for government solutions to social problems.

Yet opposition to Mr. Trump is plainly catalyzing new alliances of religious progressives — and no other cause has united them more than [protecting immigrants and refugees,](#) especially those in their flocks.

In Cincinnati alone, 21 churches have joined a sanctuary coalition, forming teams to respond when immigrants are detained, as one group of ministers did recently when a Guatemalan man seeking asylum was held at a nearby jail.

“I think a big part of why this is happening now is every group feels threatened,” said the [Rev. Alan Dicken](#), a young coalition organizer.

Among the most intriguing participants in these coalitions are evangelical leaders like the Rev. Rich Nathan of Columbus, Ohio, pastor of the nation’s largest church in the evangelical [Vineyard](#) denomination, who [joined a rabbi and an imam on talk radio](#) to denounce Mr. Trump’s travel ban.

More and more, younger evangelicals are questioning their association with the religious right, Mr. Nathan said: “I don’t know almost any evangelical Christians who feel comfortable with the old evangelical guard. They’re certainly not in my orbit. Millennial Christians are really concerned about social justice.”

And they are keeping busy.

In Cincinnati recently, the sanctuary coalition held a vigil outside a Methodist church with a gay pastor after vandals scrawled anti-gay slurs on its sign. Then a priest sounded an alarm: One of his parishioners, a mother of four who had fled gang violence in Mexico, had been picked up by immigration agents and was about to be deported.

In the end, [she was](#), despite the group’s vigils, petitions and a social media campaign. But Mr. Jackson of the Amos Project, a pastor with Independent Christian Churches, discerned a measure of progress.

“I wish we were not in this place,” he said, “but it’s one of the gifts of this moment. The energy is there, and there’s new, deep relationships that are being forged between clergy and congregations that never existed before.”

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/10/us/politics/politics-religion-liberal-william-barber.html>

June 13, 2017

Growing Concern Over Climate Change Is Creating Interfaith Dialogue

By Justin Catanoso
Pacific Standard

Two years after Pope Francis launched *Laudato Si*, the Vatican's plea to save the Earth, Trump rejected its tenets and the Paris Agreement. But people of all faiths are unified globally to beat climate change.

On May 24th, a grim-faced Pope Francis handed a signed copy of *Laudato Si* to President Donald Trump during his visit to Rome. The United States president, who has called climate change "a hoax," promised to read the papal encyclical, a spiritual and secular plea to save the Earth from environmental destruction.

A week later, Trump announced plans to yank the U.S. out of the 2015 [Paris Agreement](#), whose prologue was influenced by the principles embodied in *Laudato Si*. In doing so, Trump repudiated 195 nations' pledges to reduce their carbon footprint to mitigate the worst effects of climate change; he repudiated Pope Francis and his encyclical as well.

Two years after the release of *Laudato Si*—and long after its intense global attention has faded—it's worth asking: is the uncompromising and unprecedented Catholic teaching document fulfilling Vatican expectations by uniting leaders of all faiths, along with their billions of congregants, to take decisive climate action "in care for our common home"?

The answer is a qualified "yes"—based on evidence from interviews with a range of faith leaders, recent conferences, signed pledges, and a host a concrete actions, large and small, in congregations and seminaries around the world.

"There is an assumption that if religious leaders let the pope talk about [environmental protection], it will usher in rapid, large-scale change," said Fletcher Harper, executive director of GreenFaith, a U.S.-based interfaith environmental activism organization with an international reach.

"That's magical thinking. It's not how the world works. What matters is discipline in determining long-term work by faith groups. It's not happening as fast as I'd like it to, but it's underway," he said.

Harper offered up his own organization as an example of incremental progress. GreenFaith conducted a training session in Brazil in May with 55 "emerging faith leaders" from 17 countries. The goal: Promote environmental awareness and identify realistic renewable energy and sustainability projects that can be achieved in each country. But harvesting the fruits of the seeds planted at that international meeting will take considerable energy and time.

Push and Pull Among Catholics

The Catholic church in the U.S. has been slow to embrace the encyclical and its call for action. The pope's popularity there dropped with the encyclical's release on June 18th, 2015; too few pastors are preaching environmental protection from the pulpit, Catholic insiders say; and polls revealed that a majority of American Catholics voted for Trump.

Cardinal Peter Turkson, president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, which oversaw the research and writing of *Laudato Si*, said in a 2016 interview: "We are not unaware of the tensions the encyclical has presented in some places." Noting that wealthy U.S. Catholic donors tend to be conservative politically, Turkson lamented, "You cannot bite the hand that feeds you, but we hope to change that."

Slowly, that change is coming.

On May 10th, nine large Catholic organizations—one global, five from Italy, two from the U.S., and one from the United Kingdom—announced their divestment from coal, oil, and gas stocks in what was deemed "the largest Catholic fossil fuel divestment to date," by the Global Catholic Climate Movement.

"This statement aims to be the first concrete commitment in the logic of the integral ecology and the care of our common home, which Pope Francis called us to," said Archbishop Tomasso Valentinetti of Pescara-Penne, Italy.

Sister Sheila Kinsey, who is based in Rome and is on the steering committee of the Global Catholic Climate Movement, added, "Laudato Si and its spirit are still alive, and more and more relevant, considering that climate action is a crucial issue on the international political agenda."

She noted that, on January 27th, more than 125 international organizations—including a host of Catholic congregations, universities, along with environmental groups such as Greenpeace and 350.org—gathered in Rome for a conference titled "*Laudato Si* and Catholic Investing."

Meanwhile, in Benin in East Africa, where each Catholic diocese maintains its own farm, sustainable agricultural training centers inspired by the encyclical are growing in number. And across Australia, a number of Catholic schools are heeding the Vatican call to invest in solar panels to cut carbon emissions and save energy costs.

Interfaith Appeal

"The pope doesn't expect this movement to just be a Catholic thing," said longtime Vatican observer Robert Mickens, English editor of *La Croix International* in Rome. "What is extraordinary about the encyclical is that it is a project that the whole human race can engage in together. What unites all of humanity? The environment. It's our common home; our common interest."

As if to underscore that point, 33 faith-based groups from around the world signed the Interfaith Statement to World Leaders at the 22nd United Nations Climate Summit in Marrakesh, Morocco (COP22), last November. They pledged their commitment to the goals of the Paris Agreement—and, by extension, *Laudato Si*.

Gopal Patel is director of the London and India-based Bhumi Project, launched in 2009. Among its goals, the project promotes ways for Hindu communities to jettison coal for renewable energy, and to improve waste management and reduce pollution around temples. He signed the interfaith statement at COP22.

"All religions have been doing environmental work for a long time," Patel said. "What *Laudato Si* did, and continues to do, is ensure that faith voices are heard in the broad climate space. It was the biggest kind of support that the faith movement could get to show that we have something to say about caring for the Earth."

Patel couldn't help but mention Pope Francis' gift to Trump: "The pope could have given him many things. A punch in the face? Whatever. But he gave Trump *Laudato Si*, right? That's another opportunity for the faith community to say, 'We're still relevant and so is this message.'"

Patel also believes that the document written by Catholic thought leaders aligns well with core Hindu beliefs: "Hinduism believes that there is a universal ecosystem, not only on this planet but in all of creation. There is a universal structure and order to the world. People are a part of that. So are the trees and mountains and birds and fish."

Echoing a persistent theme in *Laudato Si*, he added, "One of the primary responsibilities of human beings is to ensure the maintenance of that universal harmony and balance that is creation."

Inspiration for Muslims

Nana Firman, co-founder of the Global Muslim Climate Network, recalled that, in early 2015—before Pope Francis made known his intention to produce *Laudato Si*—Muslim environmental leaders were drafting a statement in support of the U.N. climate negotiations to occur in Paris at year's end.

"We were discussing how to bring our position to the forefront. Then the pope released *Laudato Si* [in June of 2015] and we were, like, perfect! It stimulated and inspired us," Firman said. "Two months later, we released the *Islamic Declaration on Climate Change*."

Since then, she stressed, "a lot has been going on, even if it hasn't received much media attention."

"We are launching a campaign of clean-energy mosques in the Middle East and North Africa," she said. "The government of Morocco committed to transforming its 15,000 mosques around the country to renewable energy by 2019. Jordan has the same commitment to transform to solar energy."

Firman described hardware (projects) and software (Muslim leaders) that are being mobilized to help the poor and those most vulnerable to climate change. She spoke of joining the battle to fight rampant deforestation in Indonesia, and of the need to take action in low-lying Bangladesh, which is threatened by sea-level rise. More challenges await in drought-prone sub-Saharan Africa, she acknowledged.

"We are training imams as environmental scholars to speak from the pulpit to the community and to the public," she said. "When people come to the mosque, they see solar panels and they learn about why they are important. All of this is connected to our faith. We are stewards upon this Earth."

Faith and the Pace of Change

For all the anecdotal evidence of progress, an undertone of impatience resonates in the faith-based community, just as it does among environmental leaders. Carbon emissions are still increasing; the Earth experiences record temperatures year after year; sea-level rise and extreme weather are the norm.

Almost everywhere, the scale of investment and the pace of social change trails the quickening march of climate change.

In the U.S., dozens of seminaries—mostly Protestant—are integrating environmental education into their theological training. A younger and bigger generation of clergy is being urged to ramp up the urgency in their parishes for local and governmental climate action.

But the hope and promise of *Laudato Si* could remain beyond human reach without even more aggressive and engaged faith leaders mobilizing the billions they represent in all corners of the globe to pressure their governmental leaders and to act on their own.

"My students are excited and they want to take this on, but the challenges are so big," said Tim Van Meter, an associate professor of ecology and justice at the Methodist Theological School in Ohio. "People are just tired. It seems inevitable that we will drive ourselves to collapse."

Then, in an instant, Van Meter shook off that gloomy perspective: "One of the core understandings of what it means to be a person of faith is that you can't give in to despair. You have to live out of hope. As tired as we might get, I know we are working toward a greater good. And we will continue in this work."

<https://psmag.com/social-justice/growing-concern-over-climate-change-is-creating-interfaith-dialogue>

June 13, 2017

Theologians blast Paris Agreement withdrawal, call for creation care

By Heidi Schlumpf
National Catholic Reporter

[Albuquerque, N.M.](#) - Catholic theologians expressed concern and dismay about President Donald Trump's decision to [withdraw from the Paris Agreement](#) on climate change, with at least one theologian calling such action "objectively sinful." The president's announcement had come one week before a group of Catholic theologians met for their annual convention, which focused on the intersection of faith and care for the environment.

"By renegeing on its commitments, the U.S. could well undermine the shared trust that keeps other nations committed to the accord, with potentially devastating consequences for the entire

planet," said Jesuit Fr. David Hollenbach, outgoing president of the [Catholic Theological Society of America](#). "This suggests that Trump's decision to withdraw can be seen as objectively sinful."

Meanwhile, a group of Hispanic theologians took a public position expressing "deep regret and disappointment" in the president's withdrawal from the international agreement, noting that the decision "runs directly counter to the vision for care of creation presented by Pope Francis in his Encyclical Letter '*Laudato Si*,' among other ecclesial documents."

The statement from the [Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States](#) was released at the conclusion of its June 5-8 meeting in Albuquerque and dated June 9. The Catholic Theological Society of America meeting followed on June 8-11, gathering more 360 theologians from around the United States and the world.

"We stand with the international community of scientists, academics and citizens of the world, who recognize the impact of climate change on all of creation, particularly the world's most vulnerable citizens," said the Hispanic theologians' statement. "As such, we commit to stand with global and local leaders who act in a manner that promotes environmental stewardship that meets or surpasses the previously held commitment of the United States to the Paris Climate Agreement."

Hollenbach also praised mayors and governors who have pledged to continue the Paris Agreement commitments. His talk, titled "The Glory of God and the Common Good: Solidarity in a Turbulent World," argued that promoting the common good — such as through the Paris Agreement — and giving greater glory to God are deeply interconnected.

"Every Christian has a moral duty to make such contributions to the common good," Hollenbach said, adding that the church — as the single largest global institution in the world today — is in a position to be a key agent of the common good through its social ministry.

But Hollenbach said promoting the common good — in care for the environment and all its inhabitants — is not only a social duty but a religious one. Citing the example of St. Ignatius of Loyola, Hollenbach said it is clear that "the promotion of the common good is itself a way to show forth God's glory in the midst of history — part of the distinctively religious Christian vocation."

Such a commitment is essential when the tendency of populist and nationalist movements is "to replace collaboration for the international common good with pursuit of an illusory understanding of national self-interest," he said, noting that anti-globalist sentiment has both racist and anti-Islamic sentiment as well as roots in real suffering.

Yet he added that when St. Augustine and Luther described sin as being "turned in on oneself," "they could have been describing important currents in our politics."

Hollenbach said Francis' connection of the Eucharist with the work to protect our "common home" in "[Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home](#)" is evidence of the link between the common good and the glorification of God in history.

Lauding *Laudato Si'*

The pope's encyclical was the topic of numerous presentations at the conference. One panel looked at the reception of the document in an age of polarization — and of Twitter. With more than 34 million followers and tweets in nine languages, Francis' Twitter accounts and other social networks are intentionally being engaged in the promulgation and reception of magisterial teaching, argued Stephen Okey of [St. Leo University](#) in Florida.

Okey pointed to the Vatican's "Twitterbomb" in the days following the release of the encyclical as evidence of social media use for promulgation, while the continuing use of the hashtag [#LaudatoSi](#) reflects attempts to understand, interpret and apply the teachings — or reception.

Drawing on survey data surrounding the awareness and support, or lack thereof, of *Laudato Si'*, Annie Selak of [Boston College](#) noted that a majority of Catholics were not even aware of the encyclical, raising the question: "What does reception look like in an uninformed age?"

Those knowledgeable about the encyclical had divergent opinions about it, but Selak argued that such diversity was not a problem, unless it leads to ecclesial polarization. "Polarizing opinions shaped by the U.S. political system run the risk of ossifying as exclusiveness, resulting in church members being diametrically opposed to one another and failing to be in communion," she said.

Dialogue is the appropriate response to such polarization, argued Gregory Hillis of [Bellarmino University](#) in Kentucky, and the pope models and urges that dialogue in *Laudato Si'*.

The pope "urges all within the church away from the selfish fragmentation that is at the root of environmental degradation and toward a conversion of openness to others, both human and non-human," said Hillis, adding that a dialogical church is "a countercultural one that rejects the dominant culture's prevailing individualism."

The church, which "too often operates under the logic of a world that it supposedly rejects," is in need of conversion, said Hillis, citing Francis. "For it is only through dialogue that the church truly can be a sign of contradiction," Hillis said.

Some speakers, while praising the encyclical, were also critical of parts of it. In her keynote address on the topic of water and an "ethic of aridity," Christiana Zenner Peppard of [Fordham University](#) said she would have liked Francis to have cited at least one of the many communities of women religious who have long worked toward environmental justice.

Feminist theologian St. Joseph Sr. Anne Clifford of [Iowa State University](#) also raised questions about the encyclical's limited citation of women (only Mary, the mother of Jesus, and St. Thérèse of Lisieux, rather than any contemporary ecofeminists) and about its use of "mother" language when the pope quotes St. Francis of Assisi's Canticle at the beginning of the document. The "shadow side" of gendered language for nature is that it is "too weighed down by matter-spirit dualism."

The encyclical also "ignores the role societal gender patterns play in consumption of Earth's resources," said Clifford. For example, women are 14 times more likely to die in ecological disasters than men are, she said, as was the case in the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami in Bangladesh.

In his response to Clifford's talk, Daniel Castillo of [Loyola University Maryland](#) agreed that "we should be mindful of the manner in which even this seemingly benign term [Mother Earth] might be freighted with sexist and exploitative undercurrents characteristic of androcentric colonial power relations."

Castillo also urged ecofeminists — those who see connections between patriarchy's exploitation of women and of the Earth — to retrieve wisdom from Catholic tradition and from Jesus by "interpreting the book of nature by reading it in light of the book of Scripture."

Environmental justice

Another speaker, Andrew Prevot of Boston College, differentiated between "mere environmentalists" and proponents of environmental justice who prioritize the needs of the poor and oppressed. The latter, he said, "are natural conversation partners for liberation theology."

Prevot said he worried "that it may be easier for a Christian today to be attracted to the green turtle than to a darkly colored poor person who lives and dies amid the refuse of this world's racialized capitalist political economy."

Catholic Theological Society of America members also discussed divesting from fossil-fuel-producing companies, with the board gathering input from members to make a decision in the next year. "Our investment policies must not betray the social mission of the church, which includes promoting ecological responsibility," states a policy report created by an ad hoc committee that has been studying the issue since 2013.

More than 50 attendees also donated more than \$700 in carbon footprint offsets, to compensate for emissions involved in traveling to the conference.

Jesuit Fr. Francis Xavier Clooney, an expert in Hinduism and the religions of South Asia, was honored for his pioneering work in modern comparative theology with the society's 2017 John Courtney Murray Award for distinguished theological achievement. Mercy Sr. Margaret Farley, a feminist ethicist, received the Ann O'Hara Graff Memorial Award for her scholarship and liberating action on behalf of women in the church and broader community.

The Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States, which met jointly with the [Black Catholic Theological Symposium](#) on the topics of incarceration and detention, also recognized Mercy Sr. Ana Maria Pineda, associate professor at [Santa Clara University](#), for achievement in theological writing with its Virgilio Elizondo Award.

Next year's convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America will be held in Indianapolis. The theme is "Grace at Work in the World."

[NCR contributor Heidi Schlumpf teaches communications at Aurora University and is the author of *Elizabeth Johnson: Questing for God*.]

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/theology/theologians-blast-paris-agreement-withdrawal-call-creation-care>

June 13, 2017

ExxonMobil shareholders push through climate resolution

By Brian Roewe
National Catholic Reporter

When [ExxonMobil](#) shareholders overwhelmingly voted in late May in favor of a resolution aimed at shedding light on the impacts of addressing climate change on the oil company's long-term assets, [Dominican Sr. Patricia Daly](#) was among those beaming brightest.

"This was very sweet," said the director emeritus of the [Tri-State Coalition for Responsible Investment](#), which spans Connecticut, New Jersey and New York.

Through investment groups like the coalition, which comprises 40 Catholic institutions, and the larger [Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility](#), she and other faith-based investors have been working for two decades to bring about change at Exxon in how it recognizes and responds to climate change.

At the annual ExxonMobil meeting in Dallas May 31, the shareholder resolution, co-filed by the New York Common Retirement Fund and the Church of England and joined by the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility and 50 other institutions representing \$5 trillion in managed assets, received 62.3 percent of the shareholders' vote — the highest ever at Exxon for a climate-related measure.

The resolution, which Exxon opposed, seeks for the world's largest energy company to produce an annual report of the long-term impacts on its oil and gas reserves from global climate policies aimed at restricting average temperature rise well below 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) and as low as 1.5 degrees C — the primary goal of the Paris Agreement on climate change, which calls for drastic cuts in carbon emissions and a global shift toward a zero-carbon economy in order to meet the 2 C target and avert the worst climate impacts.

Tracey Rembert, assistant director of Catholic responsible investing for Christian Brothers Investment Services, said in a statement that while Exxon continues to bank "on an energy future that looks a lot like the past," i.e., highly reliant on oil and gas, "we want Exxon to be prepared and wide-eyed if a different market unfolds, and this proposal, we believe, jumpstarts that process."

Similar proposals also received majority shareholder support during votes last month at Occidental Petroleum (67 percent) and PPL Corporation (57.2 percent). Other resolutions at energy companies came up just short of majority support, [The Washington Post reported](#).

A vote on a shareholder resolution above 50 percent is generally viewed as a mandate for a company and its board to act upon it, Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility said in a statement.

"You don't want to ignore a vote that high," Daly said.

The vote came amid widespread news reports that President Donald Trump intended to withdraw the U.S. from the Paris climate accord, an action he indeed announced the next day.

Daly, who attended the COP21 climate summit in December 2015 that culminated in the Paris Agreement, said she agreed with some assessments that the Exxon shareholder vote was of greater importance than Trump's decision — which cannot formally take effect until November 2020, though at the federal level the U.S. has signaled it will cease implementation of its Paris emissions-reducing pledge.

Part of the significance in the Exxon vote, Daly said, was that large investment firms, several of which supported the resolution, are more and more seeking disclosures from companies of the business risks posed by countries under the Paris accord taking policy steps to reduce carbon emissions, the primary source being the burning of fossil fuels.

"Even if the U.S. pulls out of the agreement, they still need to operate with integrity and in alliance with other country goals," Daly said.

Despite the political context of the president's pullout decision, the shareholder motion was a major achievement for Daly, Fr. Michael Crosby and others with the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility who have engaged ExxonMobil on climate change over the course of two-plus decades.

"This one's a long time coming," Daly said.

The interfaith investors' interactions predated the Exxon-Mobil merger in 1999. Two years earlier, Crosby, a Capuchin Franciscan friar, had introduced the first resolution asking for a report on the impacts of climate change on the company's policies and practices, including liabilities it may incur and what it could do to reduce carbon emissions from fossil fuels.

From there, the interfaith center's resolutions have sought for ExxonMobil to disclose its greenhouse gas emissions; to disclose funds it spent on lobbying and supporting organizations at the forefront of climate denial; to report climate risks to its business; and to report its investments in renewable energy.

Those efforts yielded some positive results. Exxon shared information on its renewables investments, which it continues to do annually, though at the time of the initial request most of the initiatives were still based in oil and gas.

Earlier this year, Crosby, who is executive director of the [Seventh Generation Interfaith Coalition for Responsible Investment](#), [withdrew a resolution](#) — one first issued three years earlier that sought a person with climate change expertise be nominated to Exxon's board of directors — after climate scientist Susan Avery was appointed to the board.

Those successes, at Exxon and at other companies on issues such as human trafficking, reinforce for Daly the merits of shareholder advocacy in effecting positive change in companies, especially at a time when environmental groups, including numerous religious and Catholic efforts, have pushed for widespread divestment from fossil fuels.

So far, 27 Catholic institutions have divested from fossil fuels, among them more than a dozen religious communities. Twenty of the announcements have come in the [past two years](#) through a campaign of the [Global Catholic Climate Movement](#). In addition, the [University of Dayton](#) and [Georgetown University](#) have both divested their endowments from fossil fuels in some capacity.

While Daly credits the divestment movement with educating about climate change, she doesn't endorse it, believing to shift the global economy away from reliance on greenhouse gas-emitting fuels requires more work: "You don't change companies and you don't change economic systems of this country or the world by deciding to lose your seat at the table."

"There are a lot of people who wash their hands of it and they call it a win and they can sleep at night, and you know what, they have done nothing to bring about a world free of greenhouse gas emissions," Daly added.

Instead, the four-decade veteran of corporate responsibility encourages people to become informed and active shareholders and be involved with investment groups like the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility that are advocating for socially responsible changes.

"Imagine what would happen if people started really actively engaging in the companies that they own. The management and board of directors don't own those companies — we do," she said.

While divestment is largely credited with helping end apartheid in South Africa, the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility at its forming in 1971 sought to use shareholder advocacy to pressure companies providing critical services to leave the country until the oppressive system was abolished.

Engaging with a company doesn't mean overlooking its faults and failings, Daly clarified.

The [Exxon Knew reports](#) — which detail how Exxon knew of the risks of climate change as far back as the late 1970s yet withheld the information from its stockholders and funded groups

sowing climate denial, allegations Exxon "[completely rejects](#)" — has been the source of "honest, tense conversations" and remains an ongoing concern, the Dominican sister said.

She added she was happy that lawsuits brought by the attorneys general of New York and Massachusetts and an investigation by the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission continue to move forward. In Daly's view, the company's role in distorting and delaying action on climate change only "gives them a greater responsibility to take the lead on initiatives and different investing to turn climate change around."

Faith-based investors continue to watch how Exxon will change under its new CEO, Darren Woods, who succeeded Rex Tillerson after the latter's appointment as U.S. secretary of state. Daly organized a phone call for shareholders to thank the company for the letters it wrote, including one from Woods, to Trump urging him to keep the U.S. in the Paris Agreement.

That Tillerson, who also advocated for remaining in the deal, was absent in the White House Rose Garden during Trump's Paris pullout announcement signaled to her that he still understands the risks of climate change. The irony of a former oil man who has [only offered tempered support](#) of climate action is now considered something of an ally on the issue under the present political times is not lost on Daly, a sign she takes of how delightful life can be.

"I never would have dreamed of this scenario, but here we are," she said.

[Brian Roewe is an NCR staff writer. His email address is broewe@ncronline.org. Follow him on Twitter: [@BrianRoewe](#).]

<https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/exxonmobil-shareholders-push-through-climate-resolution>

June 14, 2017

How Standing Rock became a spiritual pilgrimage for activists

By Eileen Markey
America: The Jesuit Review

In December 2016, when thousands of Native Americans, environmental activists and their supporters were camped on the high plains of North Dakota hoping to stymie an oil pipeline mapped beneath the drinking water source of the Standing Rock Sioux reservation, Chief Arvol Looking Horse, a Lakota spiritual leader, addressed a massive interfaith prayer service. People from Native American nations across the United States had traveled to camp at Standing Rock and on nearby land, the most comprehensive gathering of native people since before the Indian wars of the 1870s. Indigenous people from Hawaii, Norway, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Mexico and Honduras arrived at the camps and hoisted their flags beside those of 300 American tribes.

Brayton Shanley, a Catholic peace and environmental activist who lives in an intentional community in rural Massachusetts, has a shock of white hair and the robust energy of someone who spends a great deal of time outdoors. At the end of November, he drove to North Dakota in a truck filled with straw bales, offered as insulation on the windswept, winter prairie. Joe Fortier, S.J., a former entomology professor at St. Louis University, who for the past 15 years has lived and ministered on the Colville Indian Reservation in Washington State, arrived the day before, changing out of his usual clothes and into a clerical collar, so people would know a Catholic priest was supporting the protest. Father Fortier, a self-effacing man whose gentleness belies the depth of his convictions, felt compelled to align himself with the people gathered at Standing Rock.

The camps had become a place to take a stand for the right to clean water and against its privatization, contamination and degradation. But they were also a site of pilgrimage, a place of profound prayer where Lakota women walked to the Cannonball River each morning to enact a water ceremony and where chants in the Lakota language, called to the rhythm of round drums, rose from the camp at dawn and Lakota elders tended a sacred fire all day and night. “Water is life,” they said. “Defend the sacred.”

On this biting cold December day, when fingers went numb if exposed to the air for more than a few minutes, more than 1,000 people gathered for a three-hour prayer service in which a rabbi, a Buddhist monk, various Protestant clergy and Father Fortier each offered prayers before the fire that Lakota elders had been tending throughout the protest. They spoke of their faiths’ common commitment to caring for the earth and their common belief in the sacredness of the physical world. Looking Horse spoke of the threat to clean water at Standing Rock as only one of millions of attacks on the integrity of the earth’s elements. Fighting back would take a particular kind of power, he said. “We will be victorious through tireless, prayer-filled and fearless nonviolent struggle. Standing Rock is everywhere.”

A few months into the Trump administration, oil is flowing through the pipeline and the historic encampment has been dispersed. The oil industry won. But Looking Horse may yet have been correct. The explicitly religious and imagination-grabbing protest at Standing Rock has inspired similar encampments and other forms of protest in defense of clean water across the country. From Pennsylvania to Texas, Florida to New Jersey and in South Dakota, Ohio, Massachusetts and Canada, newly emboldened “water protectors” have taken to the land in hopes of disrupting oil and natural gas pipelines they consider dangerous. For many of these protectors, defending access to clean water is a project rich in religious and spiritual meaning. They draw inspiration from “Laudato Si” as well as indigenous religious practice.

The tribal leadership of the Lakota Sioux is pursuing lawsuits against Energy Transfer Partners, the Texas-based company behind the Dakota Access pipeline. Some of the Lakota and other indigenous people who were part of the Standing Rock protests have reconvened at a prayer camp on the Cheyenne River Reservation downriver in South Dakota.

A coordinated campaign

On May 9, the Treaty Alliance Against Tar Sands Expansion, a coalition of 121 indigenous groups from the United States and Canada, launched a coordinated divestment campaign against the banks funding the Dakota Access pipeline and crude oil pipelines snaking from Canada to Mexico. Religious congregations organized under the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility are engaged in shareholder activism, urging major banks to withdraw from financing the Dakota Access pipeline and demanding that corporations from Coca-Cola to Campbell Soup adopt specific policies respecting water and the rights of local communities to consultation. The Sisters of Charity of Halifax presented a shareholder resolution at the May 11 general shareholder meeting of Enbridge, an energy transportation company with a 27.5 percent share in the Dakota Access pipeline. The resolution called for the company to address social and environmental risks in its acquisition deals, particularly those involving indigenous people. The resolution was rejected by shareholders, but the company committed to broader disclosure in the sustainability report it produces each year. The Jesuit Committee on Investment Responsibility has been working with large agribusiness companies that trade on the New York Stock Exchange to convince them to adopt sustainable water management practices and join the United Nations' [CEOWater Mandate](#), an initiative to engage businesses in water stewardship and sustainable development goals.

Cities, counties, public employee pension funds and individuals have withdrawn \$5 billion from companies invested in the Dakota Access pipeline in an echo of the the divestment movement against South African apartheid in the 1980s. Major investment banks in Norway, the Netherlands and France have sold their shares of loans to Energy Transfer Partners. The Jesuits, women religious, Catholic Workers and others have joined or deepened their involvement in water protection efforts. They draw links between the environmental battles of indigenous people in the United States and those elsewhere—notably in Honduras and in the Amazon region, where several environmentalists have been killed by corporate security forces and assassins linked to the national military forces.

We are here

In Conestoga, Pa., a farm field along the route of a natural gas pipeline has been transformed into a quiet protest site. On weekends, area residents gather to sing, pray and make art. They have been pushing for three years for their municipal governments to ban the proposed pipeline, citing instances of natural gas explosions and tainted drinking water. They attempted legal maneuvers to escape eminent domain to no avail, explained Mark Clatterbuck, a Conestoga resident and professor of religion at Montclair State University. He and his wife, Melinda, a Mennonite pastor, have been central actors in the pipeline opposition. Out of options, in February, Lancaster Against Pipelines, an association of local citizens, launched the Lancaster Stand in this placid corner of the county famous for its gently undulating farmland and its Amish community. “If we’re not careful we could lose the countryside and then what would we have? That’s what’s at risk,” said Tim Spiese, the Lancaster Against Pipelines board president, as he stood in the unplanted corn field before a large whitewashed barn with the words “Welcome to the Stand” painted in block letters on its side.

On a Saturday in early April, two dozen people, most in their 50s and 60s, are gathered inside a large army tent. Seated on low benches made from cement blocks and long 2-by-8 boards, they

are shaking painted maracas and beating rhythm sticks as two women with guitars lead the group: *We are here standing strong in a ripe old place/ Solid as a tree/ silent as a rock/ We are here in a ripe old place.* The back wall of the tent is rolled up, open to the breeze, framing the Lancaster County hills in spring: budding trees and green fields. More than 300 people have completed training in nonviolent protest at the camp. Committees meet to plan civil disobedience, to sort food donations and devise a rainwater collection system.

In May, Regina Braveheart, a Lakota woman who survived the massacre at Wounded Knee in 1973 and was part of the prayer at Standing Rock, visited the Lancaster Stand to urge the activists on and share stories. For Kathleen Meade, a case manager in a brain trauma rehabilitation center, who like many of her neighbors relies on well water, participating in the Lancaster Stand has meant forming deep friendships and standing up for what she values. “We just so pride ourselves on the land here. It’s horse people and dairy farmers, outdoors people and Amish. What’s unique is that Lancaster County is Republican, and this unites a lot of us, the idea that the government can’t just come and take your land,” she said as she stood in the afternoon sun in the breezy field, gazing across the round hills. “It’s just amazing how the existing structure is set up for the corporations, not the people.... We realize that we’re up a creek and if we don’t do something soon, we’re out of luck.”

Mr. Clatterbuck and other Lancaster people visited the camps at Standing Rock in the fall and were struck by the prayerful attitude, the deeply spiritual stance of the Lakota leaders. They noticed how it affected other activists. “The language that’s used is the language of the sacred,” said Mr. Clatterbuck, who edited a volume on Native American and Christian interaction this year called *Crow Jesus: Personal Stories of Native Religious Belonging*, published by University of Oklahoma Press. “All of these kinds of religious streams are feeding in together. The way religious language is fueling the resistance right now, religion becomes relevant again.”

So many people in conservative and bucolic Lancaster County, hardly a hotbed of protest, have been drawn to the Stand because it represents something deeper than the defense of property values or landowner rights (important as those might be), Mr. Clatterbuck said. Instead, they see a moral imperative to protect the place they call home, to care for the their corner of creation.

Pope Francis instructed the same embrace of the integrity of creation in “Laudato Si’,” writing that access to clean drinking water is a fundamental human right and that humans need to live in concert with the earth.

Saving a fragile system

Cherri Foytlin is not Catholic, but she takes Pope Francis’ words to heart. “I couldn’t understand how people can pray to God, praising his creation, and then not do everything they can to care for it. It’s like saying Picasso is a great artist and then ripping up his paintings,” she said. The oil that moves through the Dakota Access pipeline will eventually finish its journey in Louisiana, where Ms. Foytlin lives. A former newspaper writer, she has been working for environmental justice in the Louisiana wetlands since BP’s Deepwater Horizon oil spill in 2010. While reporting on the spill, she saw that many bayou crawfishermen, who have made their living in the swamps of Louisiana since their ancestors were expelled from French Acadia, had their

livelihoods destroyed, and she saw how the oil company lied about and covered up the extent of the damage. The miasmic grandeur of the sleepy bayou, with its ancient cypress trees, which began growing when Christ walked beside the Jordan, and its drooping moss, in whose humid tangle migrating birds seek rest, were under grave threat, she realized.

“These systems are quite fragile, really. I think how quickly we can lose that,” she said. Pipelines have criss-crossed the bayou country for a generation, ferrying oil and natural gas to refineries on the coast, a significant component of Louisiana’s economy. But Ms. Foytlin believes this latest one, the Bayou Bridge Pipeline, is too dangerous. And it only anticipates 12 permanent jobs. The proposed pipeline channels through bayous already damaged by previous infrastructure, which has chewed away at the swampland and degraded its ability to absorb storms. The loss of Louisiana wetlands was one of the reasons Hurricane Katrina and more recent flooding elsewhere in the state have been so devastating. The company constructing the Bayou Bridge Pipeline was fined in early May by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission for spilling several million gallons of thick chemical-laced mud into Ohio wetlands, during drilling for a separate pipeline there. The slurry, which is used to make underground space for laying pipes, suffocated plants and aquatic life in the wetland that helps filter water for nearby farmland. Ohio’s environmental protection agency expects it will take years to restore the wetland.

With Bold Louisiana, a community organizing group she directs, and a network of environmental, homeowner, crawfishermen and indigenous groups, Ms. Foytlin is trying to inform Louisianans of the threat to their water and their wetlands. The groups are leafleting at New Orleans Jazzfest and protesting at the state capital. They are sending postcards to their elected officials and raising money through bake sales. Ms. Foytlin, who is a member of the Cherokee Nation and originally from Oklahoma, visited Standing Rock to show her support and be part of the historic gathering of indigenous people. More recently she traveled to the Two Rivers camp near Marfa, Tex., where protesters were trying to stop a pipeline that would flow under the Rio Grande, carrying U.S. natural gas for export. That camp was broken up in April and that arm of the pipeline, another Energy Transfer Partners project, was completed.

“I wanted to let them know that what they were doing was important,” Ms. Foytlin said, adding that the power of the Standing Rock prayer camps continues to reverberate. “People felt activated and connected spiritually in the water and the land,” she said. “Standing Rock continues. People are eager to put it to bed, but it’s not over. These little people are still together and that has power.” An amalgam of groups, Ms. Foytlin’s among them, plans to launch a protest camp deep in the bayous in late June, when they expect the state to give Energy Transfer Partners final approval permits for the pipeline. On rafts built from repurposed plastic bottles and water barrels, with art and music and a deep love for their unique southern Louisiana waterways, they’ll make a watery stand. The camp is called *L’eau Est La Vie*, or Water Is Life.

Our common home

On the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, people are still digesting the experience of Standing Rock—and carrying on the work, said Peter Klink, S.J., the vice president of mission and ministry and former president of the Jesuit Red Cloud Indian School on Pine Ridge. At the height of the protests, the girls basketball team at Red Cloud wore “Water Is Life” slogans on

their jerseys. Lakota people from Pine Ridge joined the encampment and some took central roles in promoting the divestment campaign. “What we need to continue to nurture is: How are we going to care for our common home, Mother Earth? I’m not sure we can close our eyes to what we are doing on a daily basis,” Father Klink said. A consumerist, acquisitive culture is ultimately driving the environmental crisis, he believes. “If we don’t check that machine, that sense that what we have is never enough, that becomes the motor of destruction of our common home.”

During the Standing Rock encampment, the Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States issued a statement in support of the Lakota people’s right to sovereignty and clean water. Tashina Rama, who is executive director of development at the Red Cloud Indian School and daughter of Dennis Banks, co-founder of the American Indian Movement, testified on the Dakota Access pipeline threats to water at a February briefing for members of Congress organized by the Jesuit conference. Rama walked to a microphone in the briefing room and placed a few printed pages on the podium, then addressed the crowd in the Lakota language, identifying herself by way of her lineage and her ancestors. She named her parents, her grandmothers, her grandfathers. Switching to English, she spoke of the central need for access to clean water, invoking the sentiment found in “Laudato Si” that indigenous people must be consulted on projects that affect them, and she mourned the destruction of the Standing Rock camps, including one she stayed in with the female members of her family.

Ms. Rama underscored the value of water by invoking the Sun Dance, a Lakota ceremony that spans four days in June, when select members of the community dance all day in the blazing Badlands of South Dakota. “There is little relief with no clouds or breeze. Our lips are cracked and our mouths dry because whatever water we had in our bodies was gone by the second day of dancing,” she told the congressional staff. “Our ancestors prayed in this way and they passed it down to us; we are taught that through this sacrifice the Great Spirit will hear our prayers. For four sacred days we give ourselves to the Sun. Our bodies are dying and we know that with that first drink of water when the Sun Dance is over, that water is life. I was raised to pray in this way, and I find it to be a humbling way to connect with the Great Spirit, our Creator God and to give of myself so my children and my family can be healthy. We owe it to ourselves and our descendants to protect what remaining lands we have, the lands where our ancestors roamed and the sacred sites where they are buried so they can have these ceremonies to pass on to their children and so on.”

Forming right relationships

The Canadian and U.S. Jesuits see a link between protecting water and the defense of human and cultural rights. “We see common environmental and human rights challenges from extractive industries facing indigenous people around the world,” explained Cecilia Calvo, the senior adviser on environmental justice to the Jesuit Conference. “And a common thread really is water.” Of particular concern is what Ms. Calvo terms the criminalization of environmental and human rights activists who stand up for their rights. In Honduras, 123 environmental activists, most of whom protested against energy or mining companies, have been killed since a U.S.-supported coup in 2009, according to Global Witness. Similarly, environmental activists in the Amazon region face death threats. The worldwide association of Jesuits has taken on the defense of the Amazon region as a congregation-wide priority, calling it the lungs of the planet.

On March 17, Zebelio Kayap Jempekit, a member of the Awajun Wampi indigenous people of Peru, walked into the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in Washington, D.C., carrying with him the pleas and alarm of thousands of Amazonian people. Part of a team representing a coalition of indigenous and church groups across nine Amazon countries, called Red Eclesial Panamazonia, Mr. Jempeki urged the commission to take action to preserve the rights of indigenous people to protect their ancestral lands and water. The delegation, which included Archbishop Pedro Ricardo Jimeno, S.J., of Huancayo, Peru, was hosted by the Jesuits, the Sisters of Mercy, the Maryknolls and other U.S. Catholic groups, and visited Georgetown University and Catholic University. Jempeki, speaking in Spanish and wearing a traditional headband of deep red and brilliant yellow flowers, told the commission that oil extraction had destroyed the drinking water and fishing in his home and spoke of a mining project that made water undrinkable and killed the fish in the river his people relied on. He has received death threats because of his work.

“We see that not only in our own backyard are people facing environmental degradation and struggling for access to clean water, but around the world this is multiplied,” said Ms. Calvo, who in early May attended the Pan-Amazonian Social Forum in Peru, which brought together people working on water and other environmental and social issues across the region. The threats to water “are a call to examine our own economy, our lifestyle and what path do we want to be on,” Ms. Calvo said. Those issues animate the Jesuit Conference’s work in the United States as well. In the past few months, they have signed on to letters urging the Trump administration not to weaken elements of the Clean Water Act that regulate surface mining rules, to commit to the Paris climate agreement and to continue the Green Climate Fund, which helps the developing countries most affected by climate change. “We recognize that water is a fundamental component of all life and that stewardship of water is part of our call to care for God’s creation,” they wrote in a letter opposing an executive order that directed the Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to withdraw from an aspect of the Clean Water Act which protects waterways and fish habitats.

Religious work on water moves in many streams, from the Religious Organizations Along the River, a coalition of groups in New York’s Hudson Valley advocating against fracking and for Hudson River cleanup, to WaterSpirit, a retreat center on a bluff overlooking the Atlantic run by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace on the New Jersey shore. There, laypeople, Catholic and not, visit to deepen their connection to the most basic of elements, the water that flows through their bodies, washes the shore, bathes them in baptism and made possible the emergence of their earliest single-celled ancestors. WaterSpirit endeavors to link the spiritual aspect of water with the practical, corporeal concerns of caring for creation. The center has led group study workshops on “Laudato Si” and brought high school students to the shore to pray and catalog the plastic debris they find on the beach. The message is a mystical one, with its feet planted in the sand: You are part of this water of life.

In Pennsylvania, the Adorers of the Blood of Christ, an order of sisters, have for several years been resisting the efforts of Williams Transco, a natural gas company that plans to drill through their land in West Hempfield Township in Lancaster County. In February, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission gave the company final approval to build on private land, including that of the Adorers. The sisters “vehemently denounce” the decision, said Sister Janet McCann, the

U.S. regional councilor for the order. The pipeline would be a violation of the congregation's land ethic, explained Sister Sara Dwyer, peace and justice coordinator for the community. The land ethic, a statement of the sisters' theological and ecological beliefs adopted several years ago after contemplation of the religious dimensions of environmental crisis, commits them to "respect the Earth as a sanctuary where all life is protected" and to "establish justice and right relationships so all creation might thrive," explained Sister Dwyer. In the land ethic statement, the sisters vow to "seek collaborators to help implement land use policies and practices that are in harmony with our bioregions and ecosystems."

It is in fealty to that statement that the Adorers have decided to put their prayers where their feet stand. Their neighbors at Lancaster Against Pipelines, the people praying and building community in Conestoga, asked to erect an open-air chapel on the Adorers' field that the gas company covets. It will serve as a place of prayer for people of any faith, a physical mark linking spiritual and physical resistance to industry that threatens water and earth. The chapel will be dedicated at a ceremony July 9, attended by leadership of the Adorers, Lancaster Against Pipelines and supporters. It may not stand for long—the laws favor the energy company's right to take what land it wants—but for Sister Dwyer and others, "tireless, prayer-filled and fearless nonviolent struggle" is worth standing for.

Eileen Markey is an independent reporter and the author of *A Radical Faith: The Assassination of Sr. Maura* (Nation Books). She lives in the Bronx.

<https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2017/06/14/how-standing-rock-became-spiritual-pilgrimage-activists>

June 14, 2017

Unprecedented Meeting of World Faith Leaders to Take on Global Deforestation

Parliament of the World's Religions

Unprecedented Meeting of World Faith Leaders to take on Global Deforestation Monday, June 19, at the Nobel Peace Center, Oslo, Norway

- **Norway to host leaders from world's spiritual and religious traditions, engaging faith communities to protect rainforests**
- ***Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Daoist, Jewish leaders to join with indigenous forest guardians to express moral commitment, explore faith-based mobilization to end deforestation***

For the first time, leaders from many of the world's religions will meet to discuss the spiritual and ethical responsibility they share to protect rainforests, one of the planet's most vital life-support systems. Besieged by growing global demand for commodities, tropical rainforests are being cleared at a perilous rate, with an area the size of Austria chopped down each year.

The meeting, which will take place in the presence of His Majesty King Harald V of Norway, will discuss how to activate the collective moral influence of religious communities across the planet. Based on sheer numbers, they could prove decisive in protecting the world's last standing rainforests.

There is growing consensus among the world's religions that environmental concerns are closely linked to social justice, a position reinforced by Pope Francis' Laudato si and high-level declarations from many other faiths about the spiritual imperative of protecting the planet and its most vulnerable people.

The multi-faith summit marks the first significant engagement by the world's religions with an issue that climate scientists and development experts argue is a lynchpin for global efforts to address climate change, poverty, food insecurity and violations of human rights. It also heralds the first time that religious leaders from a broad spectrum of faiths will work hand-in-hand with indigenous peoples, the historical guardians of rainforests, on an action agenda to end deforestation.

Host: His Excellency Vidar Helgesen, Minister of Climate and Environment (Norway)

Partners: The meeting is being convened by Norway's International Climate and Forest Initiative (NICFI), Rainforest Foundation Norway (RFN) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in cooperation with the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale University, GreenFaith, Parliament of the World's Religions, Religions for Peace, REIL Network, and the World Council of Churches.

Where: Nobel Peace Center, [Oslo](#), Norway

When: Monday, 19 June 2017 - *Detailed schedule to come*

Who:

Indigenous Peoples Leaders

- Sônia Guajajara, National Coordinator, Articulation of Indigenous Peoples of Brazil – APIB (Brazil)
- Joseph Itongwa, executive Committee Member, Indigenous Peoples of Africa Coordinating Committee – IPACC (Democratic Republic of Congo)
- Abdon Nababan, Vice Chairperson, National Council, Indigenous Peoples Alliance of the Archipelago, AMAN (Indonesia)
- Vicky Tauli-Corpuz, U.N. Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Religious Leaders

- H.E. Metropolitan Emmanuel, Exarch, Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople (Christian)
- Dr. Nanditha Krishna, Founder, The C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar Foundation (Hinduism)

- Abbot Phra Paisal Vongvoravisit, Co-Founder, Sekiya Dhamma (Buddhism)
- Sir Rabbi David Rosen, International Director of Interreligious Affairs, American Jewish Committee and Director, Heilbrunn Institute for International Interreligious Understanding (Judaism)
- H.E. Monsignor Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo, Chancellor, Pontifical Academy of Sciences and Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences (Catholic)
- Bishop Emeritus Gunnar Stålsett, Honorary President, Religions for Peace (Lutheran)
- Dr. Din Syamsuddin, Chairman, Center for Dialogue and Cooperation Among Civilizations (Islam)
- The Right Reverend Bishop Pierre W. Whalon, Bishop-In-Charge, Convocation of Episcopal Churches in Europe (Episcopal)

Interfaith Leaders

- Reverend Henrik Grape, Coordinator, Working Group on Climate Change, World Council of Churches
- Reverend Fletcher Harper: Executive Director, GreenFaith
- Dr. Kusumita Pedersen, Vice Chair, Parliament of the World's Religions
- Dr. Mary Evelyn Tucker: Director, Forum on Religion and Ecology, Yale University
- Dr. William F. Vendley: Secretary General, Religions for Peace

Academics and Experts

- Lars Løvold, Director, Rainforest Foundation Norway
- Dr. Antonio Donato Nobre, Visiting Scientist at the National Institute for Space Research (INPE) and Senior Researcher at the National Institute of Amazonian Research (INPA)
- Frances Seymour, Distinguished Senior Fellow, World Resources Institute

Among the questions to be addressed at the event:

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- Why are the Norwegian government and civil society convening this event? Why now?
- What are the planned next steps for this initiative?

About Norway's International Climate and Forest Initiative (NICFI)

Since its launch in 2007, the Government of Norway's International Climate and Forest Initiative (NICFI) has cooperated with international partners, governments in forest and donor countries and a broad range of non-governmental organizations to reduce tropical deforestation and forest degradation.

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<https://parliamentofreligions.org/blog/2017-06-14-1507/unprecedented-meeting-world-faith-leaders-take-global-deforestation>

June 17, 2017

'Laudato Si' Pledge seeks mass Catholic climate mobilization ahead of encyclical anniversary

By Brian Roewe
National Catholic Reporter

Nearly two years after publication of Pope Francis' landmark encyclical *Laudato Si'*, a global Catholic campaign hopes to recruit 1 million Catholics to keep its message alive and animated in the daily lives of Catholics, in particular around the issue of climate change.

The *Laudato Si'* Pledge, created by the Global Catholic Climate Movement, seeks to rededicate Catholics to Francis' calls in the first papal encyclical on the environment and human ecology for all to do their part in protecting God's creation. It comes ahead of the two-year anniversary, June 18, of the release of "*Laudato Si'*, on Care for Our Common Home."

The campaign has set a goal of mobilizing 1 million Catholics worldwide to commit to take steps like reducing energy use and adopting clean energy, and to push for such measures within their

communities and countries. Individuals, families, parishes and organizations can sign the pledge, which is currently available in four languages.

The pledge, accessible at LiveLaudatoSi.org, reads: "Answering Pope Francis' urgent call in *Laudato Si'*, I pledge to: Pray for and with creation; Live more simply; Advocate to protect our common home."

Those who sign on will receive invitations to various Global Catholic Climate Movement programs, such as those planned around the [Season of Creation](#) (in September) and Earth Day, to turn their pledge into actions and lifestyle changes.

"Pope Francis helped transform the climate debate by reframing it as a moral issue. Now is the turn for the Church to 'walk the walk' and bring the encyclical's message to life," said Tomas Insua, executive director of Global Catholic Climate Movement, in a statement.

The international network of 400-plus Catholic organizations points to the sheer size of the global Catholic Church — 1.2 billion people, or roughly 16 percent of the world's population, along with its hundreds of thousands of parishes, schools and other institutions — and the accompanying carbon footprint not only as reason for Catholics to make the climate issue a priority but as potential for meaningful impact through collective action.

In his encyclical, Francis wrote, "The climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all," adding later that for Christians, care for creation is "an essential part of their faith."

"It is good for humanity and the world at large when we believers better recognize the ecological commitments which stem from our convictions," the pope wrote.

"The gravity of the ecological crisis demands that we all look to the common good, embarking on a path of dialogue which requires patience, self-discipline and generosity, always keeping in mind that 'realities are greater than ideas,' " Francis said.

Franciscan Sr. Sheila Kinsey, executive co-secretary of the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Commission of the International Union of Superiors General, told NCR the pledge demonstrates "the common good matters for us."

"We are part of a global family and we realize that our actions affect the whole world," Kinsey said.

A key aspect of the campaign, she added, is that it is a community effort among Catholics across the world. Recognizing that others are doing their part "creates kind of a momentum," Kinsey said. "It creates a climate, in a sense, that things can change."

A kick-off event for the *Laudato Si'* Pledge was set for June 17 in the Philippines, the same locale where Global Catholic Climate Movement [formed in January 2015](#) during the pope's visit to the Pacific archipelago.

The island nation has served a similar role for past GCCM programs, not only because of the enthusiasm there around environmental justice but also in its state as a global ground-zero for the impacts of climate change, including rising seas and more intense storms, such as 2013's [Super Typhoon Haiyan](#), which killed at least 6,300 people.

Insua, in Manila for the pledge kick-off, told NCR in an email that there is "extremely exciting momentum building up around the pledge, particularly with the bishops of the Philippines."

Both Cardinal Luis Tagle of Manila and Lingayen-Dagupan Archbishop Socrates Villegas, president of the Bishops Conference of the Philippines, were expected to attend the event.

The *Laudato Si'* Pledge has drawn initial support from four additional cardinals, from climate vulnerable parts of the globe, as well as the United States.

"This is a crucial ministry to help the global church respond to the climate crisis," said Cardinal John Ribat of Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, who also serves as president of the Federation of Catholic Bishops' Conferences of Oceania.

Ribat, elevated to a cardinal in October, was among the heads of six continental bishops' conferences who [issued an appeal](#) calling for a global deal to address climate change ahead of the 2015 United Nations climate summit that concluded in the Paris Agreement. He has been outspoken about the present-day impacts climate change has had on the people of the Pacific islands, where relocation due to rising seas has already begun for some communities, including in the [Carteret Islands](#).

"On behalf of the vulnerable communities of Oceania, I urge all Catholics to join and support this important effort to bring *Laudato Si'* to life," Ribat said.

Boston Cardinal Sean O'Malley, a member of Pope Francis' Council of Cardinals, said in a statement that through *Laudato Si'* "Pope Francis provides an important contribution to the good of the world we live in by making clear that we have a responsibility to care for the extraordinary gift of God's creation," not only for all people today but for future generations, too.

Cardinal Blase Cupich of Chicago described the encyclical as "an unequivocal call to action to protect our common home."

"As we mark the second anniversary of this groundbreaking document, there is an even greater urgency to work together to honor the gift of our creator," he said.

Others endorsing the pledge so far were eco-theologian Columban Fr. Sean McDonagh; Pax Christi International president Marie Dennis; Franciscan Fr. Richard Rohr; May Boeve, executive director of the 350.org grassroots climate organization; and former U.N. climate executive secretary Christiana Figueres.

"Now more than ever, the world needs to heed the moral imperative of *Laudato Si'*, and step up to the bold and urgent action that is necessary," Figueres said.

Since its founding, Global Catholic Climate Movement has emphasized grassroots steps for Catholics to address climate change, whether as individuals or within their local communities. It has also partnered in large demonstrations and marches organized by 350.org and other climate action organizations.

The "local actions" sentiment was [redoubled](#) following the November U.S. election of President Donald Trump, who pledged to reverse the country's climate policies. Since assuming the presidency, he has ordered a [review of the Clean Power Plan](#) and has sought to overhaul the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, proposing major budget cuts and a simplified focus on clean air and water.

Most recently, Trump announced he intends to remove the U.S. from the Paris Agreement, which would effectively cease implementation of the nation's pledge at the federal level.

The *Laudato Si'* Pledge comes as the second worldwide signature drive undertaken by Global Catholic Climate Movement, the first coming ahead of the COP21 climate negotiations and [collecting 900,000 signatures](#) to a petition seeking negotiators to reach a deal that sought to limit average global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

That threshold, included as a tertiary goal to the "well below" 2-degree mark in the Paris Agreement, was a priority for island nations, such as the Philippines, which provided more signatures than any of the 135 countries that participated.

<https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/laudato-si-pledge-seeks-mass-catholic-climate-mobilization-ahead-encyclical>

June 17, 2017

World Faith Leaders to Protect Global Deforestation

Regional Interfaith Network

Norway will host an Unprecedented Meeting of World Faith Leaders to engage Global Deforestation on Monday, June 19, at the Nobel Peace Center, Oslo, Norway. Norway will host leaders from world's spiritual and religious traditions, engaging faith communities to protect rainforests. Leaders from Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Pagan, Daois and, Jewish leaders will join with both indigenous forest guardians and leaders from International Interfaith Organisations to express moral commitment, explore faith-based mobilization to end deforestation.

For the first time, leaders from many of the world's religions will meet to discuss the spiritual and ethical responsibility they share to protect rainforests, one of the planet's most vital life-support systems. Besieged by growing global demand for commodities, tropical rainforests are being cleared at a perilous rate, with an area the size of Austria chopped down each year.

The meeting, which will take place in the presence of His Majesty King Harald V of Norway, will discuss how to activate the collective moral influence of religious communities across the planet. Based on sheer numbers, they could prove decisive in protecting the world's last standing rainforests.

There is growing consensus among the world's religions that environmental concerns are closely linked to social justice, a position reinforced by Pope Francis' *Laudato si* and high-level declarations from many other faiths about the spiritual imperative of protecting the planet and its most vulnerable people.

The multi-faith summit marks the first significant engagement by the world's religions with an issue that climate scientists and development experts argue is a lynchpin for global efforts to address climate change, poverty, food insecurity and violations of human rights. It also heralds the first time that religious leaders from a broad spectrum of faiths will work hand-in-hand with indigenous peoples, the historical guardians of rainforests, on an action agenda to end deforestation.

Host: His Excellency Vidar Helgesen, Minister of Climate and Environment (Norway)

Partners: The meeting is being convened by Norway's International Climate and Forest Initiative (NICFI), Rainforest Foundation Norway (RFN) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in cooperation with the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale University, GreenFaith, Parliament of the World's Religions, Religions for Peace, REIL Network, and the World Council of Churches.

Where: Nobel Peace Center, [Oslo](#), Norway

When: Monday, 19 June 2017 – *Detailed schedule to come*

Who:

Indigenous Peoples Leaders

- Sônia Guajajara, National Coordinator, Articulation of Indigenous Peoples of Brazil – APIB (Brazil)
- Joseph Itongwa, executive Committee Member, Indigenous Peoples of Africa Coordinating Committee – IPACC (Democratic Republic of Congo)
- Abdon Nababan, Vice Chairperson, National Council, Indigenous Peoples Alliance of the Archipelago, AMAN (Indonesia)
- Vicky Tauli-Corpuz, U.N. Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Religious Leaders

- H.E. Metropolitan Emmanuel, Exarch, Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople (Christian)
- Dr. Nanditha Krishna, Founder, The C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar Foundation (Hinduism)

- Abbot Phra Paisal Vongvoravisit, Co-Founder, Sekiya Dhamma (Buddhism)
- Sir Rabbi David Rosen, International Director of Interreligious Affairs, American Jewish Committee and Director, Heilbrunn Institute for International Interreligious Understanding (Judaism)
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Interfaith Leaders

- Reverend Henrik Grape, Coordinator, Working Group on Climate Change, World Council of Churches
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- Dr. Kusumita Pedersen, Vice Chair, Parliament of the World's Religions
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Academics and Experts

- Lars Løvold, Director, Rainforest Foundation Norway
- Dr. Antonio Donato Nobre, Visiting Scientist at the National Institute for Space Research (INPE) and Senior Researcher at the National Institute of Amazonian Research (INPA)
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Among the questions to be addressed at the event:

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<http://regionalinterfaith.org.au/?p=1766#more-1766>

June 17, 2017

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<http://religionsforpeaceaustralia.org.au/2017/06/17/world-faith-leaders-to-protect-global-deforestation/>

June 18, 2017

'Laudato Si'' two years later: Parishes throughout diocese continue to answer pope's call to environmental stewardship

By Lisa Dahm
The Catholic Sun

With the pull out of the United States from the Paris agreement, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a statement on June 1 regretting the withdrawal from the consortium created by the United Nations Framework Convention on climate change and signed by 197 parties in November 2016.

In the release, Bishop Oscar Cantú of Los Cruces said the USCCB, "along with Pope Francis and the entire Catholic Church, has consistently upheld the Paris agreement as an important international mechanism to promote environmental stewardship and encourage climate change mitigation."

Bishop Cantú, who is the chairman of the [USCCB Committee on Justice and Peace](#), called the president's decision "deeply troubling."

Despite the U.S. withdrawal from the Paris agreement, Catholics throughout Arizona and the world have been embracing ecological responsibility highlighted in Pope Francis' encyclical on the environment, *Laudato Si': On Care for our Common Home*, promulgated May 24, 2015.

Exactly two years later, during the pope's visit with President Donald Trump at the Vatican on May 24, Pope Francis gave the president a copy of *Laudato Si'* as well as a signed copy of his message from this year's World Day of Peace and copies of his apostolic exhortations *Evangelii Gaudium (The Joy of the Gospel)* and *Amoris Laetitia* on the family.

Parishes make an environmental difference

Since the release of *Laudato Si'*, parishes across the diocese have formed reading groups, held lectures and offered daylong retreats to study the document. Their preparation is paying off as parishes put Pope Francis' ideas into action.

For Melanie Cantua and members of the [Care of Creation Ministry at St. Mary's Basilica](#) in Phoenix, living Pope Francis' message has become their mission. After reading the encyclical together, they are now working to encourage the whole parish to protect the environment.

"What is most interesting (about the document) is the pope's words really inspire people," Cantua said. "As Catholics, we just can't sit and wait for the work to be done."

The parish bulletin includes a corner where ministry members offer simple tips on caring for God's creation. Suggestions include planting one tree each, going meatless on Fridays to conserve energy and using hand towels rather than paper towels.

"We use those as opportunities to get the message out," Cantua said. "It's weekly education in our bulletin in what they can do every day. ... What we are teaching is that it is the culmination of all of our little differences and behavior changes that makes a big difference."

At the parish Earth Day event on April 23, they also partnered with Liberty Wildlife to bring in a peregrine falcon, a Harris hawk and a great horned owl to teach visitors the importance of wildlife and to show them how to make their yards more wildlife friendly.

A conversion through *Laudato Si'*

Julie Murphy Erfani, one of the Care for Creation ministry members, was not Catholic when she first learned of the pope's encyclical.

Murphy Erfani, the director of the master's program in Social Justice and Human Rights at Arizona State University, had a graduate student in her class who told her about *Laudato Si'*. The young Catholic student pointed her toward the Franciscan Renewal Center in Scottsdale for more information.

“I started to read it and I was so taken aback by everything it said,” Murphy Erfani said about the encyclical. “Not only is it erudite, it is hopeful. . . . I was inspired by *Laudato Si’*.”

She said she took “a spiritual interest in Franciscan Catholicism” motivated by the document. After a few classes with them, she decided to become Catholic and started RCIA classes at St. Mary’s. She was recently accepted into the Church at the Easter Vigil April 15, and she credits her journey to *Laudato Si’*.

“I found the encyclical inspiring because it is pretty lofty critical theory and it is very sophisticated, but written so it can be intelligible by most people,” Murphy Erfani said.

Retrofitting a parish: both business savvy and moral mandate

Almost five years ago, [Sacred Heart Parish in Prescott](#) took to heart Pope Francis’ message of “[Let us be the Protector of Creation](#),” the theme of his inaugural Homily on March 19, 2013, in St. Peter’s Square.

Earlier, in October 2012, Sacred Heart Parish and School in Prescott commissioned a 160-kilowatt solar PV system. In its first three years, Sacred Heart’s solar plant contributed to a 69 percent reduction in energy costs, and the school derives 100 percent of its power from solar.

Smaller changes throughout the parish and school included retrofitting all of the lighting for LED lights for a cost savings of about \$12,000 annually, committing to recycling and using organic cleaning supplies and switching to tankless water heaters and low-flow toilets.

“At first it was pragmatic, but it has multiplied our mission,” said Gene Murphy, parish business manager.

Murphy also partners with the [Catholic Climate Covenant](#), and many Sacred Heart students and parishioners have already taken the Franciscan Pledge to pray, act and advocate regarding climate change.

“Because this is what he asked us to do,” Murphy said of Pope Francis. “All the popes have spoken on the protection of the environment — this is all information the popes have been saying for years. One thing about Pope Francis, he is building upon what has already been done, yet he is adding a whole other layer.”

The St. Francis Pledge

I/we pledge to pray, act, and advocate to solve climate change

Taking the St. Francis Pledge commits you or your organization to respond to the moral call for action on climate change. By pledging, you commit to praying, acting and advocating to solve climate change. How you fulfill those commitments is up to you. Here are a few ideas for how to fulfill the Pledge commitments:

Pray

- Set a time to pray for climate action.
- Pray as a family or as a church group.
- Keep a prayer journal.
- Publish prayers via a blog or newsletter.

Act

- Investigate solar and renewable options.
- Learn how climate affects the vulnerable.
- Calculate your carbon footprint.
- Take steps to reduce your footprint.

Advocate

- Connect with policy makers.
- Connect with your municipal council.
- Explore sustainable policies at work.
- Hear your pastor's position on ecology.

<http://www.catholicsun.org/2017/06/18/laudato-si-two-years-later/>

June 19, 2017

Global religious and indigenous leaders warn against deforestation

By Alister Doyle, Reuters
The Christian Science Monitor

Representatives from around the world attended the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative in Oslo on June 19, calling for protections to forests for their cultural, environmental, and religious significance.

Oslo, Norway—Religious and indigenous leaders appealed on Monday for better protection of tropical forests from the Amazon to the Congo basin, with a Vatican bishop likening current losses to a collective suicide by humanity.

Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, and Daoist representatives met indigenous peoples in Oslo to explore moral and ethical arguments to shield forests that are under threat from logging and land clearance for farms.

Organizers said the Oslo Interfaith Rainforest Initiative from June 19-21 was the first to gather religious and indigenous peoples to seek out common ground to protect forests. They hope to organize a summit in 2018.

"Without the forests we don't have life," said Bishop Marcelo Sanchez Sorondo, head of the Vatican's Pontifical Academy of Sciences. "If we continue to do this deforestation it's like suicide."

Din Syamsuddin, an Indonesian Muslim leader, called for new technologies and changes of lifestyles to protect forests. "A true believer should maintain the balance with nature," he said.

Norwegian climate and environment minister Vidar Helgesen, a host of the talks, said forests were homes and a source of income to millions of people, as well as habitats for creatures from tigers to birds of paradise.

He said rainforests were also a giant natural store of carbon dioxide, the main greenhouse gas from burning fossil fuels. Trees release the gas when they rot or are burnt to make way for farms, such as for cattle or palm oil plantations.

"The Paris Agreement is doomed if deforestation continues," Mr. Helgesen said.

Many countries have reaffirmed support for the 2015 Paris pact to phase out greenhouse gas emissions after President Trump announced plans on June 1 to pull out, saying he wants to promote the United States fossil fuel industry.

Many speakers noted that a "tree of life" is a part of many religious traditions.

"Trees don't have only ecological value for us, but also cultural value for us. Every tree," said Joseph Itongwa of Democratic Republic of Congo, a representative of indigenous peoples in Africa.

The net extent of the world's forests shrank by 12,700 square miles a year from 2010-15, about the size of Belgium, the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization says.

The rate is about half that of the 1990s.

Mary Evelyn Tucker, director of Yale University's forum on religion and ecology, said religious groups such as the World Council of Churches were seeking ever more to restrict investments in areas that damage the environment.

<https://www.csmonitor.com/Environment/2017/0619/Global-religious-and-indigenous-leaders-warn-against-deforestation>

June 19, 2017

King Of Norway To Host A Meeting Of Religious And Indigenous Leaders On Climate Change

By Antonia Blumberg
Huffington Post

Attendees say this will be the first conference aimed at tackling deforestation from an interfaith perspective.

King Harald V of Norway plans to host a meeting of religious and indigenous leaders, interfaith advocates and scientists this week to address the worldwide crisis of deforestation and its effects on climate change.

Religious and indigenous leaders from 21 countries convened at the Nobel Peace Center in Oslo on Monday for a three-day conference on rainforest protection. They are slated to meet with forest advocates, climate scientists and human rights experts to develop goals and actions for a rainforest initiative that blends science, faith and indigenous knowledge.

“The fact that the U.N. and a major government are open to hosting this and synergizing science and religion, ecology and ethics makes it an exciting moment,” said Mary Evelyn Tucker, director of Yale University’s Forum on Religion and Ecology, one of the co-sponsors of the event.

The conference participants include indigenous leaders from tropical forest nations like Indonesia, Brazil and the Democratic Republic of Congo, as well as religious leaders from Jewish, Christian and Muslim traditions. Bishop Marcelo Sanchez Sorondo, head of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, Rabbi David Rosen, the director of interreligious affairs at the American Jewish Committee, and Dr. Din Syamsuddin, an Islamic scholar and head of the Center for Dialogue and Cooperation Among Civilizations, are listed among the attendees.

“A decade ago, Norway decided to make reducing tropical deforestation one of its top international priorities,” said Vidar Helgesen, the country’s minister of climate and environment, in a statement. “In that decade — the scientific case, the economic case, and the geopolitical case for ending deforestation has only grown.”

This week’s conference, convened by Norway’s International Climate and Forest Initiative, Rainforest Foundation Norway and the United Nations Development Programme, aims to investigate how religious and cultural values can bolster efforts to protect the world’s rainforests.

“This will be the first conference of its kind on the role of religions and indigenous peoples on forest conservation,” Tucker told HuffPost.

Attendees say they hope religious and indigenous leaders can help turn the tide on forest preservation by encouraging a cultural shift in how the world views climate efforts.

“A new norm is emerging against illegal deforestation,” said Frances Seymour, a senior fellow for the World Resources Institute, referring to the [2015 Paris climate agreement](#). “To have the faith community engaged in the issue could be quite significant.”

Rainforests are capable of storing [billions of tons of carbon](#), and scientists consider them to be [among the most important resources](#) for mitigating climate change.

On a more immediate level, tropical rainforests provide food, water and income to some 1.6 billion people, [according to the United Nations](#). (And of course, that’s to say nothing of the vital role they play for countless animal and plant species.) The humanitarian component of forest conservation is something Tucker said almost all of the world’s religions can get behind.

“Many of the religions have had values [of] justice for people — taking care of the poor, aiding the sick and the elderly,” she said. “On the other hand, you have environmentalists trying to preserve forests for their ecological complexity, but sometimes without an understanding of the people who live there.”

Rural communities in developing countries get over 20 percent of their household income from gathering wild products like bush meat and wood in the forest, Seymour said. These communities also benefit from “forest-based ecosystem services,” including water and resilience to extreme weather.

“When a forest is degraded through logging and converted to different land uses, the poor are made worse off, because they lose access to forest goods and services and don’t necessarily benefit from new employment opportunities,” she said.

Deforestation and illegal logging have had [a devastating impact](#) on indigenous communities around the world. Many of them [lack legal rights](#) to care for the land that is both essential to their livelihood and sacred in their belief systems.

Pope Francis wrote about the special bond between indigenous peoples and the land in his [2015 encyclical on the environment](#). “For them land is not a commodity,” he wrote, “but rather a gift from God and from their ancestors who rest there, a sacred space with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identity and values.”

Indigenous groups have historically found themselves confronted by third-party companies unlawfully [encroaching on their land](#) and cutting down forests without consent. In places like Brazil, the government has tried to establish legal protections to end the practice. But in a conflict that conservationists say [resembles the “Wild West,”](#) indigenous groups have often been driven to stage protests and even fight on the ground to protect their land.

“Forest communities around the world have put their lives on the line to care for the planet’s tropical forests,” Vicky Tauli-Corpuz, the U.N. special rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples and an attendee of the Oslo conference, said in a statement. “We are nothing without our forests. Our culture, our spirituality, our livelihoods, our incomes and our health are tied to them.”

Research has also shown that when indigenous communities have the rights to their land, rainforests in those regions are [more likely to remain standing](#). Indigenous groups therefore need to be “part of the solution” in forest conservation, Seymour said.

Both she and Tucker said that conference attendees will work to draft immediate, concrete action plans, including coordinating a follow-up summit for 2018.

But interfaith and intercultural efforts can be [challenging by nature](#), given their tendency to run into differing belief systems and traditions.

“Religions have their problems, and they have their promise,” Tucker said.

Their promise, Seymour said, lies in their ability to help bring about social change and a “shift in norms,” in which deforestation would go from being generally accepted to universally condemned. Such a shift in public opinion could in turn lead to new legislation to protect the world’s forests.

“I’m the daughter of a Baptist minister, and in my father’s lifetime the cause was civil rights,” Seymour said. “I saw how in a brief generation, attitudes, laws and practices regarding racial segregation could change with the help of religious leaders. My hope is that environmental justice issues could similarly witness that kind of sea change.”

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/norway-climate-conference_us_59384eede4b00610547ebe80?section=us_religion#

June 19, 2017

Interfaith Rainforest Initiative in Oslo Photos and Images

European Pressphoto Agency

See photos here:

<http://www.epa.eu/religion-photos/churches-organisations-photos/interfaith-rainforest-initiative-in-oslo-photos-53594094>

June 19, 2017

Holy smoke: saving the rainforests

The Economist

Religious leaders gather in Oslo today along with indigenous peoples’ representatives and climate activists for a save-the-planet pow-wow convened by Norway’s International Climate

and Forest Initiative. The summit is the first to bring together faith leaders and native communities at such a high level. It also frames saving the rainforests—still disappearing at a rate of 6,000 acres per hour—as a moral imperative rather than just a climate or conservation worry. Though Norway is increasingly secular, environmentalism is on the rise. Its government has invested almost \$3bn over the past decade to reduce deforestation. But this largesse is only made possible by Norway's oil wealth. The environment minister, Vidar Helgesen, will today demand a “tectonic shift in values”. With a record number of wells being drilled in the Barents Sea this year he might also consider the morality of drilling in the fragile Arctic.

<https://espresso.economist.com/1e79596878b2320cac26dd792a6c51c9?fsrc=scn/tw/te/bl/ed/holy/smokesavingtherainforests20170620espresso>

June 19, 2017

Religious, indigenous leaders demand rainforests be saved

By Matti Huuhtanen, Associated Press
Island Packet

Religious and indigenous leaders on Monday called for an end to deforestation in the first international multi-faith, multi-cultural plea to reduce the emissions that fuel climate change.

Participants from 21 countries gathered at a conference in the Norwegian capital of Oslo, hoping that billions of people of faith worldwide will unite to protect the Earth's rainforests. Those forests are fundamental to human life but are suffering from agricultural and industrial exploitation in South America, sub-Saharan Africa and Asia.

Hosting the one-day meeting, Norwegian Climate and Environment Minister Vidar Helgesen said that halting deforestation requires "a global, tectonic shift in values."

The Interfaith Rainforest Initiative was launched by the Scandinavian country that has made reducing tropical deforestation one of its top international priorities, with investments of some \$3 billion in the past decade.

"In that decade, the scientific case, the economic case, and the geopolitical case for ending deforestation has only grown. However, more is needed," Helgesen said. "It is not the realm of policy, commerce or science, but of spirit, faith and moral conviction."

Tropical rainforests contain most of the Earth's land-borne biodiversity, help regulate rainfall and temperature globally and regionally, and provide food, water and income to 1.6 billion people.

The conference the rapid decreased in tropical rainforests has been fueled by palm oil plantations, cattle, soy and crop production and "rapacious and often illegal mining and logging operations." It said the reduction of the rainforests amounted to an area the size of Austria, or nearly 84,000 square kilometers (33,600 square miles).

"Forest communities around the world have put their lives on the line to care for the planet's tropical forests," said Vicky Tauli-Corpuz, UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. "We are nothing without our forests. Our culture, our spirituality, our livelihoods, our incomes and our health are tied to them."

Those at the meeting included representatives of Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim and Hindu faiths, and indigenous leaders, including ones from Indonesia and Brazil.

<http://www.islandpacket.com/news/business/article156902589.html>

June 19, 2017

Religious, Indigenous Leaders Demand End to Tropical Rainforest Deforestation

Halting deforestation requires "a global, tectonic shift in values," the Norwegian climate and environment minister said

By Matti Huuhtanen
NBC Bay Area

Religious and indigenous leaders on Monday called for an end to deforestation in the first international multi-faith, multi-cultural plea to reduce the emissions that fuel climate change.

Participants from 21 countries gathered at a conference in the Norwegian capital of Oslo, hoping that billions of people of faith worldwide will unite to protect the Earth's rainforests. Those forests are fundamental to human life but are suffering from agricultural and industrial exploitation in South America, sub-Saharan Africa and Asia.

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Those at the meeting included representatives of Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim and Hindu faiths, and indigenous leaders, including ones from Indonesia and Brazil.

<http://www.nbcbayarea.com/news/national-international/indigenous-religious-leaders-end-rainforest-deforestation-429420393.html>

June 19, 2017

Religious, indigenous leaders demand rainforests be saved

The Associated Press
Yale Daily News

HELSINKI (AP) — Religious and indigenous leaders worldwide are calling for an end to deforestation in an international multi-faith, multi-cultural plea to reduce the emissions that fuel climate change, which is killing tropical rainforests.

Participants from 21 countries at a conference in the Norwegian capital of Oslo are hoping that billions of people of faith worldwide will unite to protect the Earth's rainforests. The rainforests are fundamental to human life but are suffering from agricultural and industrial exploitation in South America, sub-Saharan Africa and Asia.

Vidar Helgesen, Norway's environment minister, launched the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative and is hosting the one-day meeting. He says Monday that halting deforestation requires "a global, tectonic shift."

Among those at the meeting are representatives of Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim and Hindu faiths, and indigenous leaders, including ones from Indonesia and Brazil.

<http://www.nydailynews.com/newswires/news/business/religious-indigenous-leaders-demand-rainforests-saved-article-1.3259078>

June 19, 2017

Religious leaders join interfaith rainforest initiative in Oslo today

World Council of Churches

New hope for world's tropical forests arises as the Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, Daoist leaders join indigenous forest guardians to launch global effort to end deforestation. Interfaith rainforest initiative, created by global coalition to fight escalating threats to endangered forests in Africa, Southeast Asia and Latin America is vital to slowing climate change.

Religious and indigenous leaders from all corners of the globe launched today an unprecedented initiative they say will bring needed moral attention and spiritual commitment to bear on global efforts to end deforestation and protect the tropical rainforests—forests that are fundamental to human life, the planet's health and reducing the emissions fueling climate change. It marks the first time religious leaders from a broad spectrum of faiths will work hand-in-hand with Indigenous Peoples, the world's leading rainforest guardians, to call upon and activate billions of people of faith worldwide to stand up for rainforests. The gathering was attended by His Majesty King Harald V of Norway.

Tropical rainforests in South America, sub-Saharan Africa and Asia are falling rapidly due to a range of forces, including palm oil plantations, cattle, soy and crop production, and rapacious and often illegal mining and logging operations. The losses amount to an area the size of Austria each year.

“The story of creation in the book of Genesis tells us of trees that are beautiful to behold and a source of sustenance. Rainforests are pivotal for life on earth, provisioning people's needs, promoting biodiversity and protecting the climate”, said World Council of Churches (WCC) general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit. “Today when the rainforests are threatened by deforestation driven by a shortsighted, profit-oriented economy, we must use the knowledge of what is good and our faith-driven action to protect and care for the rainforests and therefore the earth and all life”.

With their capacity to store billions of tons of carbon, the preservation of tropical rainforests is widely viewed as fundamental to halting climate change. Many climate experts note that forests are the only proven approach for capturing and storing large amounts of carbon. Thus, staving off their destruction could keep carbon emissions at bay, buying time for the world to transition to a low carbon energy future, and also playing an indispensable role in reaching global carbon neutrality in the second half of this century.

Tropical rainforests also provide food, water and income to 1.6 billion people. They contain most of the planet's land-borne biodiversity and help regulate rainfall and temperature globally, regionally and locally.

Religious and indigenous leaders from 21 countries will have discussions with forest advocates, climate scientists and human rights experts in Oslo on June 19-21 to develop goals and actions, along with milestones to mark their progress. They expect to follow up with an action plan and a global interfaith rainforest summit in 2018.

The group was convened by Norway's International Climate and Forest Initiative (NICFI), Rainforest Foundation Norway (RFN) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in cooperation with the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale University, GreenFaith, the Parliament of the World's Religions, Religions for Peace, REIL Network and the WCC.

“Our goal—working in concert with the spiritual and indigenous leaders gathered here—is to define a shared action plan to create a popular movement for expanded political will and on-the-ground action to protect rainforests,” said Bishop Emeritus Gunnar Stålsett, honorary president of Religions for Peace. “The scope of this initiative is global. But we are also putting special focus on religious and indigenous leaders, networks and institutions in countries with the most significant tropical rainforests.”

The initiative is linked to a surge of grassroots action over the last few years in which environmental, climate and indigenous rights issues are being embraced as spiritual imperatives that strike a chord with multiple faiths and traditions. Other leaders of Evangelical Christian and Muslim organizations, and the Archbishop of Canterbury, have stressed the shared human responsibility to protect the planet. Lending crucial leadership and indispensable momentum to these efforts was the official letter or “encyclical” issued in 2015 by Pope Francis that called on all people of the world to take swift action, to bring, “the whole human family together to protect our common home.” He also noted the unbreakable link between Indigenous Peoples and the environment: “For them land is not a commodity, but rather a gift from God and from their ancestors who rest there, a sacred space with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identity and values.”

“The world’s rainforests are a stunning example of the life-sustaining beauty of the planet; they are spectacular, vital to life, and at grave risk”, said Rev. Fletcher Harper, executive director of GreenFaith. “This meeting represents a tremendously important first step forward for faith communities, who must join First Peoples and commit to rainforests’ health and restoration.”

Rev. Henrik Grape, coordinator of the WCC Working Group on Climate Change, represented WCC at the event.

“Learning from the ecumenical and interfaith activities on climate change, the action to protect the rainforests could gain a lot,” he said. “Actually, climate change and protection of the rainforests are very closely related, so this is natural way to go further in our common pilgrimage for justice and peace. Peace with earth. And the Indigenous People’s spirituality and understanding are indispensable to a more sustainable future.”

Citing the spiritual, environmental, social and economic benefits the world’s tropical rainforests provide, the partners of the multi-faith initiative emphasize humanity’s shared ethical and moral responsibility to protect them. They are committed to taking concrete, collective action to protect, restore and sustainably manage those forests. The world’s religious and spiritual communities have long sheltered and protected forests—from the rainforest-dwelling Ashaninka in Peru and Brazil to Buddhist monks ordaining trees in Thailand. Yet, this is the historical effort

for such a broad-scale and global mobilization of faith communities to protect the tropical forests so essential for the earth's climate.

[WCC work on Care for Creation and Climate Justice](#)

[WCC encourages renewed climate efforts after US withdrawal](#)

[Rainforest Foundation Norway](#)

<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/religious-leaders-join-interfaith-rainforest-initiative-in-oslo-today>

June 19, 2017

Europe bishop represents Anglicans, Episcopalians at launch of Interfaith Rainforest Initiative in Norway

Episcopal News Service

Religious and indigenous leaders from across the globe launched an unprecedented initiative June 19 in Oslo, Norway, aimed at bringing “moral attention and spiritual commitment” to bear on global efforts to end deforestation and protect tropical rainforests—forests that are fundamental to human life, the planet's health and reducing the emissions fueling climate change.

“The Norwegian government has made major investments in protecting the rainforest, but this is the first attempt to bring together religious leaders, scientists and indigenous peoples,” the Rt. Rev. Pierre Whalon, bishop of the Convocation of Episcopal Churches in Europe, said from Oslo in a telephone interview with Episcopal News Service.

Whalon helped organize the conference and was scheduled to speak during a June 19 dinner. Indigenous people from across Africa, Brazil, Peru, Colombia and Indonesia have joined Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Daoist and Buddhist religious leaders for the June 19-21 launch of the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative aimed at framing rainforest protection in moral terms.

The conference is meant to “change minds and hearts and get people working together,” said Whalon. The urgency is clear, he added, from the stories shared by indigenous people living in the rainforest and from satellite images.

“Rainforest destruction is not just tearing down all the trees and turning into soy fields. It's literally ethnic cleansing,” said Whalon. There's a real moral and spiritual imperative to protecting the rainforest. Conference organizers made sure to give indigenous peoples a chance to share their stories from the front lines, and what they have to say will “curl your hair,” he said.

Palm oil plantations; cattle, soy and other crop production, and illegal mining and logging operations are destroying tropical rainforests in South America, sub-Saharan Africa and Asia at high rates. Rainforests are home to indigenous people; provide food, water and income to 1.6 billion people; contain most of the planet's land-borne biodiversity; help regulate rainfall and temperature globally, regionally and locally, and store billions of tons of carbon, which is essential for curbing global warming.

“The world's rainforests are a stunning example of the life-sustaining beauty of the planet; they are spectacular, vital to life and at grave risk. This meeting represents a tremendously important first step forward for faith communities, who must join First Peoples and commit to rainforests' health and restoration,” said the Rev. Fletcher Harper, an Episcopal priest based in New Jersey and the executive director of GreenFaith, in a press release.

Religious and indigenous leaders from 21 countries will have discussions with forest advocates, climate scientists and human rights experts to develop goals and actions, along with milestones to mark their progress. They expect to follow up with an action plan and a global interfaith rainforest summit in 2018. The group was convened by Norway's International Climate and Forest Initiative, Rainforest Foundation Norway and the United Nations Development Program in cooperation with the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale University, GreenFaith, the Parliament of the World's Religions, Religions for Peace, REIL Network and the World Council of Churches.

The rainforest initiative is linked to a surge of grassroots action over the last few years in which environmental, climate and indigenous rights issues are being embraced as spiritual imperatives that strike a chord with multiple faiths and traditions. Other [leaders of Evangelical Christian](#) and [Muslim organizations](#), and the [Archbishop of Canterbury](#), have stressed the shared human responsibility to protect the planet.

“Tropical rainforests occupy a sacred place in many faiths, religions and spiritual traditions,” said Mary Evelyn Tucker, director of the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale University, in a press release. “Indeed, spiritual reverence for nature and all life can be found across the world's religions, including among indigenous peoples and other residents of the world's tropical rainforests. Given what we are hearing from religious and indigenous leaders worldwide, we believe we can create a global movement around this shared vision.”

Whalon became involved in the conference's planning because of previous involvement in roundtable discussions related to the environment and communicating the message of Pope Francis' [encyclical on the environment and human ecology](#). He was invited into the roundtable discussions following the [December 2015 U.N. climate negotiations in France](#), when he and American Cathedral in Paris Dean Lucinda Laird [organized several events for conference attendees](#).

<http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/ens/2017/06/19/europe-bishop-represents-anglicans-episcopalians-at-launch-of-interfaith-rainforest-initiative-in-norway/>

June 19, 2017

Religious and indigenous leaders seek to save rainforests

By Josephine McKenna, Religion News Service
National Catholic Reporter

[Rome](#) - Religious and indigenous leaders from 21 countries gathered in Norway on Monday to launch a new initiative aimed at saving the world's tropical rainforests from the impact of deforestation and climate change.

It was the first time leaders from Catholic, Protestant Jewish, Buddhist and other faiths joined indigenous leaders from Brazil, Peru, Indonesia, Colombia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo to call for urgent action to protect the forests.

Inspired by Pope Francis' outspoken stance on global warming and overdevelopment in his 2015 "Laudato Si'" encyclical, the groundbreaking event was held in Oslo and backed by Norway's King Harald V.

"Without the forests we do not have life; we live thanks to the forests," Monsignor Marcelo Sanchez Sorondo, who heads the Vatican's Pontifical Academy of Sciences, told the conference.

"If we continue to do deforestation, it is like suicide. We need to act together to defend our common house."

The conference was told the size of tropical rainforests in South America, sub-Saharan Africa and Asia is falling rapidly due to palm oil, soy and crop production, and extensive mining and logging operations with annual losses equal to an area the size of Austria.

Vicky Tauli-Corpuz, an indigenous leader for the Kankana-ey Igorot people in the Philippines, is U.N. special rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples.

She said that forest communities had put their lives on the line to care for the planet's tropical forests and the conference was the first step towards critical collaboration.

"Many of these dominant religions have been linked to the colonization of our communities," she told RNS. "It is important that they come together to support the indigenous people who are the main guardians of the forest."

Tauli-Corpuz, who led community opposition to logging expansion under the late Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos, said deforestation and mining had taken their toll on her community of 1 million people in northern Luzon and others in the Philippines.

"We are nothing without our forests," she said. "Our culture, our spirituality, our livelihoods, our incomes and our health are tied to them."

Tauli-Corpuz said she hoped the Oslo talks would lead to more cooperation with indigenous people and stop the violation of their rights. "These are concrete things that can happen," she said.

Din Syamsuddin is a professor of Islamic thought who also heads a center for promoting dialogue between civilizations in Jakarta, Indonesia. He said respecting nature was included in the teachings of the Quran and it was time to educate a new generation about saving the forests.

"Conserving rainforests is timely; sustainability is the responsibility of all, before it is too late," he told the Oslo conference. "Why don't we start now?"

Rabbi David Rosen, international director of interreligious affairs at the American Jewish Committee, said the world is "a divine creation" and that he also believes there is a moral responsibility to protect it for future generations.

The Oslo conference was organized by Norway's International Climate and Forest Initiative, Rainforest Foundation Norway and the U.N. Development Program, in cooperation with the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale University, the World Council of Churches and others.

Participants hope to follow up with an action plan and a global interfaith rainforest summit in 2018.

"Tropical rainforests occupy a sacred place in many faiths, religions and spiritual traditions," said Mary Evelyn Tucker, co-director of Yale's Forum on Religion and Ecology.

"Given what we are hearing from religious and indigenous leaders worldwide, we believe we can create a global movement around this shared vision."

<https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/religious-and-indigenous-leaders-seek-save-rainforests>

June 19, 2017

Religious, indigenous leaders demand rainforests be saved

By Matti Huuhtanen, Associated Press
The Wichita Eagle

Religious and indigenous leaders on Monday called for an end to deforestation in the first international multi-faith, multi-cultural plea to reduce the emissions that fuel climate change.

Participants from 21 countries gathered at a conference in the Norwegian capital of Oslo, hoping that billions of people of faith worldwide will unite to protect the Earth's rainforests. Those forests are fundamental to human life but are suffering from agricultural and industrial exploitation in South America, sub-Saharan Africa and Asia.

Hosting the one-day meeting, Norwegian Climate and Environment Minister Vidar Helgesen said that halting deforestation requires "a global, tectonic shift in values."

The Interfaith Rainforest Initiative was launched by the Scandinavian country that has made reducing tropical deforestation one of its top international priorities, with investments of some \$3 billion in the past decade.

"In that decade, the scientific case, the economic case, and the geopolitical case for ending deforestation has only grown. However, more is needed," Helgesen said. "It is not the realm of policy, commerce or science, but of spirit, faith and moral conviction."

Tropical rainforests contain most of the Earth's land-borne biodiversity, help regulate rainfall and temperature globally and regionally, and provide food, water and income to 1.6 billion people.

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"Forest communities around the world have put their lives on the line to care for the planet's tropical forests," said Vicky Tauli-Corpuz, UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. "We are nothing without our forests. Our culture, our spirituality, our livelihoods, our incomes and our health are tied to them."

Those at the meeting included representatives of Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim and Hindu faiths, and indigenous leaders, including ones from Indonesia and Brazil.

<http://www.kansas.com/news/business/article156902589.html>

June 19, 2017

Religious and indigenous leaders urge better protection of forests

By Alister Doyle
Reuters

OSLO - Religious and indigenous leaders appealed on Monday for better protection of tropical forests from the Amazon to the Congo basin, with a Vatican bishop likening current losses to a collective suicide by humanity.

Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist and Daoist representatives met indigenous peoples in Oslo to explore moral and ethical arguments to shield forests that are under threat from logging and land clearance for farms.

Organizers said the Oslo Interfaith Rainforest Initiative from June 19-21 was the first to gather religious and indigenous peoples to seek out common ground to protect forests. They hope to organize a summit in 2018.

"Without the forests we don't have life," said Bishop Marcelo Sanchez Sorondo, head of the Vatican's Pontifical Academy of Sciences. "If we continue to do this deforestation it's like suicide."

Din Syamsuddin, an Indonesian Muslim leader, called for new technologies and changes of lifestyles to protect forests. "A true believer should maintain the balance with nature," he said.

Norwegian Climate and Environment Minister Vidar Helgesen, a host of the talks, said forests were homes and a source of income to millions of people, as well as habitats for creatures from tigers to birds of paradise.

He said rainforests were also a giant natural store of carbon dioxide, the main greenhouse gas from burning fossil fuels. Trees release the gas when they rot or are burnt to make way for farms, such as for cattle or palm oil plantations.

"The Paris Agreement is doomed if deforestation continues," Helgesen said.

Many countries have reaffirmed support for the 2015 Paris pact to phase out greenhouse gas emissions after U.S. President Donald Trump announced plans on June 1 to pull out, saying he wants to promote the U.S. fossil fuel industry.

Many speakers noted that a "tree of life" is a part of many religious traditions.

"Trees don't have only ecological value for us, but also cultural value for us. Every tree," said Joseph Itongwa of Democratic Republic of Congo, a representative of indigenous peoples in Africa.

The net extent of the world's forests shrank by 33,000 square km (12,700 square miles) a year from 2010-15, about the size of Belgium, the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization says.

The rate is about half that of the 1990s.

Mary Evelyn Tucker, director of Yale University's forum on Religion and Ecology, said religious groups such as the World Council of Churches were seeking ever more to restrict investments in areas that damage the environment.

(Editing by Mark Heinrich and Alison Williams)

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-religion-forests-idUSKBN19A19K>

June 20, 2017

Climate change in Vietnam causing farm failures

By Joachim Pham
National Catholic Reporter

[Hue City, Vietnam](#) - Unseasonable heavy rain poured down in late May causing serious damage to fields in Thua Thien Hue Province, central Vietnam. Dykes were breached and more than 3,000 hectares (about 7,400 acres) of rice were destroyed .

Tran Dai Hien, a farmer from Quang Dien District, said 2.5 acres of 20-day rice on his farm was waterlogged and died. Another quarter acre of rice almost ready for harvest was 2 feet underwater, he added.

Hien, 52, blamed the heavy rain on climate change, undercutting his production. "We harvest 10 tonnes [about 22,000 pounds] of rice a year but have to pay 6 tonnes for costs. We scrape out a meager living because we live only on the rest," the father of three said.

Growing rice is the main source of income for the area.

"Our future looks uncertain when the weather is unpredictable," Hien said.

Le Quoc Chu, another farmer from Phu Mau commune, said in the past the area got a few scattered afternoon showers in April and August. The weather was suitable for growing rice, vegetables and flowers.

"It is strange that heavy rain and chill wind lasted one week this period of the year," said Chu, who lost about a half-acre of young rice.

"We still owe the bank 30 million dong (US\$1,322) but we do not know how to pay it back," he said.

Both Tran Dai Hien and Le Quoc Chu are among many farmers in the Thua Thien Hue province who have received support from the Daughters of Mary Immaculate.

Chu said since January the sisters have given his family cooking oil, instant noodles, 40 kilograms (about 88 pounds) of rice, some clothes and 200,000 dong (\$9).

"Although their support is not much, it is a great consolation to us in a difficult time. We owe them a great debt of gratitude," the rice farmer said.

Chu is concerned about how he can continue to support his two daughters who are studying at local colleges because he is not sure about good crops in the future, he said in a low voice, wiping sweat from his face.

"We hope the sisters will have funds to offer scholarships to our children so that they can finish their studies," he said.

Chu said local farmers are deeply concerned that if they sow seeds again at this point, crops would not be ready for harvest until September, when the usual annual floods hit the area.

In late May, heavy rain also flooded many cities and provinces and damaged thousands of acres of crops across the country. Various insects, enhanced by the unusual weather, damaged crops, according to state-run newspapers.

However, a few days after the rain, scorching heat started to roast northern and central provinces, with readings from 98 to 104 degrees Fahrenheit, and a few places reaching 110.

Weather experts blamed the extreme weather on climate change.

Agriculture and Rural Development Minister Nguyen Xuan Cuong said at a meeting in April that the climate this year is unpredictable and will cause as much damage as in 2016.

Cuong said last year floods and storms led to 264 people dead or missing and destroyed 370,400 houses, 2 million acres of crops, and damaged many roads, dykes and other public facilities. The total loss is estimated at more than \$1.7 billion.

Nguyen Thi Kim Ngan, chairwoman of the National Assembly, said at an international conference on May 11 that Vietnam is one of the Asian Pacific countries most affected by climate change. An estimated 54 percent of the country's flatland will be inundated, and 10-12 percent of the population will be affected directly, she said.

Sisters rush to offer food to victims of climate change

St. Paul de Chartres Sister Ephreme Nguyen Thi Luu and other sisters offered \$9 per household to 50 families in Phu Mau Commune on May 29. "Most farmers here have had poor crops and lacked basic food for months," Luu said. Last January, the nuns also gave them cooking oil, cake, dried fruits and sugar to celebrate the Lunar New Year.

Luu said people have fallen into poverty due to climate change and many have fled to cities to look for jobs. "It is hard for them to live on their farmlands," she added.

She said the nuns will ask benefactors to provide scholarships so the children can continue pursuing their studies in the new school year in September.

Daughters of Mary Immaculate Sister Mary Truong Thi Thu said the nuns have been giving rice, instant noodles, blankets, second-hand clothes and money to farmers in the districts of Huong Thuy, Phu Loc, Phu Vang and Quang Dien since December when floods hit the province.

"We only give basic supplies to victims of climate change when we get donations from benefactors, so we could share with them only irregularly," Thu said.

Le Thi Sen from Phu Mau commune said local people who suffered crop loss have received nothing from the government since early this year.

"We do not know what to live on, without the nuns' supplies," the mother of two said.

During the meeting held May 25 by the government's Vietnam Fatherland Front in Ho Chi Minh City, representatives from 14 religions reviewed their activities to protect the environment and strengthen people's resilience to climate change.

Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Do Manh Hung of Ho Chi Minh City Archdiocese said the church educates Catholics in environmental protection by collecting and classifying garbage, saving water sources and energy, using environment-friendly materials and planting trees. Local Catholics make donations to funds for victims of climate change.

Followers of other religions grow organic vegetables, collect used pesticide containers and save water in cultivation.

Eidvin Archer, head of Nordic Assistance to Vietnam, a Norwegian NGO giving social and humanitarian assistance in Vietnam, appreciated religions' environment activities and promised to support initiatives to join local religions in environment protection.

[Joachim Pham is a correspondent for Global Sisters Report based in Vietnam.]

<https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/climate-change-vietnam-causing-farm-failures>

June 21, 2017

YDS religion-ecology scholar speaking at international rainforest conference

Yale Divinity School

Mary Evelyn Tucker, Senior Lecturer and Senior Research Scholar in Religion and Ecology at Yale Divinity School, was a speaker at an international rainforest-protection conference hosted by the King of Norway this week. The meeting of religious and indigenous leaders, interfaith advocates, and scientists addressed the worldwide crisis of deforestation and its relationship to climate change.

Leaders from 21 countries participated in the three-day conference, held at the Nobel Peace Center in Oslo and convened by Norway's International Climate and Forest Initiative, Rainforest Foundation Norway, and the United Nations Development Program.

"The fact that the U.N. and a major government were open to hosting this and synergizing science, religion, ecology, and ethics made it an exciting moment," said Tucker, who, along with

John Grim, co-directs **Yale's Forum on Religion and Ecology**, which co-sponsored the conference.

Tucker spoke in a session on "Creating an Interfaith Action Agenda on Rainforests: Opportunities and Challenges" and gave closing comments in a plenary discussion of "The Way Forward."

Read more in [the Huffington Post \(link is external\)](#) and at the [Forum on Religion and Ecology website \(link is external\)](#).

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<http://divinity.yale.edu/news/yds-religion-ecology-scholar-speaking-international-rainforest-conference>

June 26, 2017

The Life: Sisters reflect on care for the Earth

By The Life Panelists
Global Sisters Report

Since its start three years ago, Global Sisters Report has provided a forum to "give voice" to women religious from around the world. We publish award-winning journalism about the mission and ministry of sisters, but the columns written by sisters are at GSR's heart. Now we're taking that part of our mission a step further in a new monthly feature called The Life, an international panel of 20 sisters who write short reflections on various topics. About five or so will respond to a question posed every month.

We had so many applicants that it was challenging to select the panelists for this current round. Yet we emerged from that process with what we think is truly a representation of the "global sisterhood."

On the panel are sisters who've been in religious life for decades and one who just professed first vows this month; one from India who is serving in Zambia; an American sister who's spent most of her ministry — 50 years — in the Philippines; a sister from Nigeria in the U.S.; and a sister from Nicaragua and another from Mexico who serve their communities in Rome.

Other panelists are in Australia, Canada, Vietnam, India, Kenya, Ethiopia and the Philippines. Some head congregations and others have led religious conferences involving many communities and multiple congregations. Some minister solo; others live in community.

They assist refugees, combat human trafficking, help drug addicts, teach grade school and high school, catechism and college theology courses.

For this month's question, we turned to Pope Francis and asked the sisters this question:

Two years after the release of Pope Francis' "[Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home](#)" how are you and/or your community carrying out Francis' call for caring for the Earth?

Mary Nguyen Thi Phuong Lan is a Dominican Sister of Our Lady of the Rosary in Vietnam.

Some parish pastors in Vietnam responded to Pope Francis by spending time before or after Mass helping Christians to understand the meaning of this encyclical letter so that they would know how to care for the common house and to better protect the environment for family, society and all of the world. Quoting Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Francis writes: "For human beings ... to destroy the biological diversity of God's creation; for human beings to degrade the integrity of the earth by causing changes in its climate, by stripping the earth of its natural forests or destroying its wetlands; for human beings to contaminate the earth's waters, its land, its air, and its life — these are sins" (*Laudato Si'*, 8).

Communities of our congregation studied the encyclical in parishes. But each member of our congregation also has a responsibility to build the future of this planet by making the environment in her small community better and safer. One community, known as the St. Holy Family community, includes six sisters and 17 poor children who are trying to carry out the calling of Francis. It has a large garden with many different kinds of fruit trees, such as rambutans, durians, avocados, mangos, mangosteens and jackfruits.

We grow these fruit trees without using chemicals and growth substances to stimulate the fruits. We use fresh water to irrigate the plants and the dung of chickens and pigs to fertilize these trees. That is why our fruits are not bigger and nicer than the fruits that are grown using chemicals and growth substances. We are not interested in earning more money from the fruit crops; we pay attention to the health of the community.

Especially as nuns, we must realize that "our responsibility with creation, and our duty toward nature and the Creator, are an essential part of our faith," as Francis quoted Pope John Paul II. Then Francis continued: "It is good for humanity and the world at large when we believers better recognize the ecological commitments which stem from our convictions" (*Laudato Si'*, 64).

Furthermore, it is our responsibility to educate children about the protection of all fruit trees in the garden, including not picking fruits and throwing them unconsciously onto the ground. And when they are grown, they will be aware of caring for the health of their community by not using chemicals on fruit trees and vegetables. They will also know how to protect the environment's safety and not destroy plants rashly.

Teresita Abraham is a Presentation Sister from India living in rural Zambia.

For me, *Laudato Si'* is a celebration of all those who pioneered the vision of a single sacred community and the motherhood of Earth. It is a wake-up call to humanity.

I feel affirmed about the direction of our congregation: Over the past two decades, our Presentation community has grown in awareness and action on behalf of the integrity of creation. With Pope Francis' timely call and challenge, we respond with urgency to the beat of our time.

We are committed to this by waking ourselves and inviting others to wake up. Our network for justice, peace and the integrity of creation has been working with sisters and co-workers to bring home the message of *Laudato Si'*, the [U.N. Sustainable Development Goals](#) and the [Paris climate agreement](#) in a variety of ways.

Together with the local community, we have initiated a new ministry in rural Zambia by creating a sanctuary of peace and harmony called the [Garden of Oneness](#). People are the co-creators and immediate beneficiaries of this place. It is a place to help us listen to the heartbeat of God in all of life, living the vision of mystics and teachers of our story echoed in the dream of Jesus that all may be one and in the spirit of [Nano Nagle](#), foundress of the Presentation Sisters.

This garden is a living expression of *Laudato Si'*: All life is sacred, all life is one. We engage in awakening programs with the local community, as well as national and international groups. We collaborate with our district council, traditional leaders and other groups in caring for our natural heritage.

We protect all indigenous trees in our 30-acre space and, during the past three years, we have planted more than 200 trees. We are grateful for the wisdom of mystics and teachers like John Muir who wrote that trees were "God's first temples." We hold a Mubanga tree in the garden as a space to honor our ancestors.

We grow our own vegetables, and other things we need we try to buy locally. We use locally made traditional drinks and do not encourage the use of any fizzy drinks. We use solar energy and hold this garden as a plastic-free zone. We discourage the use of bottled water and invite people to use living water from local springs.

During Holy Week, we integrated the wisdom of *Laudato Si'* into some of the programs, reflections and rituals. On Good Friday, more than 300 people took part in the Way of the Cross through the wilderness, listening to the heartbeat of the One in Jesus of Nazareth and at the heart of creation.

Pat Farrell is a member of the Dominican Sisters of San Rafael, California. She lives in the Chicago area.

Certainly, I am part of a congregation that is committed to carrying out Pope Francis' call for caring for Earth, and as executive director of the [Dominican Sisters Conference](#), I am especially grateful for the opportunity to witness the commitment of the 19 congregations that make up that conference. It is my privilege to share from that perspective.

When the Dominican Sisters Conference met in Chicago for our 2012 convocation, we were challenged by this question: "What is Earth asking of the Dominican Order?"

So that we could study this question more deeply, our sisters across the country engaged in a process of reflection using the "Faith Praxis Cycle" to help us better understand global climate change in 2014. Our hope was that this would move us to action on behalf of Earth and God's people.

Imagine our delight when we discovered that Francis would be releasing *Laudato Si'*!

Spurred on by Francis' prophetic words, and knowing that the world's leaders would [gather in Paris on Nov. 30, 2015](#), we launched — a year to the day ahead of time — a monthly study and prayer series titled "Paris 2015 and Counting." This study helped the sisters consider all the social justice issues to which they are committed in the light of climate change, and to understand that what affects Earth also affects women, migration, human trafficking, etc.

When we gathered again in Chicago for our 2015 convocation in October of that year, we not only missioned our four sister representatives to stand for us in Paris, but all of our member congregations ratified our proposal to study climate investment opportunities, with the hope of diversifying in this way.

We continued to carry out our study, prayer, reflection and action during 2016 through a study series on *Laudato Si'*. Our most recent work was a climate novena beginning on the eve of Earth Day 2017 and culminating on the day of the [People's Climate March](#), April 29, which just happened to be the feast of our Dominican saint, Catherine of Siena, who had no compunction about speaking justice to those in power.

The next project on our agenda is climate change myth-busting.

Regi Joseph is a Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary Sister and a teacher in the state of Jammu and Kashmir in northern India

To begin with, there has been greater awakening among the Presentation Sisters about our responsibility to care for the Earth, which is our home. We strongly believe in the spirituality of being in communion with all of God's creation and are firmly resolved to care for the environment.

About *Laudato Si'* specifically, we as a community would regularly gather, read a particular section of the text and spend some time in reflection. Then each member shared insights. We

also discussed the ways in which we can individually promote sustainable living with simple steps like minimizing waste of electricity, water and paper. We promote organic farming and refrain from using fertilizers.

In the school, a number of steps have been taken to help students become more conscious of the urgency of caring for the Earth. We have an Eco Club that creates awareness among the students through special assemblies and competitions (poster-making, slogan-writing) on caring for the environment.

Our school is a polythene-free zone; the students are not allowed to use it. They are also discouraged from using thermocol (polystyrene) and aluminum foil because these are non-biodegradable. They are asked to write a pledge stating that they will not tear or waste pages of their notebooks.

Just today, a student brought a sapling to plant in the school compound because it was her birthday. Last week, two other students brought a sapling to be planted on the school premises in memory of one of their classmates who had passed away in March. It is indeed heartening to note that the students are becoming aware of the need for planting more and more trees.

In conclusion, I would like to quote Pope Francis, speaking on World Environment Day in 2013:

"Nurturing and cherishing creation is a command God gives not only at the beginning of history, but to each of us. It is a part of his plan; it means causing the world to grow responsibly, transforming it so that it may be a garden, a habitable place for everyone."

Giselle Gómez Guillén was born in Nicaragua, entered the [Society of St. Teresa of Jesus](#) in 1975 in San Antonio, Texas, and now lives in Rome.

Two years after the publication of *Laudato Si'*, we feel confirmed in our searches and commitments to the care and integrity of creation. At the same time, we feel challenged.

In 2005, we approved our new constitutions. One of the articles refers to our position in relation to this core theme:

We love and defend life as a gift from God and we feel responsible for the survival of our planet and the construction of a just and non-violent society. We are challenged by the ecological imbalance and the devastation of the planet, the unjust distribution of land assets and situations of violence and war. These realities urge us to live the covenant of love that God established with his creatures, manifested in the fundamental unity of the human family and in the interdependence among all and the cosmos.

We are currently preparing the next general chapter of our congregation. One of the most important issues in which we want to take a stand is integral ecology.

This option implies:

- Recreating the contemplative dimension of our Teresian spirituality: The entire material universe is a language of love of God, of his affection without measure for us. The sun, the water and the mountains: Everything is the caress of God. At the same time, it means to unite us to creation because it groans with childbirth pangs before the destruction and degradation that we humans cause.
- Moving from a superficial way of understanding ecology to an integral ecology; one that sees the interconnectedness of environmental, economic, political, social, cultural and ethical issues. Such an ecology requires the vision to think about comprehensive solutions to what is both an environmental and a human crisis.
- Defend and promote human rights and an integral ecology in collaboration with many others who seek to restore justice and the integrity of creation.
- Support the projects and commitments of our congregation in areas of special relevance for the environmental future.
- Promote mission projects for more sustainable lifestyles. Incorporate ecological and care ethics (for people, the environment and social justice) into educational projects in all areas of mission in order to help grow solidarity, responsibility and care based on compassion.
- Join as a congregation the global movement for the care of creation, participating in networks and collective actions to care for and defend water, the environment, biodiversity, energy sources and non-renewable materials.

<http://globalsistersreport.org/news/environment/life-sisters-reflect-care-earth-47556>

June 28, 2017

Pastor leads lawsuit opposing Bayou Bridge Pipeline to protect Louisiana Cancer Alley community

“The love of money is the root of all evil.”

By Julie Dermansky

[NationofChange](#)

Pastor Harry Joseph of the Mount Triumph Baptist Church in St. James, Louisiana, is taking [legal action](#) to prevent the [Bayou Bridge Pipeline](#) from being built in his community, roughly 50 miles west of New Orleans. He is named as a plaintiff in a case filed by the [Tulane Environmental Law Clinic](#), petitioning the Parish Court to overturn [the coastal permit](#) that the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR) gave Energy Transfer Partners, the company that built the controversial [Dakota Access Pipeline](#).

The Bayou Bridge Pipeline will be the last leg of the Dakota Access, carrying oil fracked in North Dakota to Louisiana. The final stretch of the project, if built, will span 162.5 miles from

Lake Charles to St. James, cutting through the Atchafalaya Basin, a national heritage area and the country's largest wetland.

This pipeline will transport crude oil from the oil and gas hub in Nederland, Texas, to a terminal in St. James Parish's Fifth District, a small, predominately low-income African-American community of fewer than 2,000 in a stretch of land along the Mississippi River known as Cancer Alley.

A beleaguered town with no way out

Pastor Joseph found out about the Bayou Bridge Pipeline shortly after a [tornado affected the 5th Ward earlier this year](#). A power line came down, blocking the only road residents can use to get in and out of the area. It was a stark reminder that the community doesn't have an evacuation route – and the only alternative road out was closed to the public by an oil storage company that bought the land.

“The pipeline is one more risk to our community that we really don't need,” Joseph told me. The community is already facing the imminent construction of [two multi-billion-dollar methanol plants](#).

“People are sick of being sick and tired,” Joseph told me. “Politicians tell us that the new developments are good for St. James because of jobs and money” – two things he points out that he is not against but he thinks that the greed of those in power needs to be put in check. “My prayer is that they look at the situation the community is facing – and not just how much money the state is making, but instead, look at how many people are being destroyed.”

A community as 'collateral damage'?

At [a hearing for the pipeline permit](#), Joseph allied himself with environmental groups opposing the pipeline, including [Bold Louisiana](#), [Gulf Restoration Network](#), [the Sierra Club](#), and the [Atchafalaya Basinkeeper](#), which are also part of [the lawsuit against DNR](#). The Louisiana Environmental Action Network has also been helping the community fight against the [petrochemical plant permits](#) and other developments adding to air and water pollution in the area.

Genevieve Butler, who goes by the name Eve Miller, a representative of the community-based organization H.E.L.P.(Humanitarian Enterprise of Loving People) Association, is also a plaintiff in the lawsuit. Miller and Joseph hold meetings about the pipeline fight the third Monday of each month at the Mount Triumph Baptist Church, which has become a hub for pipeline resistance.

I met Miller at her home before the last meeting on June 19. She lives across from numerous oil storage tanks at the end of a dead-end street. From her porch, we looked out at a field full of oil tanks. “The area used to be pastoral, but now it is almost void of life,” she told me. “We no longer hear birds, frogs, or insects, and our fruit trees don't flower anymore.”

Miller describes the community as “collateral damage.” It angers her that, when oil storage facilities started expanding at a rapid clip in 2014, she says white residents in the area were bought out, but not a single black household.

“Everyone knows someone who has cancer, has died from cancer, is suffering from cancer, or has some type of illness that could lead to cancer. So every household knows something about cancer,” Miller told me. “But when I was a teenager growing up in the same area – you didn’t see people sick and dying.”

Because the Louisiana [Tumor Registry doesn’t provide sufficient data to pinpoint elevated cancer rates in specific towns](#), and no recent health survey has been done, proof that the industrial installations are the cause of people’s cancer isn’t conclusive. However, anecdotal reports from the community are alarming, and the future doesn’t look any better.

“We have been told if an accident happens, to shelter-in-place,” Miller told me. “Close windows and doors till you get an all clear. But in our area, houses have shifted because of the ongoing construction – there is no place to stay safe. None of the windows and doors closes tightly.” As we spoke, we could hear banging coming from construction of a new facility on the other side of the levee down the road from Miller.

Building a case against the pipeline

Timmy P. Rousel, the St. James Parish President, responded to the community’s concerns after Pastor Joseph submitted a [petition with 400 signatures calling for an evacuation route](#) during a council meeting. In a letter to Joseph, Rousel encouraged residents to identify any frail or elderly who will require emergency assistance to contact their nearest senior center and have family members create an emergency plan ahead of time. “But no plan can help you if the only road in and out of the area is shut down,” Miller pointed out.

Lisa Jordan, deputy director of the Tulane Environmental Law Clinic, told me the situation in St. James was one of the worst instances of environmental injustice she has seen.

The lack of an evacuation route is a key factor cited in the law clinic’s petition. But that didn’t play into DNR’S original decision to grant the pipeline permit, according to Patrick Courreges, Louisiana DNR communications director. He explained that DNR only takes into consideration when the proposal would make substantial changes to areas, and that the addition of the Bayou Bridge Pipeline to St. James Parish wouldn’t qualify.

Tulane’s petition to the Parish Court also alleges that the DNR ignored a state constitutional provision: “The natural resources of the state, including air and water, and the healthful, scenic, historic, and esthetic quality of the environment shall be protected, conserved, and replenished insofar as possible and consistent with the health, safety, and welfare of the people. The legislature shall enact laws to implement this policy.”

The clinic's case argues that, as the Louisiana Supreme Court has ruled, this provision compels the state to reduce negative impacts on the environment and public welfare before approving a proposal that impacts the environment, and as Tulane says, "DNR failed to do that."

Can the law clinic win?

On June 14, the Tulane Environmental Law Clinic [won the reversal of another contentious permit DNR](#) issued in a residential community in Belle River, Louisiana. In that case, DNR granted a permit to FAS Environmental Services that could lead to the [expansion of its injection well operation in the Atchafalaya Basin](#). Like Energy Transfer Partners, FAS Environmental Services has a poor safety record, which played a role in the court's decision to revoke the permit.

Despite the recent legal victory, the odds are stacked against stopping any pipeline in Louisiana. In the last 10 years, DNR has not turned down a single pipeline permit request. But Pastor Joseph is hopeful that the court system will ultimately help him save his community.

Even if Joseph can't stop the pipeline, the battle against it is shining a light on the grave injustices his community is already facing. He is eager to show anyone around St. James, so others can see and hear for themselves what his community is dealing with. He doesn't expect to shut down industry there, but ultimately he wants the companies to buy out everyone who wants to leave the area – St. James has around 1,000 residents total – because he says no one will be safe after all the pending industrial developments are completed.

He hopes the lawsuit will give pause to the other state and federal agencies yet to decide on Energy Transfer Partners' remaining permits for the Bayou Bridge Pipeline. The company has pending requests for a water quality certificate from the Louisiana Department of Environmental Protection and [a permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers](#).

What Joseph sees going on around him reminds him of a lesson from the Bible, he says: "The love of money is the root of all evil."

He wonders now if the love of money is so strong that industry leaders and politicians are willing to let people die in order to get it. Not if he can help it, he told me.

<https://www.nationofchange.org/2017/06/28/pastor-leads-lawsuit-opposing-bayou-bridge-pipeline-protect-louisiana-cancer-alley-community/>

June 28, 2017

Three years to safeguard our climate

By Christiana Figueres, Hans Joachim Schellnhuber, Gail Whiteman, Johan Rockström, Anthony Hobley & Stefan Rahmstorf
Nature

Christiana Figueres and colleagues set out a six-point plan for turning the tide of the world's carbon dioxide by 2020.

Read the essay here:

<http://www.nature.com/news/three-years-to-safeguard-our-climate-1.22201>

June 30, 2017

Universe's unfolding story set to music in composer's new oratorio

By Sharon Abercrombie
National Catholic Reporter

Passionist Fr. Thomas Berry, the cultural historian and early prophet of the current environmental crisis, encouraged artists and musicians throughout his lifetime (1914-2009) to tell the magnificent 13.8 billion-year history of the universe through music, poetry and dance.

As direct ancestors of the stars, humans collectively share a unique role as compassionate beings, to protect and to heal the earth, Berry said. Creative artists, he argued, can bring us to this point of conversion quickest of all.

The latest evidence that they have been listening is Sam Guarnaccia, a composer, classical guitarist and environmentalist who will debut a major musical ritual based on an intimate look into the universe Friday night in Cleveland.

The BlueWater Chamber Orchestra and the Cleveland Chamber Choir is set to perform the world premiere of Guarnaccia's "Emergent Universe Oratorio" at the Milton and Tamar Maltz Performing Arts Center at Case Western Reserve University.

The concert is among the events that are part of the World Union of Jesuit Alumna congress, which opened Wednesday at John Carroll University. The gathering, held every four years, focuses on a subject connected to Jesuit education and values. The theme of the 2017 international congress is "Uniting Our Jesuit Frontiers," with the evolving universe among the session topics.

While the universe has formed over billions of years, the 73-year-old Guarnaccia composed his "Emergent Universe Oratorio" in intervals in the course of a five-year period. The oratorio's libretto tells the story of the Earth from the Big Bang to the present day, and features poetry from Rainer Maria Rilke, Wendell Berry, William Blake, Gerard Manley Hopkins and, of course, Berry.

The performance, to be conducted by Cleveland Chamber choir artistic director Scott MacPherson, [will be livestreamed](#) on the Case Western Reserve University website.

“I had a huge passion for the idea of bringing forth as much beauty as possible on this theme of our interconnected, interdependent being and belonging, from the beginning to, in and with the universe, all life and each other,” Guarnaccia told NCR.

The piece, he explained, “demands a response at all levels: feeling, seeing, understanding, experiencing and acting.”

“It is neither entertainment, a doctrinal, or even a numinous reenactment of a spiritual-religious position or story, nor just the story. It is more an attempt to evoke a deep awareness through an experience of intense emotional intelligence and the inevitability of a response, and hopefully a transformation, a crack in the hardened crust ... leading to an awakening that we are integral to a living universe.”

Or as Berry puts it in his poem “[Morningside Cathedral](#)”:

“Beseeching humankind
To bring back the Sun
To let the flowers bloom in the meadows,
The rivers run through the hills
And to let the Earth
And all its living creatures
Live their
Wild,
Fierce,
Serene a
And Abundant life.”

Guarnaccia’s “Emergent Universe” drew inspiration from the 2011 Emmy Award-winning documentary “Journey of the Universe” written by Brian Swimme and Mary Evelyn Tucker. Tucker, a scholar at Yale University in the field of ecology, religion and cosmology, is scheduled to introduce the performance.

“This Oratorio is a magnificent tribute to the beauty and complexity of the unfolding universe across deep time. It inspires the present emergence of a flourishing Earth community,” she said in an email.

On Thursday night, she and colleague John Grim of the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology hosted a screening of the hour-long film at John Carroll. Their film also spawned an online course series that explores the universe’s formation from a multidisciplinary perspective. So far, the three-class program has drawn more than 16,000 participants, Tucker said.

For the Cleveland performance of “Emergent Universe,” Guarnaccia, has written a complete orchestration for the BlueWater Chamber Orchestra. An earlier version of the piece, performed in 2013 in Shelburne Farms in his home state of Vermont, utilized a small chamber ensemble and chorus.

Guarnaccia is among several composers who have been moved to tell the story of the universe through music.

For many years, Grammy-winning soprano saxophonist Paul Winter has been celebrating Berry's vision through his jazz compositions honoring wolves, whales, elks, wrens and other earth critters. Each winter solstice, he presents an ecological-based concert at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City.

Joyce Rouse, aka "Earth Mama," is another student and admirer of Berry. She has been [writing folk music and presenting workshops to kids and adults](#), geared to healing the planet, one song at a time.

In March 1995, Maia Aprahamian, debuted a musical rendition of Berry and Swimme's work, *The Universe Story*, in celebration of the 50th anniversary of the United Nations. The work was performed by the San Francisco symphony, with Swimme serving as one of the narrators.

"The day came when I was thunderstruck by the depths of the Universe. This led to my unshakable conviction that as humans get a glimpse of this cosmic magnificence, we would relate to one another and everything with infinite reverence," Swimme told the audience that night. "Music is one of our most powerful pathways into this greater participation in our evolving Universe."

As for Guarnaccia, he is probably best known for "A Celtic Mass for Peace, Songs for the Earth," which he wrote in collaboration with Celtic spirituality scholar John Philip Newell of Scotland. It was performed during peace celebrations in New York and Vermont marking the 10th anniversary of the 9-11 terrorist attacks.

His attraction to the natural world is lifelong. He grew up in the outdoors of Middlebury, Vermont "next to a covered bridge and waterfall on Otter Creek, and as most fortunate rural children, spent hours and years dreaming into the landscapes, skiescapes, and soundscapes in the 'country.'"

"It's the best education there is: just leave a child alone outside," he said.

Along with Berry's writings, the [Earth Charter](#) and ideas of Wendell Berry, Joanna Macy and Bill McKibben have all at some point flowed into Guarnaccia's music.

In addition to the sounds of the "Emergent Universe Oratorio," there will be a visual feast for the audience at Friday's event: 11 oil paintings by artist Cameron Davis's Endless Spring series. Davis, a senior lecturer at the University of Vermont who specializes in art and the environment, was inspired by the oratorio to paint her series.

Other points of the World Union congress, which runs through Sunday, will dive deeper into the evolving universe. A two-part panel discussion on Saturday will feature Jesuit Fr. Prashat Olaleker of Mumbai's Xavier College ("Meditation for an Evolving Universe; "Contemplative Movement: New Frontiers for Jesuit Education and Spirituality") and Barry Rodrigue of the

University of Southern Maine (“Big History: A Study of Existence and the Search for Meaning”).

[Sharon Abercrombie is a frequent contributor to Eco Catholic.]

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